

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Stakeholder Perceptions of Child-Centred Education in Saudi Public Sector
Preschools: Using Practice Architecture to Examine Progress Towards
Saudi Vision 2030

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Dedication

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Title: Stakeholder Perceptions of Child-Centred Education in Saudi Public Sector Preschools: Using Practice Architecture to Examine Progress Towards Saudi Vision 2030

Abstract

Prior to Saudi Arabia's latest development plan Vision 2030, the implementation of Western child-centred approaches to education has proven difficult. Firstly, there is no history of theory and practice associated with child-centredness in Saudi Arabian society and culture. Secondly, the country's Wahhabi Islamic tradition has made modernization difficult, with education emerging as an area of particular tension. Yet education is recognized as playing a key role in improving long-term prosperity and facilitating Saudi Arabia's transition towards a knowledge-economy based on 21st century skills: 'creativity, imagination and critical thinking' (Al-Issa, 2009: 39-40). As the global trend is towards rights-based education, the question of whether Western theories and practices of education have relevance in non-Western contexts is of considerable importance in Saudi Arabia.

This study aims to show how Vision 2030 is providing the principle mechanism for bringing Western perceptions and understandings of 'child-centred education' and a traditional Wahhabi interpretation of Islam into closer alignment. To this end, the main research question is as follows: How does using Practice Architecture to explore Child-Centred Education in public sector preschools in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030?

To answer this question, this research explores what child-centred educational policy, theory and practice means in the context of three public preschools in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The interview data and policy stipulations revealed that the intertwining of religion and

traditional Arab ethnic norms and values in the Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum for Kindergarten has produced an *adapted* version of child-centredness.

As Prince Mohammed bin Salman has acknowledged, children are ‘our nation’s pride and architects of the future’ (Al-Saud, 2017: 7). The findings reveal that by presenting a more tolerant and moderate approach to Islamic beliefs and practices, Vision 2030 is providing a mechanism for achieving equality and social justice by bringing these two models of education into closer alignment.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This research project which was commenced well before the publication of Vision 2030, explores the perceptions of a range of educational stakeholders concerning the issues in understanding and delivering early childhood care and education in Saudi Arabia. Before the advent of Saudi Arabia's latest development plan Vision 2030, the implementation of Western child-centred approaches to education had proven difficult. Firstly, there is no history of theory and practice associated with the concept of child-centredness in Saudi society and culture. Secondly, the country has a specific Islamic tradition, based on Wahhabi teaching, which has made modernization difficult with education identified as an area of particular tension. Yet education is recognized as having a key role to play in improving long-term prosperity and in facilitating Saudi Arabia's transition towards a knowledge-economy. According to the 2030 Vision Statement, 'our real wealth lies in the ambition of our people and the potential of our younger generation. They are our nation's pride and architects of the future' (Al-Saud, 2017:7). Consequently, the extent to which Western theories and practices of education may have relevance in a Saudi context is a focus of considerable interest in this thesis.

This small-scale qualitative study involving three public preschools in Makkah examines how child-centred principles and practices are constructed, understood and implemented in Saudi Arabia. The main research question is, 'how does using Practice Architecture to explore Child-Centred Education in public sector preschool in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030?' Early years practitioners based in Saudi Arabian public preschools have to find ways of working constructively at the interface of two potentially competing frameworks of principles, beliefs and values. This research focuses on exploring the similarities and differences between Western child-centred pedagogies and Saudi Arabian

child-centred pedagogies through the lens of Practice Architectures. The overall aim is to show how Vision 2030 is providing the principle mechanism for bringing Western perceptions and understandings of ‘child-centred education’ and a traditional Wahhabi interpretation of Islam into closer alignment.

Firstly, this chapter will explain the basic principles underlying global programs of education and development that provide the framework for Early Years Care and Education in Saudi Arabia. Secondly, the chapter will explain how a child-centred approach is seen as an important tool for facilitating development and maximising autonomy and participation rights. Thirdly, the chapter will discuss Saudi Arabia’s 10th Development Plan Vision 2030: the brainchild of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Fourthly, the chapter will set out the Research Problem, Research Aims, Objectives and Questions. The chapter will also explain the significance of the study. A section on Positionality will establish the researcher’s credentials for undertaking the study. Finally the overall structure of the study will be explained.

1.2 An Agenda Towards Education for All

Early childhood development is a rare public policy initiative that promotes fairness and social justice, and at the same time promotes productivity in the economy and in society at large (Heckman, 2006 in SESRIC, 2013: 1).

The United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) uses the term Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to refer to all developmental services that are provided in an organized way for children during the period from birth until a child begins formal schooling, usually on entry to primary school at age 6 or 7 (ibid). This sector is vitally important in developing countries due to the benefits it is claimed to bring in health, education and social welfare (SESRIC, 2013: 1). For this reason, ECCE is widely regarded as a tool for promoting social justice and economic productivity. A 2013 report by the Statistical, Economic

and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) states that Early Childhood Education programmes (which cater for the needs of the over-threes) are generally administered by ministries of education (SESRIC, 2013: 1). ECCE provision takes an holistic approach by covering three main areas: 1) health, nutrition, hygiene; 2) cognitive, social, emotional and physical development, and; 3) social protection (ibid.)

In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) proposed that ‘learning begins at birth’ (SESRIC, 2011: 1; SESRIC 2013: 1). The fastest development of the brain occurs in the first six years of life, therefore it is crucially important that all children have access to high quality developmental services provided under the ECCE programs as described above. In 2000, the UNESCO-Dakar World Education Forum agreed a Framework for Action on specific targets and goals related to ‘Education for All’ (ibid.). Goal 1 called for the expansion and improvement of early childhood care and education (ibid.) on grounds that early investments in ECCE have long-term benefits not just for the individual child but for society as a whole (UNESCO 2005, UNESCO ECCE Report 2010, SESIRIC 2013, UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015). ECCE is particularly significant in countries with high birth rates. According to a 2011 SESRIC report whilst ‘13% of the world total population is between the ages of 0-6 ... 30% of that population live in OIC member countries’ (SESRIC, 2011: 1). In light of ‘the many obstacles and challenges’ facing Islamic countries where social, cultural and religious norms may create dimensions of exclusion, a 2013 SESRIC Report stated that ‘Incorporating early childhood care and education into the EFA framework has provided a mechanism to focus on problems related to ECCE’ (SESRIC 2013: 1). The SESRIC reports are a response to UNESCO’s call for ‘more policy attention and investment’ in all areas of ECCE provision to ensure that countries are able to meet their EFA commitments (SESRIC, 2011: 1).

In 2015, UNESCO introduced a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as ‘universal’ reference points for international development for the period 2015-2030 (UN/DESA 2015: 1). In recognition of the links between education and all of the other SDGs, the development agenda identifies education (SDG 4) as ‘a standalone goal’ (ibid). The UN/DESA working paper also highlighted the need for ‘a more detailed examination of policies for education in the SDG context’ (ibid: 1-2) especially the links between education and social justice, if these goals are to become a reality. A UN Human Development Report (UNDP) 2014 indicated that education is viewed ‘as a tool to promote peace, justice and equality’ not least because the acquisition of ‘Higher capabilities, particularly in education, advance human agency – people’s capacity to make choices’ (ibid: 17).

Numerous reports including UNESCO 2013, 2014; World Bank, 2007, 2013; UNDP, 2010, 2013, 2014 have emphasized the importance of education. Education is a high priority because it plays:

a significant role ... in shaping the values of future generations, redirecting societal preferences and inclinations, and instilling the empowering skills to enact them. It helps people understand democracy and deepens its foundations, promotes the tolerance and trust that underpin it, and motivates people to participate in politics (UN/DESA 2015: 17).

In policy development terms UNESCO states there is a ‘need to advocate education as a largely untapped strategic resource for building resilient and sustainable societies’ (UN/DESA 2015: 17). The UN/DESA paper calls for further research into the connection between education and access to justice. And ‘education programs and approaches’ in developing countries ‘need to be transformed to achieve these objectives’ (ibid). The aim of supra-national organizations is for developing countries to achieve ‘universal’ educational goals by implementing rights-based i.e. child-centred teaching and learning practices.

A child-centred approach implicitly recognizes that children's rights and needs are the primary focus for education theory and practice (UNESCO ECCE Report Arab States 2010). Increasing the autonomy and participation of young children facilitates cognitive development, shapes personality and builds confidence. Neuroscientists have provided evidence that 'Children who have little opportunity to explore and experiment with their environment may fail to develop fully the neural connections and pathways that facilitate later learning' (ibid: 15). This evidence reveals the importance of innovative approaches, which focus on facilitating 'children's creativity and critical thinking' (UNESCO, 2015). According to UNESCO, in countries like Saudi Arabia where children have historically been taught using a transmissive curriculum, there is an urgent need to shift away from these traditional methods of instruction (ibid). As a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Saudi Arabia has agreed to work in cooperation with the United Nations to determine its national priorities and needs. Members of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) work in collaboration with Saudi officials to monitor the kingdom's progress towards meeting its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Saudi Arabia has declared itself 'non-harmonized' i.e. the kingdom will not do anything that conflicts with Islam. This religious requirement has meant that despite educational reforms which have produced better outcomes, there have been no substantive changes in Saudi educational policy for over forty years (Munagish 2004; Al-Osaimi 2007). The intertwining of strict Wahhabi religious doctrine and tribal or conservative social norms has had a huge effect on how education policy is designed and implemented in the Kingdom.

1.3 Vision 2030

With Vision 2030, the country has embarked on a massive program of social and economic reforms on a scale that is unprecedented in its modern history and represents 'what is effectively a cultural revolution' (Chulov 2017). Vision 2030 is based 'around three themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy and a strong foundation for economic prosperity' (Saudi

Vision 2030, 2018). The fundamental aim is ‘to transform the Saudi Arabian economy from being predominantly state-driven to a largely market-driven one’ (Friedman, 2017: 5). Vision 2030 acknowledges that education will be a crucial factor in shaping social attitudes and determining the future economic prosperity of Saudi Arabia. In order to facilitate this transformation, the current education system must be reformed so that it is more closely ‘aligned with market needs’ (Saudi Vision 2030, 2018). Education is also a crucial element in the socialization process and it plays a central role in determining how Saudi citizens see themselves and how they understand their social roles in society.

A research paper published in July 2017 entitled ‘Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia’s Social Contract: Austerity and Transformation’ by Kinninmont analysed the potential for political, economic and social reforms in Saudi Arabia. The author is senior research fellow and deputy head of the Middle East and North Africa Programme (MENA) at Chatham House and has been involved in research in Saudi Arabia since 2003. Countries that invest heavily in health and education are said to be ‘more resilient in the face of financial crises’ (UN/DESA, 2015: 18). During the period 2005-2015 \$399.75bn was spent on education in Saudi Arabia (Rajab and Wright, 2018: 2). Yet the kingdom has a ‘track history of non-delivery in the past’ and ‘previous reform programmes have repeatedly lagged behind targets’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 12). As Kinninmont (2017) points out, vision documents are ‘written with heavy input from major international management consultancies, especially in countries where public consultation and debate on these issues is limited’ (ibid.). This comment suggests that in an effort to improve their ‘international image which has hit a low point’ (ibid: 11) Saudi government officials might well be using the language of reform without necessarily applying it or fully understanding its implications. However, with Vision 2030, which is the brainchild of King Salman’s son Mohammed bin Salman who was appointed crown prince in June 2017, the impetus for modernization and reform is coming from within the Kingdom itself.

The pattern of huge financial investment is set to continue ‘as the creation of a knowledge-economy forms the third objective of Vision 2030, the Kingdom’s 10th Development Plan’ (Oxford Business Group, 2017). Along with plans to diversify the economy and reduce its dependence on oil, Vision 2030 will introduce ‘a degree of social liberalization to enable the growth of the entertainment and tourism industries’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 2). According to Kinninmont, Vision 2030 ‘implies ... extensive reforms to the education system, traditionally a stronghold of Saudi Arabia’s clerics’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 2). If these plans are fully implemented ‘this would transform relations between the state and its citizens, politically and socially as well as economically, and also the government’s partnership with the clerisy’ (ibid.).

1.4 Specific Challenges Facing Islamic Countries

Given the scope of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s ambition, it is significant that a statutory UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) is not mandatory in Saudi Arabia. In terms of challenges and constraints, the Kingdom continues to be ‘a UN non-harmonized country’ (UNCCSF, 2012: 3) which means it is signed up to the UNCRC *subject to the proviso* that the UN’s recommendations do not come into conflict with Islamic law (Shari’ah). The United Nations Common Country Strategic Framework (UNCCSF) is used to determine the ‘UN’s general goals and activities in the Kingdom’ (UNCCSF, 2012: 3) but perhaps not surprisingly, previous UN reports have identified a number of issues. In 2010-2011 the UN Common Country Analysis team (CCA) compiled a report which identified a number of ‘inter-related areas of focus for UN cooperation’ (UNCCSF, 2012: 3). Whilst Saudi Arabia had improved in terms of economic competitiveness, the country continued to lag behind on its investments in ‘Social Protection and Services: Enhanced quality of education, health, social services’ (ibid).

The SESRIC Report (2013) into the provision of ECCE in OIC member countries identified problems specifically related to ECCE. The section headed ‘Challenges and Policy

Recommendations’ under sub-heading ‘Curricula deficiencies’ stated ‘The curricula should be organized for the child’s emotional, social, physical, creative and cognitive skills’ rather than focusing too intently on academic skills such as reading and writing (SESRIC, 2013: 17). The proposed solution was a shift towards more child-centred curricula. Moral development is a crucial aspect of the Saudi ECCE curriculum, but children are also required to learn Arabic (the language of the Qur’an) as early as possible, which means that reading and writing skills are very important. Preschool is seen as preparation for entry into primary school. Very young children are required to memorize through rote learning (repeating after parents and teachers) without necessarily understanding the content. As a result, parents are very suspicious of and do not understand the benefits of learning through organized play activities.

The report added ‘Each country should base its own curriculum on its cultural and religious values and deliver the programs in the mother tongue’ (SESRIC 2013: 17). The cultural dimension was incorporated for a specific purpose:

...to direct parents from informal to formal programs, if they do prefer the former just for the sake of getting a culturally relevant education for their children (SESRIC, 2013: 17).

This creates a major obstacle for governments in developing Islamic countries who must ensure that their ECCE curricula are designed to deliver human development goals i.e. meeting the ‘emotional, social, physical, creative and cognitive needs’ of individual children whilst at the same time each curriculum must remain culturally relevant (SESRIC, 2013: 17). This accommodation is especially difficult when local educational organizations operate according to a very different set of social and cultural norms than those of the supra-organizations, which means that ideas about progress might differ. Another area of tension concerns the fact that the UNCRC is underpinned by the concept of children’s rights: freedom of choice in relation to classroom activities, freedom of participation and freedom of speech, including the right to ask questions and to have their views respected. According to a UNDP

2010 report ‘material prosperity and good achievements in health and education can coexist with nondemocratic practices’ however the report also goes on to assert that ‘democratization may have the strongest effects on primary education’ (UN/DESA, 2015: 18). Al-Sehaim writing in 2009, noted that the expanding youth population in Saudi Arabia was not new but it was beginning to have an influence on certain economic and social policies. Eight years later, Vision 2030 explicitly acknowledges that it is imperative for the government to reform its policies on education and training to ensure citizens are equipped with ‘the empowering skills’ they need to become active members of society (UNESCO 2013, 2014; World Bank, 2007, 2013; UNDP, 2010, 2013). However, whether governments are able to meet the requirement for increasing democratization underpinned by ‘tolerance and trust’ (ibid) will depend on how closely the beliefs and values of a Western influenced framework of ideas can be aligned with those of the developing country in question.

1.5 Statement of the Research Problem

Since 1992 the Saudi government has chosen to model its early year’s curriculum on the American High Scope model and an approach to learning and teaching based on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). To date, the implementation of Western child-centred approaches to education in Saudi Arabia has proven difficult. Firstly, there is no history of theory and practice associated with the concept of child-centredness in Saudi Arabian society and culture (Rajab and Wright, 2018: 551). Secondly, the country has a specific Islamic tradition, based on Wahhabi teaching, which has made modernization difficult with education emerging as an area of particular tension. As Kinninmont 2017 observes:

The education ministry has typically been a stronghold of clerical influence, and schools place a heavy emphasis on religious study and rote learning, often to the exclusion of much scientific education and critical thinking. Saudi Arabia performs badly in international education rankings, despite its relatively high levels of spending (Kinninmont, 2017: 21).

The main purpose of an Islamic paradigm of education is to ensure the child develops a relationship with God through the inculcation of Islamic beliefs and practices, which are not specific to the individual, and which require a high level of unquestioning obedience and conformity.

The High Scope Curriculum encourages active participatory learning by building on children's abilities, interests and strengths in the belief that 'children learn best through active experiences with people, materials, events and ideas, rather than through direct teaching...' (OECD 2004). DAP utilizes research on early year's development and learning to create an effective framework for early years education based on three core principles: 'knowing about child development and learning'; 'knowing what is individually appropriate' and 'knowing what is culturally important' (NAEYC 2012). These key requirements mean that on a practical level, educational stakeholders based in public preschools in Saudi Arabia have to find ways of working constructively between a Western discursive framework and an Islamic discursive framework. Within a Western discursive framework education is designed for producing democratic societies: consequently every child is perceived as having 'rights not just needs' (Hewett, 2001: 95). According to the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY 2015) the values embedded in Western frameworks of child-centred education include 'Democracy, Rule of Law, Individual liberty, Mutual Respect and Tolerance'. Within an Islamic discursive framework education is designed for producing the ideal Islamic society: consequently every child is perceived as having the right to a religious education on grounds that becoming a good Muslim is in the best interests of the child. The values embedded in this framework include loyalty, obedience, submission, modesty and solidarity. This situation effectively places educational stakeholders at the interface different frameworks of principles, beliefs and values. This point is essentially the contextual focus of the research.

1.6 Research Aim, Objectives and Questions

The aim of this research is to examine how child-centred educational principles and practices are constructed, understood and implemented in Saudi Arabia. In order to fully examine this phenomenon one main research question and six sub-questions have been devised.

The main research question is as follows:

How does using Practice Architecture to explore Child-Centred Education in the public sector preschools in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030?

To provide a comprehensive answer to this question, six sub-questions will be addressed as follows:

1.6.1 Sub-Questions

1. What is Practice Architecture and how can this facilitate the understanding of contrasting educational issues?
2. How do social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centred learning in the West?
3. How do social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centred learning in Saudi Arabia?
4. What is an appropriate way in which to research this topic?
5. How is child-centred education constructed by the government in the public sector preschool in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

6. How is the concept of child-centred education perceived by a range of key educational stake holders?

1.7 Significance of the Study

Under Vision 2030 education continues to be a priority sector for investment and reform. Education is recognized as key to improving long-term prosperity, in a context where the global trend is towards viewing children's education as a basic right (Monteiro, 2010: 1990). Yet, it cannot be assumed that notable 'achievements in health, education and income' will necessarily be synonymous with 'progress in human development if social conditions constrain individual achievements and if perceptions about progress differ' (UNDP, 2014). Hence the question of whether Western theories and practices of education have relevance in non-Western contexts is a matter of great concern in Saudi Arabia.

In this research the principles, beliefs and values that underpin Western theory and pedagogy need, ideally, to be fully understood by everyone involved in the provision of preschool education before they can be successfully implemented in the classroom. In order to work constructively and effectively in the classroom, teachers must understand the concepts underpinning the theoretical bases of their practice (Alexander, 2001). Consequently, one of the main objectives of this cross-cultural project is to investigate the similarities and differences between Western child-centred pedagogies and Saudi Arabian child-centred pedagogies. Another objective is to find out how various government employees interpret the idea of child-centredness and whether teachers are able to successfully negotiate between the two approaches. The research will also explore whether or not this negotiation is easier for those individuals who have been exposed to Western influences because they have travelled or worked outside of Saudi Arabia. The concept of 'Practice Architecture' (Kemmis et al: 2008,

2014) will be explored as a critical lens through which to analyse these issues in order to assess whether two potentially different frameworks of ideas, beliefs and values can be brought in tandem with each other.

Currently, there is a lack of empirical research into child-centred education in the Saudi context, in particular there is a lack of qualitative research (Al-Harthi 2014). The existing research studies include Al-Noaim 1996, Al-Kasem 1997, Gahwaji 2006, Al-Shaer 2007, Al-Jadidi 2012, Al-Harthi 2014, Alameen, Male & Palaiologou 2015, and Aljabreen, 2017. In relation to the issue of providing high-quality preschool provision in Saudi Arabia, these studies have examined the lack of learning facilities and equipment (Al-Noaim 1996 in Gahwaji 2006) the need for play-based learning (Al-Kasem 1997); the need for more professional training for preschool teachers as a way to improving the quality of service provision (Gahwaji 2006, Al-Jadidi 2012); and the need to introduce assessment measures that will encompass developmental areas and include input from teachers, parents and the community (Al-Shaer, 2007), the debates over teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi private and public preschools (Al-Harthi 2014), the importance of pedagogical leadership (Alameen, Male & Palaiologou 2015) and teacher roles in U.S Montessori preschools compared with teacher roles Saudi public preschools (Aljabreen, 2017).

1.8 Positionality

The researcher's position as an insider or outsider to the culture being studied can affect the process of the research. The issue of social and cultural identity is especially significant in the context of this research project, as Saudi Arabia is traditionally a very closed culture which is difficult for outsiders to access and research. My status as an insider i.e. a female Saudi Arabian Muslim citizen gave me privileged access to the participants and helped to facilitate access, rapport and trust. My ethnic background is Arabic/Asian, I grew up in a household in which Arabic, English and Urdu were spoken and written. We were brought up

as Muslims. My position as an insider/outsider to traditional Saudi culture involved a continuously shifting positionality. As a female Arabic-speaking researcher I shared certain ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities with the research participants. I am not 'pure' Arab so I was viewed as socially inferior to those participants who could claim a tribal background and therefore a tribal name, which is a marker of social distinction. My name identifies me as a tribal outsider from an urban background.

I am an insider in that I have an undergraduate degree in Early Childhood from a Saudi University and experience as a preschool teacher. My MA from a British University placed me as an 'insider' to those teachers who also qualified outside Saudi Arabia and shared my concern to facilitate more socially democratic teaching and learning practices. The power hierarchies placed me as an outsider to the head teachers, the administrators and the supervisors from the Ministry of Education in Makkah.

1.9 Structure of the Study

The research project comprises two main phases. Chapter 1 provides the introduction and overview of the study. Chapter 2 explains those aspects of Saudi Arabia which are relevant to the study including the values, attitudes and behaviours that shape everyday life. Chapter 3 explains the concept of Practice Architecture and how this concept can be developed to provide a critical lens through which to facilitate an understanding of contrasting educational issues. The two Literature Reviews provide information about the discursive frameworks of beliefs, values and knowledge that underpin child-centred education. Chapter 4, the first Literature Review focuses on American and Western European approaches to child-centredness. This information will be used to answer sub-question 2 about education and the effects of social and cultural diversity in the West. Chapter 5, the second Literature Review focuses on Saudi Arabian approaches to child-centredness. This information will be used to answer the third sub-question about education and the effects of social and cultural diversity in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 6 presents the research rationale and explains the methodological approach adopted by the researcher. This information will be used to answer sub-question 4 about the appropriate way to research the topic.

The second phase of the project is concerned with the empirical research. Chapter 7 presents the results of the documentary analysis. The documents used for analysis include Government Educational Policy documents and Reports, Executive Plans, the *Teacher Guidebook*, lesson plans and the Self-Learning Curriculum. The information gathered from these sources will be used to answer sub-question five. Chapter 8 presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews with twenty-eight educational stake holders in Saudi Arabia. This information will be used to answer sub-question six. Chapter 9 will present the discussion of the main arguments arising from the research questions and the empirical data findings. This chapter will explain how the implementation of a new set of policies introduced under Vision 2030 will help to resolve the differences between Western perceptions and understandings of child-centred education and a traditional Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. Chapter 10 will present the Conclusions and Recommendations of this study.

1.10 Summary

Saudi Arabia has invested heavily in education at levels since the last oil boom but ‘demands for greater political and social inclusion’ and ‘the speed of social and economic change is likely to accentuate existing concerns about preserving a local identity whether Saudi, Arab, Islamic or sect-specific’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 6). Therefore it is no surprise to discover that Vision 2030 is based on the idea of a ‘‘thriving economy’’, but also of a society with strong roots and traditions’ (ibid). Kinninmont (2017) points out that the reforms proposed by Vision 2030 will encourage:

significant debate over what local identity really means in a society in which views on culture, family, religion and faith are very varied – a diversity that tends to be masked by an often simplistic image of a conservative and pious society (2017: 6).

To outsiders, Saudi Arabia may appear as a homogeneous society but there is diversity within Islamic culture and diversity within Saudi society as a whole. Social and cultural diversity frequently finds its expression in the tribal/urban division between individuals. Tribalism is synonymous with conservative social attitudes and strictly held religious beliefs. By contrast, urbanism is synonymous with a more open-minded and socially liberal set of attitudes and beliefs.

The researcher believes that this research makes a significant contribution to the existing knowledge on child-centred theory and practice in Saudi Arabia. Having identified where there are gaps between Western and Islamic paradigms of education, this research will show how the Saudi view of education as a moral imperative can be aligned with a global trend in which education is regarded as a right. With Vision 2030 the Saudi government has publicly declared their intention to reform the current education policy to ‘develop positive behavioural attitudes and improve society economically, socially and educationally’ (Al-Harhi, 2014: 22). Chapter 2 will provide information about the three specific areas of culture that are integral to this study namely 1) Wahhabism, 2) the intertwining of religion and ethnic traditions, 3) and the educational reforms. Insofar as these three areas apply to the preschool sector, they provide the key to understanding the foundations which underpin the current trends and forces at work in modern-day Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 2 will provide information about Saudi Arabia which is the setting for this study. Understanding the cultural context of Saudi Arabia is very important because every culture will have different ideas about how to bring up children and what is in their best interests. The following chapter will identify and discuss the values, attitudes and behaviours that shape everyday life in Saudi Arabia and are integral to the administration and functioning of its education system.

Chapter 2 – Saudi Arabia

2.1 Introduction

Different contexts generate different discourses, including different diagnoses of the problems ... the context is not only important for the likely success of implementation, but also for the sort of solutions that are proposed (Flynn, 2002: 74-75).

The aim of this chapter is to provide information about Saudi Arabia which is the setting for this study. The cultural context of Saudi Arabia is very important because every culture will have different ideas about how to bring up children and what is in their best interests. These beliefs and values will be reflected in the administrative structures and practices of the organizations that undertake their education. The values, attitudes and behaviours that shape everyday life in Saudi Arabia are integral to the administration and functioning of its education system. It is difficult to comprehend the position of young children in Saudi Arabia without an understanding and appreciation of the unique cultural heritage of the country.

Firstly this chapter will examine how religion provides the overarching framework for the organization of society, including a brief history of how the Al-Saud came to dominate the Arabian Peninsula with the aid of Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab. These early struggles led to the founding of a sovereign state in which nationalist rhetoric and religion were inextricably linked and remain so today. Secondly this chapter will discuss how the intertwining of Arab ethnic traditions and religion has continued to shape Saudi society, with a particular focus on how tribal and patriarchal hierarchies and conservative social attitudes have influenced ideas about the upbringing of young children and the role of women. Thirdly this chapter will examine the historical development of preschool education in Saudi Arabia with reference to the theoretical influences of both Western and Eastern scholarship. This section will also discuss how international development agencies such as the UNCRC have influenced educational reforms in Saudi Arabia. A key issue here is the accelerated curriculum changes that began in the late

1970s and continued into the twenty-first century. The Saudi government has continued to take a proactive stance in shifting teaching and learning practices away from the traditional Ktatib system towards a modern-day child-centred preschool. Ktatib is an Arabic method of teaching based in mosques where young people are taught the Qur'an, Arabic reading and writing and moral habits for the correct Islamic behaviour (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016: 313). The main focus of Ktatib is to develop a religious instinct and it relies on teaching methods based on memorization and repetition.

2.2 Religious Context

In the twentieth century, the modern state of Saudi Arabia, which came into being in 1932 emerged under the leadership of the Al-Saud. The country is an Islamic state and a hereditary monarchy, with the king acting as both Head of State and as head of government. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia incorporates the regions of Hijaz, Asir and Hasa and the central province of Najd and covers an area of around 830,000 square miles. Previously these provinces had been divided by 'regional and tribal differences that militated against unification' (Al-Rasheed, 2002: 3). As Al-Rasheed points out, the conquest by Al-Saud did not rely on 'nationalist rhetoric' but rather 'relied on ancestral claims to rule over a region that once belonged to his ancestors' (ibid: 3-4). This 'symbolic vocabulary' coupled with coercion from a revival of the Wahhabist reformist movement (in the form 'of the *ikhwan*, a tribal military force that was dedicated to fight in the name of jihad (holy war) against the infidels') (ibid.) helped to consolidate Ibn Saud's power over the region. According to Saudi Government figures for 2017, the population comprises around 31.7 million individuals: around 11.5 million were expatriates according to estimated figures in 2016 (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia 2017).

An important factor to consider is the 'geographical accident' which means that millions of Muslims all over the world head for Saudi Arabia. As the location of the two holiest shrines of Islam, Makkah and Al Madina, the country has huge symbolic significance 'as the direction

for holy prayers' (Al-Rasheed 2002: 5). Saudi Arabia invests heavily in maintaining and expanding the two holy sites and, to mark his 'deep sense of responsibility towards Islam' King Fahd bin Abdulaziz adopted the official title of the 'Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2017). Since the early 1930s, when Saudi Arabia became part of the world economy, the most pressing problem has been how to reconcile huge oil revenues 'whilst still remaining faithful to Islam' (Al-Rasheed, 2002: 6). The modernization process must simultaneously preserve the 'old' and 'authentic' whilst incorporating the 'new' and 'modern' and 'alien' (ibid.). Saudi Arabia is in many ways, a modern state but it is also a 'nation that adheres to Islam' and 'presses vigorously forward in the service of Islam' (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2017). Therefore 'Muslims reject the Western secular idea of the separation between church and state' (Idris, 1995) and government derives its legitimacy from King Salman's self-appointed role as the official custodian of the true Islam, which is based on the teachings of Abd Al-Wahhab. The public practice of any religion other than Islam is forbidden and the government stringently enforces this restriction in line with Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab's belief that the state needed to be 'strong ... to propagate and defend the faith, and so on' (Idris, 1995).

Islam comprises four schools of thought that developed during the Arab-Islamic Empire: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali (Barakat, 1993). The Hanbali School of Law is the most strict of Islam's four schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Wahhabis follow the Hanbali school which relies not only on the Qur'an but also draws more heavily on the hadith (traditions of the Prophet Mohammed and sayings of his followers) (Elliott House, 2013: 34).

The intertwining of religion and state is evident in the Basic System of Governance which is headed by 'an executive who fills three traditional roles, that of tribal leader (sheikh), religious leader (imam), and king (malik)' (Lipsky, 1959: 5). The *Basic Law of Governance* 1992 defines the aims and duties of the state and it determines the nature of the

social contract between the ruler and citizens. This document stipulates that ‘The State shall protect human rights in accordance with the Islamic Shari‘ah’ (*Saudi Arabia: Basic Law of Governance*, 1992: 5). It should be noted these rights are constrained by the principle that:

No-one, not an individual dictator, an elected national body, or a scholar of religion, has the right to make any legislation that contradicts what is stated in the Qur’an or the Hadith of the Prophet Mohammed (Idris, 1995).

Anyone who attempts to do so is committing ‘an act of grave *shirk*’ by ‘putting themselves in God’s place’ (Idris, 1995). The Saudi legal system (*Shari‘ah Law*) is founded on the strict application of the Hanbali School of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, which rejects all attempts at reinterpretation by more recent scholars. According to the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia:

All are equal before God and in their concern for the well-being, security and dignity and progress of their nation. All citizens are also equal before the law (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2017).

Developments such as gender equality, personal freedoms, family law and democratic rights have until recently met with opposition from the Council of Religious Ministers (known in Arabic as: *Majlis Ash-Shura*) whose views must be accommodated by the Government. Hence all Royal Decrees must embody the *Majlis Ash-Shura* Law, which means that religion is integral to shaping the socio-political environment.

The intertwining of religion and law in Saudi Arabia means that there are no parallels with European or American systems of governance in which there is separation between church and state. Within a free market economic system such as America and Europe, the laws can be changed through a democratic voting system, to ensure equality for all citizens irrespective of ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality or disability. There is no comparable system of democratic rights and freedoms in Saudi Arabia and there are no elections for political office, which means that citizens do not participate in the processes of government. The purpose of the Saudi state is to implement the Islamic Shari‘ah thereby ensuring ‘a system of social life’ which is based on ‘divine guidance’ and not on ‘human ideas or whims’ (Idris, 1995). Within

Islam, the rights and freedoms that exist have been restricted by a moral and ethical framework which was not subject to change before the advent of Vision 2030. According to Idris 1995:

... thanks to the Wahhabi movement there is a consensus among them on the fundamentals of faith and method, the like of which is nowhere to be found in any other part of the Muslim world (Idris, 1995).

2.3 Social and Cultural Context of Saudi Arabia

The intertwining of Arab ethnic traditions and religion have continued to shape social hierarchies and influence social attitudes. According to the Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission (SACM) ‘The culture of Saudi Arabia is defined by its Islamic heritage, its historical role as an ancient trade centre, and its Bedouin traditions’ (SACM, 2018). The Saudi government recognizes two religious holidays as national ones: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-adah (Idris, 1995). There is an emphasis on Islamic identity in daily life and one purpose of these public holidays is to reinforce the idea that ‘loyalty to faith’ should replace ‘kinship loyalty’ (ibid.). The Saudi state has undoubtedly undergone modernization; nevertheless many of the old customs and ways remain firmly entrenched, not least the tribal and patriarchal social order in which ‘kinship solidarity’ has not been replaced by ‘loyalty to faith’ but rather the two are intertwined to provide one of ‘the most cherished axes of social organization’ (Al-Rasheed, 2002: 193).

2.3.1 Social Organization and Social Values

The 1992 bylaw in the Saudi Basic System of Governance reinforces the importance of the family ‘as the nucleus of Saudi society. The family plays a vital role by teaching its members to adhere to Islamic values’ (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2017). Within Islam, children belong to the father and Muslim state institutions uphold the principle of patrilineality (descent through the male line). The family provides the foundation of social unity and showing loyalty and respect for family members is crucially important. Family is followed by clan and

then tribe in terms of loyalty. The family structure is patriarchal and hierarchical with fathers and older males occupying the dominant positions. Age is another primary element in the allocation of roles. Sons are highly valued as they are expected to look after parents in their old age whereas a daughter becomes part of the son-in-law's family. Large families and many children were once the norm as they were seen as a sign of virility and as a source of economic prosperity but according to Gahwaji (2013) this pattern is gradually changing. 'The rise of individual/family incomes has affected the lifestyle of many Saudi families, particularly the middle and upper classes' (2013: 336). Gahwaji notes that today individuals are tending to live in smaller nuclear families rather than as part of an extended network. Greater numbers of women are entering the workforce, which has brought about changes in lifestyle and a 'change in child-rearing and childcare practices' (ibid). The increasing numbers of mothers working outside the home has played a significant role in the growth of the preschool sector (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016). The demand for child care services and preschool centres has increased along with the demand for nannies and caregivers, typically these workers will be from other countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, India and Ethiopia (Alqassem, Dashash and Alzahrani, 2016: 2).

Along with age, gender is another primary element in social organization and the allocation of roles. Wahhabi socio-religious teaching strictly forbids any mixing between the sexes and women are kept segregated from men in the public sphere. This practice applies to all areas of life in Saudi Arabia and it is one way of preserving traditional norms and values, which define women's primary role as nurturer and housewife. This role is non-negotiable, which means that many women cannot balance their basic duties in the home with the demands of the workplace (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016). As Al-Rasheed (2013) argues 'aspects of tribalism, for example, tribal endogamy' as well as 'patriarchy ... restrict women's choices' (Al-Rasheed,

2013: 18). Under Islamic jurisdiction women are defined as ‘second halves to men’ (Gahwaji, 2006: 28). Women are seen as mentally and morally inferior as they lack *aql* ‘the faculty of understanding, rationality, judiciousness, prudence, and wisdom’ (Altorki, 1986: 51) and they lack ‘the ability of judgement’ (ibid). By contrast, in their primary role as protector of the family honour, women have *aql* relating to household matters and managing relations with extended family. Education is increasingly being seen as a powerful agent of change in relation to these traditional and patriarchal patterns of social organization (Altorki, 1986:55; Soffan, 1980: 46-60).

2.3.1.1 Tribal Beliefs and Values

The ability to claim an authentic Arab identity establishes where individuals are placed in the social hierarchy. The fact that the Council of Senior Ulama (Saudi clerics) and heads of government are all from a tribal background is a testament to the high social status of a ‘true’ Arab identity. An authentic Arab identity is embodied in the Bedouin, the original tribal nomads of the desert. Certain characteristics associated with the Arab people have their origins here, for example, hospitality and generosity to visitors is a tradition that can be traced to the Bedouin, who offered food and drink to desert travellers. The ritual of serving coffee is a much cherished tradition along with the offering of dates and sweets to friends, visitors or family. Traditional dress codes are observed by both men and women in all areas of public and private life with the emphasis on modesty for women. Tribalism is synonymous with social conservatism. The common expectation amongst many tribal people is that women will not work outside the home. When women do work they will be fully veiled and will defer to their male guardians (husband, father, brother, uncles, son). There are differences in the value placed on education. In Saudi Arabia many of the Bedouin are not educated but they may have accrued wealth through trading (camels, horses, and sheep) and land ownership. These factors have an

influence on their attitudes towards their children, their children's education and their ability to facilitate their children's educational progress.

Tribalism is also synonymous with strongly held religious beliefs. These people see themselves as the true followers of Islam by 'adhering strictly to the example set by the Prophet Mohammed fourteen hundred years ago' (Elliott House, 2013: 35). Tribal individuals will advocate a purist Wahhabi doctrine which relies more heavily on the hadith than other schools of Islamic thought.

2.3.1.2 Urban Beliefs and Values

People who are from an urban background will generally be more open-minded, more socially liberal, better-educated and often knowledgeable about social and political rights. Crucially, these individuals will often advocate a more moderate and tolerant approach to Islam. For liberal Saudis the religion of the Prophet 'is a kinder, gentler religion that loves learning and life' (Elliott House, 2013: 56). A number of urban women now work outside the home and favour the hijab rather than the full veil. These women are more likely to have travelled and been educated outside Saudi Arabia in countries as varied as Europe, America, Australia, Canada, Egypt, and the Arab Gulf States. These differences in social background, education, attitudes, beliefs and values will influence how individuals understand and negotiate their roles within the family and in wider society.

2.3.2 The Saudi Oil Industry

Saudi Arabia 'holds 25% of the world's known oil supplies' and is currently 'the world's biggest producer and exporter of oil' (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2017). The Kingdom joined the World Trade Organization in 2005, 'beginning the process of opening up its economy to the outside world' (SACM, 2018). Oil wealth has enabled the education of women but they cannot work unless they are permitted to do so by their male guardians. Consequently, women's participation in the labour force has never exceeded twelve percent, which means

their position in the workplace remains ‘marginal’ (ibid). The oil industry has undoubtedly facilitated growth and development in many sectors including health and education but the modernization of civil society has lagged behind. However, the wide scale social, cultural and economic reforms proposed under Vision 2030 are intended to facilitate the wider participation of women in civil society. According to Friedman with Vision 2030:

The state is trying to reshape the identity of the core Saudi nation and mobilize it for the purpose of promoting its economic welfare, fostering new forms of socio-political solidarity, defending its borders, and re-legitimizing the Al-Saud family’s political domination of the country (2017: 5).

These economic changes will affect civil society by ‘dramatically’ re-structuring ‘the relationship between citizens and the state, which has traditionally been shaped by the Saudi ruling establishment’s ability to disperse oil revenues to its people’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 3).

2.3.3 Conceptual Framework of Early Childhood in Saudi Arabia

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) culture is defined as ‘the customary beliefs and patterns of behaviour, both explicit and implicit, that are inculcated by the society – or by a social, religious, or ethnic group within the society – in its members’ (2009: 13). According to Khalifa, ‘Islamic history sets a good example in relation to treating children with love and care’ (2001: 313). Nevertheless, the growth in mass media communications technology, higher standards of living and improvements in education and health have all played a part in changing ideas about family life and family roles in Saudi Arabia. The expansion of consumer goods and world markets has also been a factor in shaping new cultural patterns but at the same time:

...this exposure to more global worldviews has cultivated the need to develop and protect the nature of the locality. Here, children are seen as the focus for ensuring the continuity of morals and cultural attitudes (Khalifa, 2001: 111).

The family, the religion and the education system are still seen as the three main agents of the socialization process: a form of social learning which involves the negotiation of norms (Musgrave, 1987: 2). The author notes that:

Various kinds of knowledge (moral and cognitive) are made available to group members at different times in their life. All of this knowledge will have been socially constructed by previous generations and in relation to particular cultures (ibid: 119).

The adult-child relationship is at the heart of the socialization process. Work by James and Prout (1997: 15) highlights that childhood is a social process which is shaped by the cultural context and therefore the category “child” and “childhood” might differ across space and time (ibid). This perspective draws attention to the child as a creative and active participant in the construction of his/her own meaningful reality. According to Al-Drage, ‘children’s culture has been considered as a major focus’ for this tension between tradition and modernity (1990: 23): a situation which has led to confusion in contemporary understandings of childhood. Khalifa (2001) goes on to point out that ‘the differences between an adult and a child in a traditional Arab culture ... are quantitative rather than qualitative’ (2001: 126). ‘The former knows and thus conforms to the cultural norms, while the latter does not’ (ibid). This claim is supported by the fact that the Arabic word most often used to describe the child is *jahil*, which literally means ignorant and therefore equates childhood with a state of ignorance. As a result, children must be trained to take on their moral obligations.

The Arab family must carry forward ‘the cultural norms and social relations of the tribal society’ (Khalifa, 2001: 127). For this reason there is a strong resemblance between the culture of the society and the family as a unit of social organization, especially in the relations and hierarchies within the family. The family dynamics operate to emphasize the child’s dependency on and obligations towards it rather than towards the wider society. Thus ensuring the ‘strength and continuity’ of the family (ibid). The child’s submergence within the family

is reflected in the use of the plural pronoun 'our' when referring to possessions rather than 'I'.

Ammar explains the key features of socialization in a traditional Arab family as follows:

The process of growing up is envisaged as a way of disciplining the child to conform to the adults' standards, and to comply with what their elders expect them to do, thus acquiring the qualities of being polite 'muadab'. In adult eyes, the period of childhood is a nuisance, and childhood activities, especially play, are a waste of time. The 'giving of adab' to children is the guarantee of survival of the social structure, with its patrilineal bias and respect relationships, especially filial piety, which is sanctioned by the koranic injunctions (1954: 126).

Ammar's quotation illustrates how a framework of 'religious values and obligations' is used to 'reinforce the adult-child relationship' (Khalifa, 2001: 131). The importance of children acquiring 'muadab' cannot be overstated. It is the ideal norm that parents aspire towards and it is 'a value which also has its religious sanction, as a pious son' (ibid). As Ammar points out, whilst this concept is focused on producing 'obedience and subservience' towards adults, in reality, it extends 'to cover the whole range of children's activities for which elders are responsible' (1954: 126). This situation emphasizes the way in which 'power is an important tool in the transition and the sustenance of social norms' (ibid.)

2.4 Education System in Saudi Arabia

2.4.1 The Historical Development of Preschool Education

The historical development of preschool education in Saudi Arabia has been subject to the influence of both Western and eastern scholarship. In the first stage of curriculum development, the Saudi education system was based on an Arabic method of teaching called Ktatib: this word means 'the gathering of a group of young people at a mosque to be taught not only religious instruction from the Qur'an, but also Arabic reading and writing and moral habits for good behaviour' (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016: 313). Ktatib was the traditional method of teaching: teachers positioned themselves in front of the students and 'repeated information from a small board. The methods were basic, but the information drilled into Muslim children

in this Qur'anic context' (ibid) was 'deemed necessary for a child's religious development' (Fernea, 2014: 9). King Faisal had begun his own religious schooling in the local *ktatib* at the age of six where he learned the *suras* of the Qur'an by heart.

The second stage of curriculum development introduced the first modern (*non-ktatib*) Saudi mixed public preschool, which opened in Riyadh in 1966 following King Faisal's Royal Decree. This was as a result of the King and several other Arab leaders recognizing the need for a more organized and structured system of education to replace the informality of the *Ktatib* method. The following year two more preschools opened in Dammam and Ahsa. In 1975 the project approach to education was introduced and several preschools opened in Makkah (Alhamed, Alotaibi, Ziadah, & Metwally, 2007). An accelerated curriculum change from *Ktatib* to the preschool took place during the late 1970s and continued during the twentieth century. Ten further schools were opened in Riyadh followed by three preschools in each of the five key cities: Jeddah, Medina, Taif, Hofuf, and Dammam. Two preschools were opened in Anha, Buraidah, and Arar (Abduljawed et al. 2008). It should be noted that the development of these new preschools did not herald a totally new curriculum. The project approach did not differ markedly from the traditional approach, particularly in its focus on the child acquiring reading and writing skills (Al-Omar, 2013).

The third stage of curriculum development was the introduction of the self-learning approach in 2006. From the outset, the aim was to not to adopt but to 'adapt child-centred curricula, which view children as active learners who initiate and direct their learning, to early childhood education' (Al-Othman et al, 2015: 2513). The Saudi government selected the American High Scope curriculum because it is a high quality (child-centred) program of early years education. Al-Qassem, Dashash and Lash (2016) contend that these three phases of curriculum development 'represent the pedagogical movement from teacher-centred towards learner-centred frameworks' (2016: 6).

In partnership with Tatweer (a Saudi strategic investment company) another goal of the project was to provide trained supervisors, teachers and directors in the area of early childhood education. The expansion of public preschools has ensured that ‘a “good” preschool experience’ is no longer considered ‘a privilege of the wealthy’ (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016, p: 314). In 2004, approximately 96,000 children were enrolled. Al-Mogbel (2014) notes that due to ‘expansion and development’ efforts by the Saudi government, there was a huge increase in enrolment between 2004 and 2014 (Al-Mogbel, 2014: 2084). In 2015, the U. S. – Saudi Arabian Business Council stated that the Saudi Arabian government had invested \$56 billion in education in 2014 (Alqassem, Dashash and Alzahrani, 2016: 2).

2.4.2 Theoretical Influences on the Development of Preschool Education

The theoretical influences governing ECCE and development include both Western and Middle Eastern scholarship. Abduljawed et al. 2008, state that it is crucial for the educational culture of the Middle East to acknowledge the valuable contributions of Muslim scholars including Al-Ghazali; Ibn al-Qayyim, and Ibn Sina: all of whom emphasized the importance of educating very young children (Abduljawed et al. 2008). As Sedgewick 2001 points out, ‘the holy Qur’an, along with the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed is also considered a main source for Saudi education’ (Sedgewick, 2001). According to Abduljawed et al. 2008, ‘these educators, psychologists, religious leaders, the Qur’an, and researchers’ are agreed ‘that the child, especially at the preschool stage, has great potential for enthusiasm, imagination, and activity’ (Abduljawed et al. 2008). According to Abduljawed et al. 2008 the Saudi ECCE philosophy is also influenced by Western educators including Froebel and Montessori but the greatest influences on progress are Dewey and Piaget: most notably the latter’s ‘principles of child psychology and stages of growth, including cognitive development’ (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 314). All of these thinkers have influenced the Saudi philosophy of ECCE. According to Al-Othman et al. ‘...importing Western ideas is an advantage, in terms of sharing different

experiences with the international community’ but they go on to caution ‘Nevertheless, we should not ignore the fact that successful early childhood pedagogy should be socially, culturally and linguistically appropriate’ (Al-Othman et al, 2015: 2511). The need to provide curricula that conform to global educational standards whilst remaining culturally specific has meant that ‘importing educational programs has become a pressing issue’ (ibid.).

2.4.3 Structure of the Early Years Education System

The Islamic religion remains at the heart of the Saudi education system whilst at the same time the Saudi Arabian government directly links the education of young children with the continuing advancement, development and future prosperity of the country (Al-Shaer, 2008). To date, there are three organizations which are jointly responsible for the supervision and management of ECCE in Saudi Arabia: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the private sector (Abduljawed et al., 2008). The main Ministry of Education in Riyadh is the “umbrella organization” controlling the majority of management’ (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016: 314). The private sector ‘(educational management and investment by companies, private individuals, and non-government or charitable organizations) also plays a significant role in leadership’ (ibid.) under the directorship of the Ministry of Education. Teams of social workers and health workers visit the preschools in a supervisory capacity under the direction of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The preschool education system is divided into nurseries, which provide optional care for children aged 0-3, and kindergartens, which provide optional care *and* ‘instruction’ for children aged 3-5 who are not old enough to be admitted to grade 1 (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 313). Grade 1 marks the entry into formal schooling at age 6. The preschools are mixed and all the teachers are female. The school day begins before 7:00 a.m. and finishes at 1:00p.m (Sedgwick, 2001). The provision and organization of ECCE reflects the influence of

international development programs. Yet at the same time Saudi ‘Schools are typically identified as one of the best areas where children can grow with very high discipline and rigor, hence preparing them for life’ (Al-Qassem, Dashash and Al-Zahrani 2016: 6). It should be noted that schooling based on ‘very high discipline and rigor’ is diametrically opposed to a child-centred approach.

2.4.4 Teacher preparation and training

According to Al-Qassem, Dashash Al-Zahrani (2016) ‘It is important to have an integrated and comprehensive source for kindergarten teachers in the kingdom’ (2016: 6) which incorporates ‘a multitude of technical information that helps teachers take into account the growth characteristics and needs’ of children (ibid.). Until the late 1970s Saudi Arabia had no involvement in teacher training at any level, including preschools and it was common practice to bring in teachers from other Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq in order to educate Saudi children (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 316). Al-Qahtani (1994) notes that the training of nursery and kindergarten teachers was officially instigated in 1983 (during the reign of King Fahd Al-Saud 1982-2005) under the auspices of the Gulf Girl Association: ‘an organization that provides social and cultural support for Saudi women and offers an associate degree in early childhood education’ (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 316).

In 1985, King Saud University started its degree program, which has subsequently ‘set a solid standard for Saudi ECE’ (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 317). The bachelor program includes ‘165 hours of study, usually completed in eight semesters and including a practicum’ (ibid: 316). Seventeen of the twenty four public universities in Saudi Arabia now offer bachelor degrees in early childhood education and ‘there are at least four training centres attached to and administered by the Ministry of Education’ (Al-Jadidi, 2012: 30) which offer continuing professional development for ECCE educators. The development of such programs is a

response to the findings of international research studies such as Sylva *et al* (2003). This study proposed that kindergarten teachers educated to degree level were ‘more involved’ and ‘more interested’ in children when compared with those who lacked similar qualifications. By 2006, the Ministry of education was reporting that 87% of preschool teachers were Saudi citizens (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 316).

2.4.5 Religious framework: the Islamic paradigm of education

Kashkary and Robinson (2006) draw attention to the fact that historically, the Saudi ECCE curriculum ‘lacked coordination and was significantly underdeveloped’ (Kashkary and Robinson, 2006). Under the direction of the Ministry of Education ‘standardization increased and the curriculum developed more significantly according to child development theory and age-appropriate goals’ (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016: 315). However, as the Saudi education system has traditionally come under the jurisdiction of Saudi Arabia’s religious establishment, two aspects of the curriculum have remained different from many other ECCE curricula:

- 1) the integration of religious education–Islam as the national doctrine, religion, source of ethics, and basis of the legal system (Sedgewick, 2001); and
- 2) study of Arabic language, including formal usage (for help in understanding the Qur’an) (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 316).

Many of the ECCE educational goals are founded on the words of the Qur’an and Sunnah (sayings of the Prophet Mohammed), which provide ‘religious and social constants’ (Al-Shaer, 2008: 1). The goals for religious instruction include: inculcating faith in God and the Prophet Mohammed in the hearts and minds of children, ensuring that children recognize God as the creator of all things, thanking God for his grace, teaching children good moral behaviour and habits. Children are also taught the five pillars of Islam and the requirements of Islam in daily life.

To comply with ‘international agreements and declarations, including The World education Forum Dakar Declaration (2000)’ (ibid) the policy governing ECCE is also ‘informed by the conceptual framework of early childhood and based upon care, play and education, with attention given to the qualities of excellence, fairness and effectiveness’ (Al-Shaer, 2007: 12). The social goal is to ensure children are able to make the transition from home to school: ‘to a social life shared with peers’ (ibid.). The policy specifies that the preschool environment should be designed in such a way that the children are able ‘to absorb the virtues of good Islamic behaviour through simulation and instruction in tradition, with neither indulgence nor overwork’ (ibid.). These statements show how the conceptual framework of early childhood development is always filtered through an Islamic paradigm.

According to Aljabreen & Lash (2016) the Saudi preschool curriculum should ‘align with the stated objectives of ECCE by providing:

... a wealth of linguistic expressions that are age-appropriate. A creative and aesthetic preschool environment ought to provide children with an opportunity for vitality and healthy development (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 316).

There is evidence to suggest that by 2002 the Saudi ECE curriculum had been substantially reformed in the direction of a more child-centred approach. In 2002, Albajah defined the Saudi curriculum as ‘a set of planned and practiced experiences and activities that help children achieve the desired educational outcomes as best as they can according to their abilities’ (Al-Bajah, 2002 cited in Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 316). In the modern world the importance of these early educational opportunities cannot be overlooked. As Aljabreen and Lash (2016) point out, for over forty years the development of ECCE in Saudi Arabia has been shaped by the ‘geographic, economic, religious and historical context’ of the kingdom and by the ‘educational foundational thinking’ of Western scholars such as Dewey and Piaget along with Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina and Ibn al-Qayyim amongst others (2016: 313).

According to the Saudi Ministry of Education (2013) they are involved in ‘developing dynamic educational curricula for children to achieve the objectives of this stage’ (Ministry of Education, 2013: 2084). The traditional subjects taught at preschool level include: ‘counting and arithmetic (including currency and shapes); science (curiosity, observation, experimentation); art; physical education ... and social education (community roles and public service)’ (ibid.). The Ministry statement indicates that the current Saudi ECCE curriculum incorporates a Western framework of ideas about early childhood and child development within the Islamic paradigm of early childhood education.

2.4.6 Legal Frameworks of Education: The UNCRC and the Islamic Paradigm of Law

Saudi Arabia signed up to the UN Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) on 26 January, 1996 (UNCRC, 1990). The CRC stipulates that children be ‘treated as human beings with a distinct set of rights, who can and should be agents in their own lives’ (Kinos, Robertson, Barbour and Pukk, 2016: 345). Upon accession, the Government of Saudi Arabia registered its reservation with respect to all articles that are in conflict with Islamic law (Rajab, 2013: 18). In response to UNCRC Article 12, the Saudi Basic Law of Government under Section E “Respect for the views of the child” paragraph 87 states that:

The Kingdom respects the views of the child on all matters relevant to his or her life and gives due weight to such views in accordance with the child’s age and maturity (Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2018).

Until very recently, educational provision in Saudi Arabia was shaped by the Dakar Framework 2000, which was made up of ‘six goals, associated targets, and 12 implementation strategies’ (Benavot, 2016: 5). The achievements and challenges faced by developing countries in meeting these goals and targets are the subject of UNESCO’s 2015 EFA Report. In May 2015, the global education community reconvened to produce a new agenda entitled Education 2030 which ‘reaffirms education as a basic right for all and moves a step further by viewing

education as a basic responsibility to the planet’ (ibid: 7). Under the renewed EFA program, early childhood care and education marks the beginning of education understood as a process of lifelong learning: ‘an organizing principle, intended to improve the quality of life of individuals and the social contexts in which learning occurs’ (ibid: 14). The growth and prosperity of a nation depends on the education of its children, therefore this new education program places increased emphasis on ‘inclusion and equity – giving everyone an equal opportunity and leaving no-one behind’ (ibid: 13).

2.5 Vision 2030

2.5.1 Vision 2030: Forming a New Social Contract Between the State and its Citizens

The 2030 Vision statement was compiled by The Council of Ministers in Riyadh ‘under the Chairmanship of Custodian of the two Holy Mosques: King Salman’. According to King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud:

Our vision is a strong, thriving, and stable Saudi Arabia that provides opportunity for all. Our vision is a tolerant country with Islam as its constitution and moderation as its method (Al-Saud, 2017: 7).

We intend to provide better opportunities for partnerships with the private sector through the three pillars: Our position as the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, our leading investment capabilities, and our strategic geographical position (Al-Saud, 2017: 7).

To achieve the goals and targets of the renewed global education agenda (Education 2030) Vision 2030 emphasizes ‘the Islamic principle of toleration’ and states its intention to open up equal opportunities for all its citizens (Saudi Vision 2030, 2018). This principle of tolerance and moderation must be balanced with the need to quell any major dissent from ‘the more conservative elements of Saudi society’ by ensuring that these reforms will adhere ‘closely to ... Arab values and our national traditions’ (Friedman, 2017: 5). Global ECCE agendas are child-centred, hence the success of the educational reforms under Vision 2030 will depend on the extent to which ‘pedagogies developed in all formal learning contexts ... take

account of children's own views and motivations' (Kinos, Robertson, Barbour and Pukk, 2016: 346). What this means is that 'the overall democratic values of participation and everyday practices' (ibid.) must be made compatible with an Islamic approach, in which basic rights and freedoms have previously been constrained within an overarching religious and moral framework.

The complex intertwining of religion with Arab Islamic culture and social and tribal norms creates the unique socio-cultural and religious context that is modern-day Saudi Arabia. Vision 2030 emphasizes 'We take great pride in the historical and cultural legacy of our Saudi, Arab, and Islamic heritage' (Friedman, 2017: 5) whilst at the same time it represents a new social contract between the state and the individual. The section entitled 'Taking Pride in Our National Identity' proposes a 'collective Saudi identity that includes Islam but is not limited to it' (Friedman, 2017: 5). Saudis are being encouraged not leave their fates 'in God's hands' but to think of themselves as having a collective obligation to wider society: 'we will develop ourselves and will work to become independent and active members of society, developing new skills in the process' (Friedman, 2017: 5). These ideas have their origins in 'modernist thought' which 'constitutes a radical break from a system traditionally rooted in the Wahhabi creed and tribal collectivist norms' (Friedman, 2017: 5).

Modernization is not synonymous with Westernization although Western approaches to education have been and will continue to be a major force in driving forward the shift to a knowledge-based economy. In line with previous reforms under King Abdullah, the changes to education that are planned to take place under Vision 2030:

must be and will be distinctly Arab. Why would one not expect it to be this way because when one looks back at the history of modern civilization, so much of what is studied and practiced had its roots deeply entrenched in the Arab world with Saudi Arabia playing no small part (Profanter, 2014: 209-210)

2.5.2 Vision 2030: Changing Institutional Cultures

The phrase institutional culture is used to refer to ‘the religious and social worlds that shape the beliefs and practices of those involved in the life of the institution’ (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994: 31). Vision 2030 has been described as ‘the driving force ... aimed at producing something perhaps unheard of in the Kingdom: critical, independent thinkers’ (Pennington, 2017). These educational reforms are intended to produce institutional frameworks that are more socially just and, in many cases, this will require dismantling or challenging the beliefs and practices that shape and maintain social injustice. Under Vision 2030 the aim is to carefully steer education away from ‘a cultural script’ (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994: 31) that is based on strict adherence to the theological tenets of Wahhabism towards a more tolerant and moderate Islamic approach. This shift is seen as a crucial step towards facilitating the skills and knowledge development that are vital for ‘a vibrant society, a thriving economy and a strong foundation for economic prosperity’ (Saudi Vision 2030, 2018).

A recent conference report entitled ‘Building Bridges of Understanding’ (2017) compiled by the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW) indicates that the Saudi government has already made significant progress towards reforming the institutional culture of its education system under Vision 2030. The conference ended with a panel discussion on the role and influence of religion in shaping Saudi identity. The panellists stated that whilst religion remained crucially important, ‘the religious establishment while still central, was now playing a less proactive role in shaping policy’ (AGSIW, 2017: 9). According to *Saudi Education Policy* early years’ education is based on a twofold objective:

The objective of education: understanding Islam correctly and completely, implanting and spreading the Islamic doctrine, providing students with Islamic values and instructions, acquiring knowledge along with different skills, developing constructive behavioural tendencies; advancing society economically, socially, culturally, and qualifying members in order to become useful in the construction of their society (MOE, 2013c)

It is important to acknowledge that eighty six years ago the Saudi nation ‘did not exist and some consider its major challenge amidst such sophisticated growth to be achieving modernity without compromising its heritage, faith or culture’ (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 312). The Saudi government is trying to achieve a careful balance between the aims of a traditional Islamic education and the aims of the educational policy reform agenda, which advocates a more liberal Western-based approach. The Saudi curriculum is socio-culturally *adapted* nevertheless with the implementation of Vision 2030 the general direction *is* towards more child-centred approaches with aim of equipping children with ‘new skills’ (Friedman, 2017: 5). This was confirmed at a three-day conference held in Riyadh on 9 April 2018 entitled ‘Ta’leem’ (which means Education). The United States was ‘the guest country’ with ‘60 years’ experience in early education’ (Yahya, 2018). According to the inaugural speaker, Saudi Education Minister Dr Al-Issa “the exhibition was a contribution of the ministry to the Saudi Vision 2030, and it aims to give every Saudi child the opportunity for a good education with various options”(Al-Issa cited in Yahya, 2018).

2.6 Summary

This chapter has identified and discussed the three key contextual factors underlying the current trends and forces at work in Saudi society. Firstly this chapter has explained how Wahhabi Islam provides the overarching framework for all aspects of social organization, including education. With Vision 2030 the aim is to transform Saudi Arabia into a more ‘tolerant country with Islam as its constitution and moderation as its method’ (Saudi vision 2030, 2018: 7). This transformation is already underway. The Council of Religious Ministers (*Majlis Ash-Shura*) who previously played a central role in interpreting and extending the application of *Shari’ah* law known as *Fiqh Al Sharah*) will no longer play a key part in shaping

educational policy. Decrees passed under Vision 2030 will continue to embody the Majlis Ash-Shura Law but less accommodation will be granted to the views of the clerics. As a result, the socio-political environment will be increasingly shaped by the shift towards greater liberalization and equality.

Secondly, this chapter has explained how the intertwining of religion with Arab ethnic traditions has perpetuated a form of social organization based on tribal and patriarchal hierarchies. Yet the creation of a dynamic, innovative and knowledge-based economy depends on greater social freedoms and equality of opportunity. Hence, the Vision 2030 policy agenda represents what is ‘effectively a cultural revolution’ (Chulov 2017) that heralds ‘a new social contract’ (Friedman, 2017: 5) between the Saudi state and the individual, not least by allowing women wider participation in the labour market and in civil society. At the same time, Vision 2030 recognizes that the radical nature of these reforms will need to be balanced by respect for ‘an authentic society rooted in local traditions’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 12).

Thirdly, this chapter has explained history of educational reforms in Saudi Arabia insofar as they apply to the preschool sector. To comply with its obligations under the 2015 Education for All (EFA) agenda which places greater emphasis on inclusion, equity and equality of opportunity, the curriculum focus will not be primarily on perpetuating a devout Islamic society; equal attention will be given to equipping children with twenty-first century the skills: ‘creativity, imagination and critical thinking skills’ (Al-Issa, 2009: 39-40). Vision 2030 acknowledges that Western ideas (most notably the American approach to preschool education) are an advantage to Saudi Arabia, in terms of establishing links with the international community, thereby ensuring the provision of high quality early years curricula that are designed to equip children with the critical thinking skills they need to become effective, responsible and productive members of society.

Chapter 3 will introduce the concept of Practice Architecture based on the theory of education proposed by Kemmis et al (2008, 2014). The notion of Practice Architecture will be explored to provide the critical lens through which to highlight the differences between Western and Saudi Arabian approaches to early childhood education.

Chapter 3 - Practice Architecture

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explain how the notion of Practice Architectures can provide a critical lens through which to understand both Western and Saudi Arabian approaches to teaching and learning and the systems and organizations that shape both educational practices and educational praxis. The theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis and Grootenboer, 2008) has been used in a number of educational settings. However, to date it has only been applied in one ECCE study, which looked at ‘research circles’ as a method to examine leadership in Swedish preschools (Ronnerman and Olin, 2014). The theory of Practice Architectures can be a particularly useful tool in the context of cross-cultural i.e. global programs of education because it provides a framework for examining the ‘discursive, material and social influences that shape (and are shaped by) early childhood practice’ (Salamon et al, 2016: 431). By uncovering the constraints on educational praxis, the theory of Practice Architectures ‘can serve important practical and philosophical purposes’ (ibid: 440). Specifically this chapter presents sections on Western Practice Architectures and some of their modifications. It then explores examples from Scandinavia before moving to deal with the specifics of the Saudi context. Finally the chapter argues for and develops a separate model of Practice Architecture designed for the Saudi context.

The provision of child-centred education is shaped by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) which promotes and protects the human rights and freedoms of all persons under the age of 18. These global programs of education are designed to give children ‘space, freedom and autonomy’ but they are often implemented in countries with legal systems and religious traditions and cultures that are radically different from Western-style democracies. The cultural context is highly significant because as Hope and Montgomery (2016) point out, research evidence shows that ‘the environment in which learning takes place can have a

significant impact on both the construction of meaning in education and the dynamic of learning' (Montgomery 2016).

One of the major challenges of cross-cultural programs of education is 'a lack of shared understandings of taken for granted terms and assumptions, along with the potential for ECEs voices to be silenced within professional hierarchies' (Cumming and Wong, 2012: 131). For example, the patriarchal hierarchy in Saudi Arabia means that whilst Saudi clerics understandably occupy very senior government positions they do not have expertise in Western frameworks of Early Years Care and Education and Child Development. Yet, until the advent of Vision 2030 the religious establishment had sole jurisdiction over the country's education system. These legal and religious traditions and forms of social organization mean that whilst the language of reform (i.e. Western terminology) has been used in the design of Saudi educational policy documents, this does not necessarily indicate that the underlying principles and concepts (which in the West are assumed to be universal) are shared.

The first section of this chapter will explain the concept of Practice Architectures based on the work of Kemmis et al (2008, 2014). The theory of education proposed by Kemmis et al (2008, 2014) is designed to achieve a double purpose: 'to prepare people to live well in a world worth living in' (Kemmis et al, 2014: 27). Examples from schools in Norway, Sweden and Denmark will be used to explain and illustrate the efficacy of Kemmis's schematic model of education in a Western context. The second section of this chapter will use the concept of Practice Architecture as a critical lens through which to examine the main differences between Western culture and Saudi Arabian culture. A schematic model of education based on an Islamic Practice Architecture will be created to 'bring to light some of the implicit influences on ECCE's practices' (Salamon et al, 2016: 432) thereby highlighting the key differences in the two approaches to early years education.

3.2 Western Practice Architecture

3.2.1 Theoretical Underpinning

The idea of Practice Architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) can provide a useful lens through which to view child-centred education in the West. The notion of Practice Architectures provides a means to examine the structure and functioning of organizations, institutions, contexts and the people within them. As Johansson and Sandberg (2012) point out:

Organizations, institutions, local settings and the people in them construct the Practice Architectures that give substance and form to what is and can be said and done, by, with and for whom. These Practice Architectures are constructed inside or outside an organization or other formal setting related to the local practice (2012: 909).

Kemmis et al (2014) state that:

A practice is a form of socially established cooperative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings) and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relating), and when this complex of sayings, doings and relating ‘hangs together’ in a distinctive project (Kemmis et al, 2014: 31).

As the above quotations make clear, the concept of Practice Architectures includes ‘the broader bureaucratic structures and processes’ in which individuals must work (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010, p: 69). And the concept of practice is also multi-dimensional. The ‘sayings’ of practice refers to the ‘discursive conditions’ that is, the relationship that prevails between ‘hearers and speakers (Schatzki 2002). It incorporates the ‘doings’ or work practices, that is, the relationships between educators and learners’ (Schatzki 2002) (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69). The wider social and political context will also determine how people relate to each other. When Kemmis and Smith (2008) use the term ‘practice’ they are referring to ‘social practices more generally, when actors are not necessarily conscious or aware of the moral import and the social and historical consequences of their action’ (Kemmis and Smith, 2008: 17).

When applied to administrative practices, Practice Architectures also includes the ‘characteristic arrangement of relationships’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 31) between ‘formal leadership and teachers which influence leadership practice’ (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69) (Kemmis 2008). Administrative practices provide the ‘mediating preconditions for practice’ that govern ‘what is doable and sayable in leadership’ (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69). And these ‘mediating preconditions’ govern how communication is organized between leaders and their differently ranked employees. The central idea is that changing Practice Architectures is a way of ‘reframing’ the ‘sayings’, ‘doings’ and ‘relatings’ (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69) between individuals both inside and outside of the specific organization.

Ax and Ponte (2008) note that education and the role of educators are always intertwined with social and moral responsibility, which in turn, places individuals under an obligation to continually reflect on their roles. Kemmis and Smith (2008) state that educators must continually ask themselves what *should* we do in relation to our practice? (2008: 16). And ‘In whose interests are we acting?’ (ibid). The notion of ‘*praxis* as a kind of enlightened and ‘elevated action’ is central to this view of education:

When an educator takes into account not only his or her own interests, but also the long-term interests of each individual student, and the long-term interests of society and the world at large – he or she is engaging in *praxis* (Kemmis and Smith, 2008: 17).

It is crucial to note that ‘*praxis* does not refer only to an ideal’ (Kemmis and Smith, 2008: 18). An approach to education that incorporates the notion of *praxis* recognizes that ‘the person who is acting is doing so in response to the practicalities and particularities of a given situation – they do the best they could do on the day, under the circumstances’ (ibid.). Hence the consequences cannot be predetermined and can only be judged in terms of their outcomes.

According to Kemmis et al (2014) the theory of Practice Architectures can provide a way of theorizing Education which takes account of ‘the agency of the students; at every age

(though with less responsibility when they are very young), they too are responsible for what they learn or do not learn – for their own self-formation’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 26). This approach is the opposite of the technical view of education, which is focused on ‘the production of people of a certain kind ... or the production of ‘learning outcomes’ (ibid.). From a technical perspective, students are the ‘pliant or resistant ‘raw materials’’ on whom the teachers work ‘with the tools and resources available’ to ‘produce the outcomes’ (ibid.). A technical approach to education is based on rule-following, or producing an outcome that is known in advance. In Saudi Arabia approaches to teaching and learning at all levels, including preschool, are based on a technical view of education.

3.2.2 Philosophical Underpinning

The concept of *praxis* dates back to Western antiquity and derives from Aristotle. Aristotle was trying to answer the questions: ‘What is wisdom? What is knowledge? What makes a person who has the capacity to act? (Ax and Ponte, 2008: 1). According to Ax and Ponte (2008) praxis can be defined:

... as ‘action’ referring in a general sense to all intentional activities, by which people can reach a particular ‘goal’ through their own efforts. More specifically, the term referred to rational action based on a conscious choice and ‘action’ was defined as the product of observation, desires, and intellect or reason (ibid).

Praxis is a particular type of ‘action that is *morally committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field*’ ... ‘action that aims for the good of those involved and for the good for humankind’ (Kemmis and Smith, 2008: 4). A second view of praxis that is informed by Hegel and Marx, ‘understands praxis as ‘history-making action’ that is, as action with moral, social and political consequences – good or bad – for those involved in and affected by it’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 26). As a result, ‘educational praxis’ can be understood in two ways: ‘first, as *educational* action that is morally committed and informed by traditions in a field (‘right conduct’), and second, as ‘history-making *educational* action’ (ibid).

Kemmis et al (2014) contend that it is equally as important to clarify what is meant by the term ‘education’ ... ‘especially in a European context’ (ibid). The authors offer the following definition:

Education ... is the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of acquisition, and ways of relating to one another and the world, that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind (Kemmis et al, 2014: 26).

The above definition makes clear that educational praxis involves ‘the triangular set of relationships between child, school and society ...’ (Ax and Ponte, 2008: 8). It is safe to say that there is a shared process and a shared purpose regarding education in Western countries and in Saudi Arabia but crucially the forms of understanding, modes of acquisition and ways of relating to one another are very different. This thesis will argue that whilst Kemmis’s model provides an appropriate lens for viewing Western approaches to teaching and learning it cannot be applied in an Islamic context because there are major differences in:

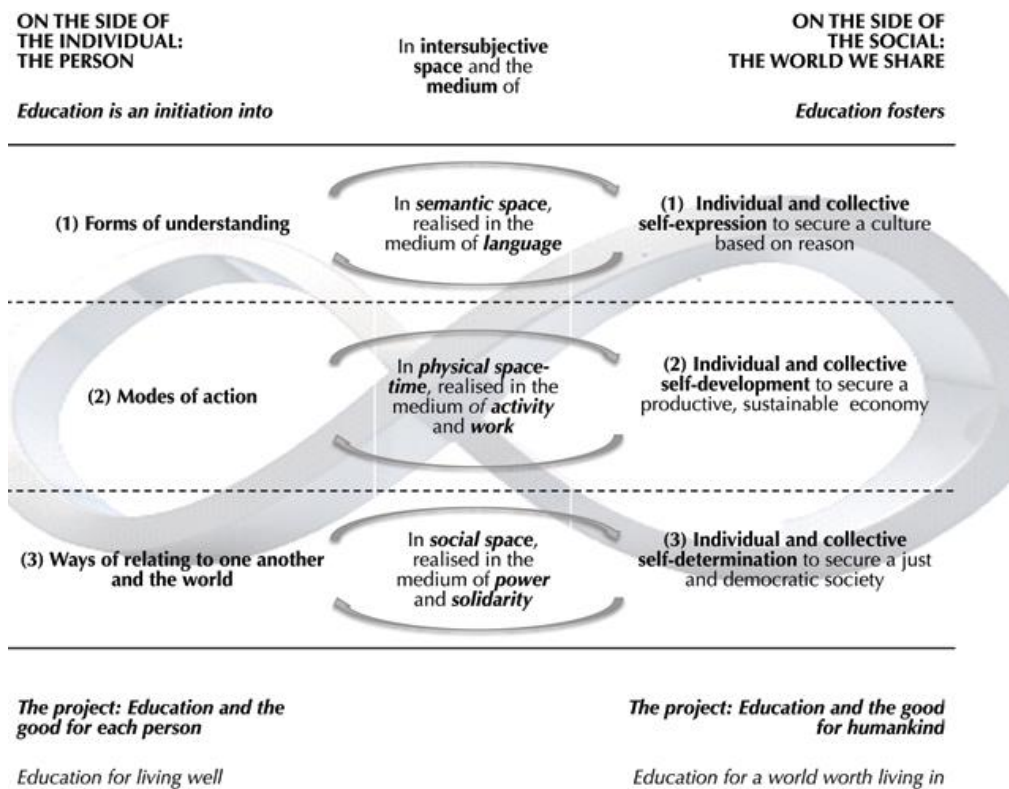
all aspects of knowledge about children, including philosophical, ideological, moral and cultural notions about what is appropriate or inappropriate, good or bad, right or wrong, suitable or less suitable for children’s growth toward mature adulthood (ibid.).

3.3 The Kemmis Model

3.3.1 Kemmis’s schematic model of education

Education concerns both individual self-development and the ‘formation of communities and societies’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 26). To achieve this ‘double purpose’ education must be implemented in ways that model and encourage ‘the good life for humankind’ (ibid: 27).

Figure 1: The Schematic Definition of Education Offered by Kemmis et al (ibid).



As shown in Figure 1, Practice Architectures appear in the shape of sayings, ‘cultural-discursive arrangements’; doings, ‘material-economic arrangements’ and relating, ‘socio-political arrangements’ (ibid: 32). As a result, ‘*practices are not merely set in, but always already shaped by, the particular historical and material conditions that exist in particular localities or sites at particular moments*’ (Kemmis, et al, 2014: 33). However, ‘given our different standpoints and life experiences, people will disagree about what the good life for humankind is’ therefore ‘what is good for any person or group to do at any particular historical moment is always a matter for practical deliberation’ (ibid.). Educational policy reforms can be seen as Practice Architectures in the sense that they are ‘meta-practices’ that regulate, inform or otherwise enable or constrain ... ‘the content and conduct of other practices’ (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008: 58).

As this chapter makes clear, the Western theory of education is based on language and discourse that has its roots in Western philosophy and liberal political theory. The ‘forms of understanding’ or ‘sayings’ that characterize educational theory and practice are intended to

encourage individual ‘self-expression’ in the classroom (i.e. questioning and debate) with the aim of creating a pluralist culture based on public reason and political and social equality (Kemmis et al, 2014: 27). The ‘doings’ or ‘modes of action’ through activity and work are oriented towards developing a ‘productive, sustainable economy’ as the main goal (ibid). In a Western educational context, the idea of what constitutes ‘individual and collective self-development’ is constantly being reassessed as governments seek to respond to technological changes and to improve the material and economic well-being of their citizens. Investment in education is seen as one sure way of boosting productivity.

A child-centred approach to education uses language and discourse that has its roots in Western philosophy and liberal political theory. As a result, child-centred education is rights-based, i.e. it reflects democratic socio-political arrangements by maximizing children’s participation in classroom activities. Young children are allowed to exercise freedom of choice in classroom activities, which means they become active agents in the construction of knowledge. In the dimension of social space, the ‘ways of relating to one another and the world’ (ibid) are premised on liberal democratic values of equality and social justice which means equal rights and freedoms for everyone. In a Western Practice Architecture the ‘organizational functions, rules and roles’ and practical arrangements will reflect the liberal values of Democracy; Rule of Law; Individual Liberty and Mutual Respect and Tolerance (PACEY 2015).

3.4 Clayton’s Modifications

All theory/practice relationships are determined by ideas about the type of person the child or young person should become and the type of society that is desired. The analytical framework of Clayton, Smith and Dymont’s (2013) study is informed by Grundy 1987 and Habermas 1972 (as cited in Grundy 1987). Grundy’s work offers insights into the varied ‘ways in which educators think about and represent theory and practice, and corresponding ways in

which beliefs are manifested in educational practice or praxis' (Clayton, Smith and Dymont 2013: 168). Grundy identifies forms of educational practice based on Habermas's theory of "knowledge constitutive interests": "a theory about fundamental human interests which influence how knowledge is 'constituted or constructed'" (Clayton, Smith and Dymont 2013: 168). According to Habermas's theory there are three 'basic cognitive interests (technical, practical and emancipatory)' (Clayton, Smith and Dymont 2013: 168) which Grundy explained as follows:

a "technical interest" is an interest in survival through control and manipulation of the environment" (p: 27), a "practical interest is an interest in "understanding the environment through interaction based upon a consensual interpretation of meaning" (p: 14) and an "emancipatory interest is "an interest in emancipation and empowerment to engage in autonomous action arising out of authentic critical insights into the social construction of human society" (p: 19) (Grundy 1987 cited in Clayton, Smith and Dymont 2013: 169).

Grundy (1987) argues that the interplay between 'knowledge and action' is determined by 'a particular cognitive interest' (cited in Clayton, Smith and Dymont 2013: 169). For example, Saudi education is driven by technical interests, which in turn, shape the theory/practice relationship. According to Grundy, when practice is directed by a technical interest then there will be a deterministic theory/practice relationship in which theory is 'conceived as a set of rules and procedures' used to 'direct teaching practice which exists to bring certain plans to fruition' (Grundy 1987, *ibid*). This is the opposite of an 'emancipatory interest' in which the theory/practice relationship is aimed at maximizing the agency and autonomy of both children and teachers:

a practical or emancipatory interest is more likely to generate notions that theory may guide but not direct practice or that practice embodies theory generation and authentication, rather than theory application (Clayton, Smith and Dymont 2013: 169).

These different forms of educational practice are summarized in the table below. In Grundy's (1987) forms of educational practice, the technical box reads like a description of the Saudi view of education (ibid. 169).

3.4.1 Grundy's forms of educational practice

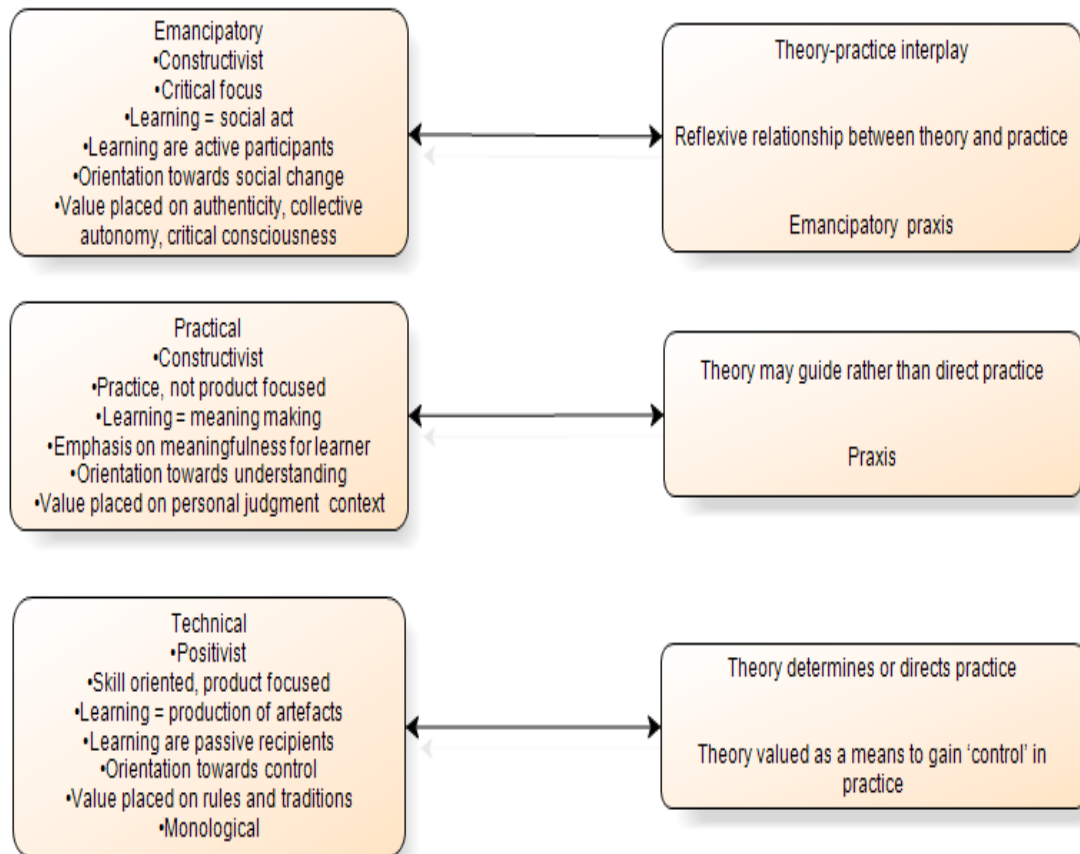


Figure 2: Representation of Grundy's Forms of Educational Practice (Clayton 2010)

3.5 Practice Architectures and Leadership: Empirical Examples from Scandinavia

The theory of Practice Architectures highlights the importance of creating the social and institutional conditions that will support improvements in educational practice (Salamon et al,

2016: 436). The following examples show how Practice Architecture helps to understand how educational reforms are implemented in Sweden and Norway.

3.5.1 Research in Sweden

The notion of Practice Architectures is often used in research studies that focus on changing educational practice and leadership, in relation to ‘leading praxis’. The term ‘leading praxis’ is intended to highlight the social and political arrangements of leadership relations and how these relations are realized ‘in practice through power and solidarity’ (Salamon et al, 2016: 436). Research in Sweden (Olin 2009) has emphasised the need for curriculum reforms which would decentralize management. The call was for an inclusive perspective on learning in which heads and teachers took on the responsibility for ‘reshaping arenas for communication, learning and decision-making within schools’ (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69). Sweden’s new *Curriculum for the Preschool* was introduced in 2011 with the aim of making the school ‘more instructive’ (OECD, 2013: 45). Leadership was dispersed to create ‘a range of curriculum and pedagogical initiatives, as well as ... ideas for improvement and action in regard to pedagogical practices’ (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69). For example, teachers were given ‘responsibility according to their education’ (OECD, 2013: 45) under a new section designed for ‘follow-up, evaluation and development’ (ibid). These guidelines are used ‘as supervision to develop the quality of the activities’ (ibid). In line with the fundamental democratic values of the Swedish preschool, another aim was to create ‘alternative spaces for communication, which allow for the exchange of different standpoints’ (ibid) and create more space for ‘individual and collective self-expression’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 27).

3.5.2 Research in Norway

The values underpinning Norway’s *Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* are ‘similar to Sweden’s but they are based on Christian and humanist values’

(OECD, 2013: 29). These values include ‘empathy, forgiveness, a belief in human worth, equality, common responsibility, honesty and fairness’ (ibid). Kindergartens should also promote human dignity, equality, intellectual freedom, tolerance, health, sustainable development and respect for the environment’ (ibid). Early development is regarded as a collaboration which involves not only ECCE staff but also ‘parents or guardians, the owners/managers of ECCE provisions, and municipal authorities’ (OECD, 2013: 49). As a result, there has been a change in how ‘learning in schools is spoken about, practiced and developed’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 74). These reforms mark a significant change in the Practice Architectures i.e. the ‘sayings, doings and relating of principal and teacher practices’ (ibid.).

In both Norway and Sweden a high value is placed on ‘age-appropriateness and needs-based pedagogy’ (OECD, 2013: 49). In Norway the staff make their own decisions about which activities will ‘foster children’s curiosity, creativity and thirst for knowledge’ (ibid. 50). Similarly in Sweden, preschool activities are based on a specific set of ‘attitudes, ideas and values’ but child outcomes are not defined (OECD, 2013: 46). In both cases the frameworks are intended as guidelines which can be adapted to meet the interests and needs of individual children. This requires a pedagogical approach based on reflexivity, self-awareness, critical insight and the idea of school as a ‘community of learners’ (Clayton, Smith and Dymont, 2013: 167). This relationship is conceived as ‘dialectical’ in the sense that it relies on the open and logical discussion of opposing ideas and opinions. Teaching and learning is conceptualized as a social act in which teachers and children are involved as equal and active participants in the construction of meaning.

3.5.3 Educational Praxis and Dispersed Leadership

In Norway and Sweden education is viewed as a ‘fundamentally moral practice’ which ‘is part of the social contract’ (Vedoy and Moller 2007). However, unlike Sweden where

democracy forms the foundation of the preschool, the Norwegian system prescribes ‘religion’ along with ‘ethics and citizenship as specific subject areas’ (OECD, 2013: 30). This ‘humanist, cultural heritage’ goes in tandem with the promotion of equity for all and in both cases schools are viewed as social sites which ‘promote responsibility and interest on the part of children and encourage their participation in society’ (ibid: 49). These curricula reforms and pedagogical initiatives are not based on a specific methodology but rather they require ‘informed decisions by professionals about balancing the welfare of the individual with the needs of society’ (Olson 2003: 210). Kemmis’s model (Figure 1) can provide a useful tool for explaining the ‘characteristic arrangement of relationships’ between educational practice and leadership in Norway and Sweden, where the ‘organizational functions, rules and roles’ and practical arrangements are fundamentally democratic. Within these frameworks, the overall aim is maximizing the agency and autonomy of children and educational stakeholders.

3.6 Argument in Support of an Islamic Practice Architecture

This section will set out the argument in support of the claim that an Islamic Practice Architecture must be developed in order to understand education in a Saudi context. As Ax and Ponte (2008) point out, education and the role of the educator are always intertwined with social and moral responsibility. In the West, this social and moral responsibility takes the form of *praxis* which requires educators to continually ask ‘what *should* we do in relation to our practice?’ (Kemmis and Smith, 2008: 16). And ‘In whose interests are we acting?’ (ibid). This means ‘the person who is acting is doing so in response to the practicalities and particularities of a given situation – they do the best they could do on the day, under the circumstances’ (ibid.). Crucially, there can be no predetermined consequences as these can only be judged on the basis of outcomes. (ibid: 32). As Ax and Ponte (2008) point out:

In the action of praxis, therefore, morality (ideology, as giving moral meaning to experience), knowledge (theory, as knowing how phenomena behave and are connected), and skill (techne as knowing how to act) merge (2008: 15).

Therefore, the theory of Practice Architectures can provide a way of theorizing education which takes account of ‘the agency of the students; at every age (though with less responsibility when they are very young), they too are responsible for what they learn or do not learn – for their own self-formation’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 26).

Whilst Kemmis’s model provides an appropriate lens for viewing Western approaches to teaching and learning, it cannot be applied in a Saudi context as all pedagogical praxis is ‘a socially and culturally embedded situation’ (Ax and Ponte, 2008: 3). Western theories and practices of education are completely alien to Islamic culture and society because they are rooted in very different attitudes, ideas and values. This means that although the Saudi government has superficially adopted Western ideas of ECCE in their educational policy documents, in their implementation these concepts are actually very different. Despite the Saudi government’s previous efforts at reforming the curriculum, until very recently, educational policy and practice has been constrained within the moral and religious framework of Wahhabi Islam. As a result, an Islamic Practice Architecture is underpinned by a very different view of education as a particular kind of ‘human and collective action’ by which ‘good individuals and good societies are formed and transformed’ (Kemmis, 2010: 21). In Saudi Arabia, educational theory and practice is underpinned by religion, which gives ‘moral meaning to experience’, all knowledge/theory comes from the Qur’an and skill (knowing how to act) is judged in terms of becoming a good Muslim by role modelling the Prophet Mohammed. As a result, education is governed by a deterministic theory/practice relationship (Grundy 1987); social and moral responsibility takes the form of obedience and submission, which requires educators to adhere to the beliefs and practices of Wahhabism as the only authentic or true Islam. Therefore in order to reframe the ‘sayings’, ‘doings’ and ‘relatings’ (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69) between individuals both inside and outside of the specific organization, an Islamic Practice Architecture must be used.

3.7 Key Differences in Saudi Arabian Culture

3.7.1 Socio-religious Context

In its 10th Development Plan as part of its 2030 Vision, Saudi Arabia stated its intention to create ‘a knowledge economy’ (Oxford Business Group, 2017). The government had already committed to introducing more child-centred education into its public preschools by basing its curriculum reforms on the American High/Scope model of child-centred teaching and learning and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). However, as discussed previously, there is clearly a mismatch between the aims of supra-national organizations to implement a more child-centred approach, the Saudi Government’s stated policy intentions and Saudi culture and traditions. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Arab Muslim monarchy, which is dominated by Islam and it is guardian of the two holy mosques. Unlike Western democracies, the country is characterized by an intertwining of religion, state and tribalism:

Clerics have been seen as partners in governing Saudi Arabia since the pact between the founder of the first Saudi Kingdom, Mohammed bin Saud and the influential cleric Mohammed Abdelwahab (Kinninmont, 2017: 20).

3.7.1.1 Religious, Legal and Theoretical Underpinnings

In Saudi Arabia governance ‘derives its authority from the Book of God Most High and the Sunnah of his Messenger, both of which govern this Law and all the laws of the State’ (Al-Saud, 1992: 3). The main purpose of the Saudi state is to defend and perpetuate the Islamic faith, consequently public practice of any religion other than Wahhabi Islam is strictly forbidden. No individual, elected body or religious scholar has the right to propose any legislation that contravenes ‘what is stated in the Qur’an or the Hadith of the Prophet Mohammed’ (Idris, 1995).

3.7.1.2 Saudi Social Contract

The idea of the social contract has its origins in European Enlightenment philosophy and it was designed to ‘explain how states legitimize their authority beyond coercion, through implicit consent to, or at least a basic acceptance of its authority’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 17). However, in Saudi Arabia, religious leaders emphasize ‘that obedience to the rulers is paramount to avoid the risk of chaos, conflict and social division’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 17).

According to Article 6 of the Saudi Basic Law of Governance:

Citizens shall pledge allegiance to the King on the basis of the Book of God and the Sunnah of his Messenger, and on the basis of submission and obedience in times of hardship and ease, fortune and adversity (Al-Saud, 1992: 3).

In an interview with *The Economist* Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was asked whether he thought Vision 2030 would have an impact on the social contract. He responded by saying that the issue was not relevant as the ‘Saudi Government already represented its people’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 13). In effect, the Saudi social contract is ‘imposed rather than contractual’ (ibid: 17). The system of governance is monarchical and the Saudi state expects its citizens to pledge their unquestioning allegiance to God, King, clerics and government respectively. Therefore the Saudi Practice Architectures (cultural-discursive arrangements’, ‘material-economic arrangements’ and ‘socio-political arrangements’) are shaped by these historical and material conditions (Kemmis et al, 2014: 27).

3.8 Practice Architectures and Leadership: an Empirical Example from Saudi Arabia

3.8.1 Research in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

According to recent research by Alameen, Male and Palaiologou (2015) reforms to Saudi Arabian education have focused attention on ‘leadership roles and responsibilities’ as a ‘key issue’ with the early years sector being identified as ‘one of the major targets for development’ (Alameen, Male and Palaiologou 2015: 121). The authors contend:

pedagogical leadership is something more than supporting teaching and learning and carries with it an expectation that actions should not be predetermined, but relevant to situation and context (2015: 124).

Here, the authors are proposing a Western view of leadership ‘as praxis for which ... there can be no right way of acting or practice, instead actions should be appropriate to a particular situation’ (Male, 2006)’ (ibid). For this reason:

...pedagogy in the twenty-first century should be about offering the capacity to learners to challenge existing knowledge and to develop the skills to deal with an unspecified future’ (Alameen, Male and Palaiologou, 2015: 124.).

This is a leadership approach based on the ‘problematisation of educational practice’, which can only proceed ‘from a situation where the norms and conventions of human co-existence considered by society to be correct become questionable’ (Benner 1973: 12 cited in Ax and Ponte, 2008: 8). As illustrated in the examples from Norway and Sweden the notion of ‘leading praxis’ is a Western concept that is supported by democratic discursive, material and social arrangements intended to maximise the agency of children and educators.

By contrast, in Saudi Arabia ‘directive leadership and control by the state has been the traditional norm’ (Alameen, Male and Palaiologou, 2015: 121). Consequently, leadership has remained ‘centralized and culturally constrained’ (ibid: 125) therefore ‘any indication of local

decision-making would be considered significant in terms of the ability to exercise aspects of pedagogical leadership' (ibid: 126). This research took place in the capital city of Riyadh, where 'local social norms are more conservative than in some other parts of the country' (ibid.). The research involved eight preschools, seven were private '(local and international)' and only one was public (ibid). It could be argued that the sample is inappropriate as it is heavily biased towards private institutions. All respondents 'agreed on the importance of involving parents' (ibid: 131) and all respondents 'emphasized the importance of collaborative work to encourage optimum learning' (Alameen, Male and Palaiologou, 2015: 133). According to the researchers, as the Saudi government previously 'has been more instrumental than parents in shaping decision-making at the institutional level' any 'engagement of parents ... could thus be seen as innovatory practice' (ibid: 133).

Yet, only one respondent (the owner and principal of the school) who 'developed her experience and education in Western society' described herself as having 'a direct relationship with her children' (ibid). The school was described as having 'a trusting and open atmosphere' which 'affects learners positively as their confidence is built' (ibid). This respondent stated that the 'child-directed, High Scope' program 'puts the child at its heart' (ibid.). She added 'the child has the biggest say so, they are the biggest stakeholders' (ibid.). The three respondents who used the Saudi Curriculum (which is also modelled on High Scope), cited their relationships with the Ministry of Education as important, especially the program evaluation by a superintendent. However, these individuals perceived themselves as day-to-day managers with little control over the 'quality of teaching and learning' (ibid: 134).

Without specifying any actual number, the researchers concluded that:

...a small number of formal leaders in the early years setting appeared to practice the full role of leadership: they form the vision and mission, make all kinds of decisions without limitation and appear to be flexible in building relationships and freely involving others in the school's decision-making' (ibid: 136).

The researchers also concluded somewhat confusingly:

In contrast, in most cases they appear to play only partial roles as preschool leaders: they seem to be managing the setting more than leading, probably as a result of being restricted by circumstances relating to external axes related to the school' (ibid).

The researchers were determined to present their findings in a positive light by describing them as 'encouraging given the nature of the larger social system within the country' (ibid). Arguably the sample used in this research did not meet its principal criterion for the selection of participants: 'to seek a balance between those who were responsible for public and private settings as other variables were not available' (ibid: 127). These factors might explain why the above claims made by the researchers are contradictory and do not seem to be supported by the data. The researchers view pedagogy as 'a triangulated concept that is concerned with theory, practice and a set of social axes' (Alameen, Male and Palaiologou, 2015: 124.). They mention that leadership praxis is being 'restricted by external axes related to the school' but they do not explain how these 'social axes' act as constraints, nor do they explain the different theory/practice relationship that underpins education in a Saudi context. Instead they suggest that 'theories from a Western context need to be moderated' (ibid. 125). Rather than trying to 'moderate' Western theories about pedagogical leadership, as the researchers suggest, it would be more productive to create a separate Islamic Practice Architecture to facilitate understanding in a Saudi context.

3.9 An Islamic Practice Architecture

3.9.1 An Islamic schematic model of education

According to Salamon et al (2016):

Deeply embedded beliefs and taken-for-granted discourses act as unspoken or 'silent narratives' (Bone 2008) that can enable and constrain the practices of

early childhood educators (ECEs) and, ultimately, the experiences of children in early childhood (CEC) programmes (2016: 431).

When the schematic definition of education offered by Kemmis et al (2014: 27) is constructed using an Islamic perspective as shown in Figure 2, many differences between the forms of understanding, modes of acquisition and ways of relating to one another are brought to light (ibid).

Figure 3: An Islamic theory of education (developed by Rajab 2018)

| ON THE SIDE OF THE INDIVIDUAL: THE PERSON Education is an initiation into | In intersubjective space and the medium of | ON THE SIDE OF THE SOCIAL: THE WORLD WE SHARE Education fosters |
|---|---|---|
| 1 - Forms of understanding | In semantic space, realised in the medium of Arabic: the language of the Qur'an | 1 - Within an Islamic Context, Individual and collective religious expression is to secure a monological culture based on faith in and adherence to Wahhabi Islam and Sha'ria law |
| 2 - Modes of action | In physical space time, realised in the medium of daily religious rituals and work | 2 - Within an Islamic context, individual and collective obedience is to maintain and preserve the <i>ideal</i> Islamic state. Striving towards excellence (role modelling the Prophet Mohammed). |
| 3 - Ways of relating to one another and the world | In social space, realised in the medium of patriarchy, hierarchy and gender segregation in public space | 3 - Within Islamic context, individual and collective obligation is to secure a hierarchical/patriarchal society based on the five pillars of Islam: faith in one God, prayer, fasting, charitable donations, haj and loyalty and obedience to the King, Clerics, family and tribe. |
| The project: Education and the good for each person Education for living well | | The project: Education and the good for humankind Education for a world worth living in |

Figure 3 reveals that the Islamic theory of education is based on the Arabic language and the discourses of the Qur'an. Within an Islamic Practice Architecture, the 'forms of

understanding’ or ‘sayings’, that characterize educational theory and practice are intended to encourage unquestioning faith in one God, whose prophet is Mohammed and the religion of Islam. The aim is to secure a monological culture based on religion and obedience to a religious, patriarchal and tribal hierarchy with God at its apex, followed by the King, the clerics and the government. The ‘modes of action’ or ‘doings’ are the daily rituals of Wahhabi religious practice which are the expression of the ideal (pious) Islamic state. This standard of excellence is achieved by role modelling the Prophet Mohammed. Consequently, what constitutes the ‘*good for each person*’ and for ‘*humankind*’ is defined by the moral and ethical framework of Wahhabi Islam (Kemmis et al 2014). As discussed later in the Literature Review, the Saudi philosophy and practice of education derives from a strict religious tradition which has its roots in Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (A.D. 780-855; 164-241 A.H.), Al-Ghazali: (A.D. 1058-1111; A.H. 450-505), Ibn Khaldoun (A.D. 1332-1406; 732-808 A.H.) and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (A.D. 1703-1792; A.H. 1115 -1206). The ways of relating are not based on self-determination but rely on networks of individual and collective obligation. Individuals must adhere to the five pillars of Islam and social relations are structured in ways that will maintain religious, tribal and gender hierarchies.

The success of the educational reforms in Saudi Arabia depends on whether two very different Practice Architectures can be brought together in ways that are mutually beneficial. As noted, the efforts to introduce reforms to early years curriculum and pedagogy in Sweden and Norway are influenced by emancipatory ‘cognitive interests’ (Clayton, Smith and Dymont 2013: 168). By contrast, in Saudi Arabia, the education system is directed by technical ‘cognitive interests’ which in turn, influence how ‘knowledge is constituted or constructed’ (Grundy, 1987: 7). The pedagogical approaches that are deemed appropriate will depend on how this theory/practice relationship is conceptualized. In Saudi Arabia, the pedagogical approach is one in which theory directs practice and practice is oriented towards control and

submission. Saudi educational practice is ‘skills oriented and product focused’ and learning is conceived as the ‘production of artefacts’ (Grundy, 1987: 169). Learners are conceptualized as ‘passive recipients’ and a high value is placed on obedience to rules and observance of traditions (ibid). Knowledge is ‘monological’ as it derives from only one source: the Qur’an (ibid).

The above notions cannot be associated with educational praxis but rather they result in ‘a deterministic theory-practice relationship’ in which theory is ‘conceived as a set of rules and procedures’ which ‘direct teaching practice’ and exist ‘to bring certain plans to fruition’ (Clayton, Smith and Dymont, 2013: 169). Another key difference concerns ideas about childhood. In Saudi Arabia the relationship between the child and the teacher is based on the idea that the child is *jahil* (ignorant) and that this stage is ‘dangerous’ (MOE, 1976). This threat will be alleviated once the child is initiated into the beliefs and practices of Wahhabi Islam. This relationship is quantitative i.e. the teacher possesses knowledge, which she is morally obligated to pass on to the child in the *correct* way (my emphasis).

This is the opposite of Western educational theory and practice, which is based on the idea that children are meaning-makers who should be encouraged to engage in ‘self-reflection, exploring personal theories, beliefs and values, and publicly critiquing the ideas and practices of others’ (ibid: 176). The differences between these two approaches to education explain why the Saudi Government has not adopted but rather they have *adapted* elements of the Western High Scope curriculum to match the contents of an Islamic Practice Architecture.

3.10 Summary

According to Montgomery (2008) ‘the environment in which learning takes place can have a significant impact on both the construction of meaning in education and the dynamic of learning’ (2008: 124). This chapter has explained how the notion of Practice Architectures can be explored as a critical lens through which to understand both Western and Saudi Arabian

approaches to teaching and learning. The first section of this chapter explained how the concept of Practice Architectures originated from the work of Kemmis et al (2008, 2014). Examples of curricula and pedagogy from schools in Norway and Sweden were used to explain and illustrate how Kemmis's schematic model of education applies in a Western context. An Islamic model of education was created to demonstrate how the theory of Practice Architectures can provide a framework for examining the 'discursive, material and social influences that shape (and are shaped by)' early childhood practice in Saudi Arabia (Salamon et al, 2016: 431). Taken together these two schematic models of education made it possible to highlight the key differences between how Western-style democratic societies perceive the role and purpose of education and how Islamic societies perceive the role and purpose of education.

In Chapter 4, the Western Literature Review, American and Western European approaches to child-centredness will be discussed. This chapter traces the philosophical, political, historical and psychological roots of ideas about child-centredness and how these ideas came to influence child centred theory and practice in the context of early year's education in the West.

Chapter 4 - Literature Review: American and Western European Approaches to Child-Centredness

4.1 Introduction

The main question posed by this research project is How does using Practice Architecture to explore Child-Centred Education in Public Sector Preschools in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030? To provide a comprehensive answer, six sub-questions have been formulated. This Literature Review will provide an answer to sub-question 2: ‘how does social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centred learning in the West? The idea of child-centredness is informed by a framework of beliefs, values and knowledge that did not originate from Arabic or Islamic culture. For this reason, the historical development of ideas, theories and practices is relevant to this study.

Within the context of globalized programs of educational reform, UNESCO and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have highlighted the need for all developing countries, including Saudi Arabia, to make major financial investments in improving the quality of its Early Childhood Education Programs. These reforms are intended to enable the countries concerned to meet the Sustainable Development Goals specified by the CRC (UNICEF 2015). However, the success of these educational reforms does not only depend on adequate levels of funding but also on the extent to which this childhood provision is ‘culturally and contextually relevant’ (ibid: 12).

This chapter will trace the philosophical, political, historical and psychological roots of Western ideas about child-centredness and how these ideas came to influence child centred theory and practice in the context of early years education in the West. The chapter will begin by exploring certain people who are regarded as the key theorists in child-centred education including Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. These individuals have made a significant

contribution to the field of child-centred or *progressive* educational theory and practice. Their ideas provide the discursive frameworks within which early childhood education is understood and constructed in the west. Five contemporary models of child-centred curricula and pedagogy will also be examined.

4.2 Definitions of Child-Centredness

The concept of child-centredness has multiple definitions. Chung and Walsh (2000) found around 40 meanings of the term in contemporary Western literature. Chung and Walsh (2000) have identified three strands of child-centred practice: a view that places the child at the centre of his/her world: a view of learning based on developmental progress and a democratic or progressive perspective that allows children to direct their own learning by participating in decision-making. Different societies have different beliefs about how to bring up young children. How a society understands the nature of young children will, in turn, influence cultural ideas about parenting styles. Ideas about parenting will include deciding how much freedom children should be given, how the relationship between children and adults should be constructed, how children should be educated and how they should be disciplined. According to Hewitt 2001 the term child-centred is based on a particular *image* of the child in which ‘every child has rights, not just needs’ (Hewett, 2001 cited in Hammond et al, 2012: 1). The belief:

that every child has rights promotes the child’s strengths, potential, and desire to discover his or her own world ... This principle reminds teachers to view each child not as needy or deficient, but as a source of strength or inspiration (ibid.).

Whilst ‘Child-centred practice has come to epitomise ECCE pedagogy ... questions remain as to what is child-centred and how a member of the workforce becomes child-centred’ (Campbell-Barr, 2017: 1).

4.2.1 Philosophical, Historical, Political Origins of the Concept

Our ideas and practices in relation to young children have origins which might be philosophical, religious or theoretical; often it is hard to make a clear distinction. Theories about the world are ideas and explanations about how the world is organized which might be founded on a set of religious beliefs or a philosophical worldview, which in turn, provides us with a guide to behaviour. Child-centred educational theory and practice has a long history in Western Europe and America where it is rooted in eighteenth century philosophy and educational reform movements, which condemned the injustices of children's lives.

In England during the 1700s the Quaker Joseph Lancaster set up 'Monitorial' schools whilst Robert Owen founded the New Lanark worksite elementary school in the early 1800s. On 16 October 1811 the National Society was formed to establish a system of education based on the belief that the national religion 'should be the first and chief thing taught to the poor, according to the excellent Liturgy and Catechism provided by our Church' (Nutbrown et al, 2008: 4-5). The schools were state-supported from 1870 onwards and are still in existence today. Although religion was the initial motivating factor they were also underpinned by the belief that early years education would benefit the whole of society. Forster's Education Act (1870) founded school boards in areas where there was little or no elementary school provision (ibid.). This history is peopled with a number of highly influential figures who have left a lasting legacy.

4.2.2 Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

The Romantic idea that the child should be at the centre of their own world originated with the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) most notably his fictional work entitled *Emile* (1762), which was a philosophical position rather than an educational treatise.

| Thinker | Main ideas |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) | Author biography: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key Enlightenment thinker whose major works include <i>A Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts</i> (1750) <i>The</i> |

Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men (1753) and *The Social Contract* (1762).

- Subjects included philosophy, politics, autobiography, and music composition.

Main influences/beliefs:

- Influenced by the first modern philosopher Rene Descartes in his attempt to uncover certain universal characteristics of human nature.
- Believed that human beings are basically innately good but they are corrupted by social conventions.
- Human beings are engaged in a struggle between emotion and reason
- Children learn important moral lessons from infancy through to early adulthood

Educational aim:

- The goal of education is to cultivate our natural tendencies by allowing the child 'to follow his instincts and think for himself' whilst at the same time he is protected from 'bad influences' (Nutbrown et al, 2008: 25).
- Ensure the pupil's character is developed in such a way that a healthy sense of self-worth and morality is attained.
- Avoid self-love i.e. self-absorption

Pedagogical approach:

- In *Emile* Rousseau argued against the prevailing Catholic religious ideas about the nature and purpose of education by focusing on the child rather than taking a didactic approach.
- Rousseau stated, 'man's education begins at birth; before he can speak or understand he is learning' (ibid. 29).
- The education of the child should begin with the teachers observing their pupils because 'We know nothing of childhood' (Rousseau, 1911: 3) as educators do not ask 'what a child is capable of learning' (ibid).
- Childhood is recognised as a separate stage of development comprising three main stages: '...up to 12 (a period which Rousseau characterized as more animal like); 12 to 16 (the beginning of reasoned thought); and 16 onwards (the beginning of adulthood) (ibid: 3).
- The countryside is the natural setting for educating a child

These ideas were radical in the context of eighteenth century France: a strongly Catholic society. As *Emile* is also concerned with 'developmental psychology and exploring its implications for education' (Nutbrown et al, 2008: 25) Rousseau's ideas underpin contemporary debates on 'childhood and children's wellbeing' (Bates and Lewis, 2009: 92).

4.2.3 Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827)

Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) was writing during the eighteenth century Enlightenment. At the same time Thomas Jefferson (1743-1825) ‘advocate of political freedom and equality’ was writing the Declaration of Independence (Kilpatrick in Pestalozzi 1951: vii).

| Thinker | Main ideas |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) | <p>Author biography:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Swiss educator and philanthropist who wanted to improve the lives of the Swiss peasantry.• Famous for his book <i>The Education of Man</i> (1780). <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used Rousseau’s work <i>Emile</i> as a guide to educate his son and to write <i>How Father Pestalozzi Instructed His Three and a Half Year Old Son</i> (1774).• Like Rousseau, Pestalozzi believed in ‘the good instincts of mankind’ which ‘lie deeply buried in man’s nature’ (Pestalozzi, 1951: 4).• Every individual has the ability to learn and the right to learn• Society has a duty to provide education.• Education begins at birth. One of the most important and most powerful influences on the child is the home environment and the relationship between the child and the mother. <p>Main theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every individual can become a responsible citizen through the right education. This is the only route to happiness and well-being. <p>Educational aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To achieve the socialisation of the child through a complete theory of education based on ‘the natural development of the mental and physical powers of individuals, hitherto neglected or misdirected’ (Anderson, 1931: 3).• To understand the psychology of education <p>Pedagogical approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensory learning through active engagement (unstructured play) with objects in the immediate environment.• Learning should be adapted to meet the needs and interests of the child.• Rejected traditional methods of schooling which excluded the poor, were based on recitation rather than understanding, and involved corporal punishment (Pestalozzi, 1951: vii-viii).• Teaching should be child-centred rather than teacher-directed• Authority should be based on ‘love as the sole foundation’ (ibid: 4) not fear• Teacher training is crucially important.• Learning environment should be emotionally secure |

Pestalozzi took into the classroom, the ‘Enlightenment spirit of equality of opportunity and respect for human personality’ (Kilpatrick in Pestalozzi, 1951: vii). The idea that the school should be ‘a place of living’ and must ‘include action to test the child’s thinking’ (ibid) has continued to influence education throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

4.2.4 Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852)

The Romantic view of education is reflected in the ideas of German educationalist and philosopher Friedrich Froebel who devised the kindergarten: ‘*an institution* for self-instruction, self-education and self-cultivation ... through play, creative self-activity, and spontaneous self-instruction’ (Froebel, 1925: 6).

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| <p>Thinker Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852)</p> | <p>Main ideas</p> <p>Author biography:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studied under Pestalozzi in 1805 and 1808. • Wrote <i>The Education of Man</i> (1826) • Famous for his kindergarten school for 3-4 year old children established in 1837. <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporated Pestalozzi’s teaching methods into his kindergarten design • Knowledge should come ‘from inside rather than from outside the child, which involves the unfolding of principles rather than merely learning the rules by heart’ (Hargreaves et al, 2014: 2). • A philosopher and religious teacher for whom ‘God is infinite reason’ and the principle of truth (ibid: ix). • Education has a moral purpose: to ‘encourage and guide’ every child towards the perfection of the human spirit’ (Nutbrown et al, 2008: 33). • Education should respect the dignity of the child and provide an emotionally secure learning environment <p>Main theory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most important concept in Froebel’s thought is ‘<i>inner connection</i>. There must be an inner connection between the pupil’s mind and the objects which he studies, and this shall determine what to study’ (Froebel, 1912: v). <p>Educational aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ‘educate the pupil through self-activity’ (Froebel, 1912: vi) beginning with ‘that which is attractive to him’ (ibid.). • To provide ‘the happiest educational means’ for children aged 3-6 when the child is attempting ‘to symbolize life as it appears to him by play and games’ (ibid: viii). |
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- To provide ‘appropriate plays and means of employment, and consequently of instruction and cultivation –of education in general adapted to the mind, spirit, and life of the child’ (Froebel, 1925:17).

Pedagogical approach:

- The child’s own motivation forms an integral aspect of the learning process.
- Educators must encourage the impulse to self-culture and self-instruction through self-shaping, self-observation, and self-testing’ (Froebel, 1925: 16).
- Methods include unstructured play, songs and stories

Froebel’s approach conflicted with the traditional (didactic) view of 19th century education. His understanding of development is different from later conceptions (Georgeson et al., 2015) in the sense that it was conceived as religious and spiritual: ‘The object of education is the realization of a faithful, pure, inviolate, and hence holy life’ (Froebel, 1925: 4).

4.2.5 John Dewey (1859-1952)

Like Pestalozzi, Dewey was interested in using education to alleviate social problems. His main concern was in finding solutions to social, economic and political change by urging parents to ‘help children learn to be socially responsible people, without trying to cling to times gone by’ (Garhart-Mooney, 2000: 3).

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| <p>Thinker John Dewey (1859-1952)</p> | <p>Main ideas Author biography:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American educationalist concerned with the analysis of traditional and progressive systems of education. • His books include <i>The Child and the Curriculum</i> and <i>The School and Society</i> (1900), <i>Schools of Tomorrow</i> (1915), <i>Democracy and Education</i> (1916), and <i>Experience and Education</i> (1938). • Founded the famous laboratory school in Chicago (1896) which became the centre of progressive education. <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenced by Pestalozzi and Froebel in his belief that education should be ‘humane in comparison with the harshness so often attending the policies of the traditional school’ (Dewey, 1997: 34). • In <i>My Pedagogic Creed</i> (1897), Article II, Dewey stated that ‘education ... is a process for living and not a preparation for future living’ (Dewey, 1897). |
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- Education should be designed to meet the challenges of ‘a changing world’ (ibid).
- Education is a right and not a privilege

Main theory:

- Educational theory and practice should be rooted in experience and this is the overarching goal.
- Consequently ‘the organized subject-matter of adult and the specialist cannot provide the starting point’ (ibid: 83).

Educational aim:

- In *Democracy and Education* Dewey’s aim was ‘To detect and state the ideas implied in a democratic society and to apply these ideas to the problems of the enterprise of education’ (Dewey, 1916).

Pedagogical approach:

- Dewey replaces the imposition of learning from above with ‘the expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to the acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill is opposed acquisition of them as means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world’ (Dewey, 1997: 19-20).
- The child ‘should remain in complete ignorance of those ideas that are beyond his grasp’ (Dewey & Dewey, 1915: 1).

Dewey advocated a rights-based approach called the ‘project method’ which ‘involved teachers and children working on ideas and finding solutions to questions’ (Nutbrown et al, 2008: 42). Today, echoes of Dewey’s democratic ideals can be heard in the goals of every global developmental agency including Education for All (EFA) and UNESCO.

4.2.6 Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) is another key figure in the history of Western child-centred education with an educational philosophy that is influenced by Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel.

Thinker

Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

Main ideas

Author biography:

- A psychologist and social reformer who abandoned her medical career to work with street children who inhabited the slums in Rome.

- Wrote *The Secret of Childhood* (1945) and *The Montessori Method* (1916).
- Montessori's methods enabled these children to read and write by age 5.
- Viewed this change in their behaviour as a 'moral conversion' (Montessori, 2002: viii).

Main influences/beliefs:

- Influenced by the humane approaches of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel

Main theory/approach:

- Montessori did not have a specific theory but rather an approach based on empirical evidence gathered through a variety of experiments conducted on a global scale (Montessori, 2002: xi).
- These experiments were dedicated to fulfilling what she saw as the immense potential in the child's natural orientation or towards learning.
- The notion of 'human tendencies' is the key to understanding Montessori's approach (Nutbrown et al, 2008: 50).
- According to Montessori, 'Education is not something which the teacher does ... it is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment' (Montessori, 1988: 7).
- Child development seen in terms of 'key stages or sensitive periods' (Bates and Lewis, 2009: 95).

Educational aim

- To develop 'directives for a practical action in educational and social fields to help the development of human personality' (Montessori, 2002: xi).
- To give children control over their own learning experiences.

Pedagogical approach:

- The classroom environment was specifically planned to meet the needs of children. Everything was child-sized including the tools. Even 'the staircase in her school was custom-designed to her student's small feet' (Garhart-Mooney, 2000: 25).
- Her teaching methods involved giving the children (whose average age was four and a half years) 'exact techniques' and leaving them to choose their occupations and to indulge in them as long as they liked' (Montessori, 2002: vii-viii).

Schools using the Montessori Method are now a global phenomenon. The child-size tools and furnishings that are commonplace today are part of this legacy. Montessori's concept of developmental phases provides a link to Piaget and it also illustrates why an understanding of child-centredness is key to understanding child development.

4.3 Child-Centredness and Child Development: Child Psychology and Cognitive Science

The idea of knowledge as a ‘continuous reconstruction of experience’ which takes ‘children’s interests, play and activities’ as the ‘starting point for learning’ (ibid.) is a social constructivist approach influenced by Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934).

4.3.1 Jean Piaget (1896-1980)

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| Thinker Jean Piaget (1896-1980) | <p>Main ideas</p> <p>Author biography:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A major figure in modern psychology and education. <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Influenced by the philosopher Henri Bergson’s 1907 text <i>Creative Evolution</i>.• Influenced by the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud (Vidal, 1994: 1).• Through studying the psychological development of children it was possible to discover what made scientific knowledge possible <p>Educational aim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To answer the question: ‘What conceptions of the world does the child naturally form at different stages of his development’ (Piaget, 1951: 1).• In <i>To Understand is to Invent</i> (1974) Piaget defined his central concept of autonomy: The goal in intellectual education is not to know how to repeat or retain ready-made truths (a truth that is parroted is only a half-truth). It is in learning to master the truth by oneself at the risk of losing a lot of time and of going through all the roundabout ways that are inherent in real activity (Piaget, 1974: 107). <p>Main theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bergson claimed that the theory of knowledge and theory of life were inseparable. This claim ‘became the foundation of Piaget’s thought’ (Vidal, 1994: 2).• On Piaget’s model, learning is neither ‘<i>intrinsic</i> (coming from the child) or <i>extrinsic</i> (imposed by the environment or taught by adults)’ (Garhart-Mooney, 2000: 61). Learning arises out of a complex interaction between the child and the social context: ‘children construct their own knowledge by giving meaning to the people, places and things in their world’ (ibid). |
|------------------------------------|---|

- Vygotsky referred to this ‘complex interaction’ as ‘*Dynamic equilibrium*’ (Piaget, 1954: 385).
- Piaget’s text *The Moral Judgement of the Child* (1932) distinguished two types of autonomy: intellectual and moral.

Pedagogical approach:

- The teacher cannot ‘teach’ young children to understand a concept’ (Garhart-Mooney, 2000: 63) as children learn by doing.
- Children are encouraged to solve problems and to view their mistakes as an integral part of the learning process.
- The teacher should support the child in her/his search for answers
- Unstructured play is fundamental to child development.

For Piaget, autonomy begins to develop in early childhood but it can be undermined if adults exert too much control over children. Consequently, relationships based on ‘co-operation’ and ‘mutual respect’ (Piaget, 1932: 374) are crucial. These ideals underpin the ‘spirit of citizenship and humanity which is postulated by democratic societies’ (ibid: 372).

4.3.2 Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)

Vygotsky’s theories about the socially constructed nature of learning focused on the development of cognition and language and their relationship to learning in general.

| Thinker | Main ideas |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Lev Semonovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) | <p>Author biography:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Russian psychologist whose work also included ‘linguistics, social science ... philosophy and the arts’ (Bruner in Vygotsky, 1962: v). • Vygotsky conducted a series of investigations in developmental psychologyand education’ (ibid). • His work represents a major step forward in understanding the intellectual and linguistic development of children. • Famous text: <i>Thought and Language</i> (1936) <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenced by Piaget’s ‘clinical method for exploring children’s ideas’ (Vygotsky, 1986: 12). • Rejected Piaget’s claim that physical development and cognitive development are inextricably linked. • Proposed that social and cognitive development work together and build on each other’ (Garhart-Mooney, 2000: 82). • Children are ‘shaped by the tools and instruments’ they use, not by ‘the hand nor the mind alone’ (Bruner in Vygotsky, 1962: vii). |

- Consequently, through careful observation of child behaviour, valid information could be obtained.

Educational aim

- To understand the interrelationship between thought and language by investigating how children develop concepts to make meaning out of words

Main theory

- Vygotsky claimed ‘an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development (ZPD), that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 90)
- Proximal development is defined as the difference between the mental age a child can perform a task unaided and the child’s performance when assisted by an adult (Kozulin, 1990: 202).

Pedagogical approach:

- Vygotsky proposed that play and school instruction ‘both create a zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky, 1978: 130)
- A child in this situation (‘on the edge of learning a new concept’) (ibid.) can benefit from the intervention of another child or a teacher. In Vygotsky’s terminology, this assistance is referred to as ‘scaffolding’ (Garhart-Mooney, 2003: 84).

For Vygotsky, teachers must be trained to respond to ‘a child’s ZPD at any time’ as this approach provides the only sure route to ‘good curriculum planning’ (OECD 2013: 85). What followed from this socio-constructivist and interactive approach was the belief that:

(1) the “whole child” was the proper subject of education’ and (2) the curriculum should originate through observation of the children’s interests and needs, rather than through analysis of subject matter (Williams and Pronin Fromberg, 2012: 56-57).

4.4 Social and Cultural Perceptions of Child-Centredness

These ideas about child-centredness have resulted in an educational approach which views:

pleasure, interest and playfulness as central to the child within an integrated curriculum in which the children commune freely with nature and have some agency over their own learning (Westbrook, Durrani et al, 2013: 10).

Within this approach, the teacher is not a ‘disseminator of information’ but rather a ‘facilitator or guide’ (Williams and Pronin Fromberg, 2012: 57). Child-centred education has ‘influenced practitioners in Europe, Russia and America’ (ibid.). The Plowden Report in England (1967) promoted child-centred pedagogy and it ‘remained a dominant and idealised form of pedagogy labelled as ‘progressive’ until the 1980s’ (ibid.).

Child-centredness should be understood as ‘a pervasive attribute of teaching, not a specific teaching method’ (Alexander, 2007: 17). Nevertheless, child-centredness is seen as integral to high quality early years care and education, especially in developing countries where it enjoys an almost hegemonic position with its “justified, “admirable” and “inspiring” educational ideas’ (Altinyelken, 2010b: 153). One problem is that whilst it is possible to determine high quality ECCE based on ‘measurable pedagogic criteria’ due to the highly individualised nature of child-centredness teaching ‘the goals and curriculum content of this education are variable...’ (Siraj-Blatchford and Wong 1999: 9). Another problem concerns the issue of cultural relevance. A comparative ethnographic study by Bocock (1995) across thirteen early childhood programmes revealed that defining quality ‘as a set of objective characteristics’ is difficult when the underlying values, beliefs and norms which shape curricula aims and aspirations are not shared cross-culturally (Siraj-Blatchford and Wong, 1999: 11).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the theory of Practice Architectures reveals how early child development is socio-culturally situated and political. Should education focus on the needs and interests of the individual or serve the needs and interests of the community at large? This dilemma concerning the ‘double purpose of education’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 27) has taken many forms:

... it has affected assumptions made about what children bring with them to early childhood settings and the nature of the settings themselves. It also has affected the possibilities for articulation among various forms and levels of child care and early education (ibid.).

The range of developmental settings can vary because early years education is inextricably bound up with care involving both young children and their families. When young children arrive in preschool they have undergone a wide range of experiences as a result of family and community influences (Heath, 1983; Teale, 1988; Whiting & Edwards et al, 1988). Children also possess different ‘preliterate and oral capacities’ (ibid.) shaped by their early conditioning as the basis on which teachers can build. ‘When group settings do build on these strengths, there is greater continuity between the experiences of home, school, and community’ (Williams and Pronin-Froberg, 2012: 100):

The nature and quality of these experiences differs according to the unique elements of the cultures in which children are raised, the economic situation of their families and community, and any experience they or their family might have with racism, classicism, sexism, handicapism, and ageism (ibid.).

Different socioeconomic groups and cultures will ‘reflect variation in beliefs and customs, linguistic behaviour, cognitive styles and motivation’ (ibid.). In Western Europe and the United States ‘cultural pluralism’ is generally believed to be an ‘asset’ because it allows children to ‘absorb both the rudiments of the common culture and those of other cultures’ (Williams and Pronin Fromberg, 2012: 100-101). Pluralism is synonymous with securing a ‘just and democratic society’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 27) because it recognizes both the uniqueness of the individual and the specificity of the cultural and social context whilst simultaneously ensuring that all children are treated equally in the classroom.

4.4.1 High-Quality Early Years Education

Whilst there may be ‘legitimate variations in the curriculum goals and contents of early education’, it is still possible to identify the common pedagogic principles which are ‘*instruction, involvement and engagement*’ (Siraj-Blatchford and Wong, 1999: 15). In America and Western Europe, quality is defined as ‘a curriculum based on child-initiated learning activity, a complex scheme for staff, and sound, sustained parent participation’ (ibid: 11).

However, the problem of cross-cultural differences highlighted the need for a ‘relativist’ approach based on an ‘ecological framework of understanding child development’ Woodhead (1996). An ecological perspective recognizes that children are embedded in ‘micro-systems (family), meso-systems (school) and macro-systems (economic and social policies)’ (Siraj-Blatchford and Wong, 1999: 13). Consequently, high quality early childhood education recognizes both the ‘influence of the preschool and ‘the mutual bearing of different systems on the learning experiences of children’ (ibid.).

A more ecological approach does not necessarily mean an approach that is child-centred. In many New Zealand preschools run by Maori groups and many industrialised areas of South-East Asia like Singapore, teachers and parents have rejected the child-centred model. Leong (1997) found that Singaporean parents preferred ‘didactic teaching methods (e.g. structured and teacher-directed creative activities)’ (Siraj-Blatchford and Wong, 1999: 14). This finding conflicted with ‘what the professionals believed (ibid.). As Woodhead (1996) points out, a relativist approach to defining quality child care will only be effective in societies where people ‘are prepared and willing to negotiate their views ... as long as the opportunity and forum are given to them to do so’ (Siraj-Blatchford, 1999: 14). Where this democratic forum is lacking then ‘outside criteria’ will be imposed (ibid).

4.5 Child-Centredness in Education Theory and Practice (Curriculum and Pedagogy)

A distinction is drawn between curriculum and pedagogy. Following Siraj-Blatchford and Wong (1999) curriculum is taken to mean ‘*the educational plan and learning effects of early years settings*’ (ibid: 8). Pedagogy is taken to mean ‘*the particular selection of educational practices and techniques that are applied to realize the curriculum*’ (ibid). Curriculum and pedagogy are intertwined in educational practice. Governments across the world are increasingly viewing early years education as an opportunity to not only improve the health

and wellbeing of their entire societies but also as an opportunity to prepare young children for ‘the economic and social challenges of an uncertain future’ (ibid.). Education is an attempt to answer ancient philosophical questions concerning:

...what is the nature of knowledge, what knowledge is valuable and for whom, how does one understand “the good” for society, how do people create meaning in their lives, what constitutes beauty and how might justice be actualized? (Williams and Pronin-Fromberg, 2012: 305).

These questions may not be explicit but they provide the background to debates and decisions about the care and education of young children. The crucial decisions are those ‘regarding what was to be taught and how it was to be taught to young children’ (ibid.).

Within Western European and American early childhood curricula and programs the answers to these questions ‘must always be determined anew for changing times and circumstances’ (Kemmis et al, 2014: 27). This is an approach to education that is praxeological in the sense that these curricula are ‘aiming for social and political transformation’ (Pascal and Bertram, 2012: 3). As a result, the design and content of ECCE curriculum and pedagogy will differ according to:

... how educators and parents interpret, value, and integrate several influences – what they believe society sanctions, what they perceive is worth knowing, what they understand about the nature of children and how they learn, and what strategies they have for teaching children within these contexts (ibid: 305-6).

However, the general consensus is that children are best taught using developmentally appropriate practice (ibid: 305) i.e. ‘practice should be in harmony with children’s needs’ (ibid: 310).

4.6 Curriculum Development for Young Children

Table 4.6.1 Summarizing Five Curriculum Outlines

The drive towards placing the child at the heart of education is in line with:

human rights principles that privilege the uniqueness of each person and with the socio-cultural theories that see children as attached to specific cultures and learning (ibid.).

The following curriculum outlines include the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); Reggio Emilia; American High Scope; *Te Whariki* and the Swedish Curriculum. The fundamental aim of each curricula framework is to:

provide a structure and educational direction to teachers in their work of supporting the development of skills and capacities, while respecting the child's natural interests and choices' (OECD, 2004: 26).

| Country | Curriculum | Principles | Goals | Content | Pedagogy |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| England | Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) | Liberal political values | Preparation for formal education and socialisation. | Children assessed in maths, literacy, understanding the word, art and design. | Play-based with emphasis on 'planned and purposeful play' (Georgeson et al, 2015: 872). |
| Italy | Reggio Emilia | Socialist values: solidarity: reciprocity, collaboration, co-operation | The acquisition of learning competencies | Symbolic i.e. hundred languages of children: music, painting, sculpture, drama, poetry and constructions | Pedagogy of listening. |
| USA | High Scope | American liberal democratic values. | Preparation for formal schooling and socialisation. | Based on interest areas: construction, reading and writing, art, role play, numbers, sand and water play. | 'Active learning' through a 'plan, do, review sequence' (OECD, 2004: 9). |
| New Zealand | <i>Te Whariki</i> | Liberal democratic framework: recognition of cultural and social differences. | Developing wellbeing, belonging, children's contribution, communication and exploration. | Subjects include maths, science, technology, arts, and social sciences. | Active participation based on reciprocal relationships (includes play). |
| Sweden | Swedish Curriculum | Liberal democratic values | Teaching children the democratic | Subjects include language and text, numbers, | Play-based using dialogue, |

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| values and norms of Swedish society | shapes and science plus social skills. | creative activities and reflections. |
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4.6.1 United Kingdom: Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage:

EYFS

The principles underpinning the EYFS framework reflect child development discourses and liberal democratic equality agendas. According to the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years there are four key British values embedded in this framework: ‘Democracy; Rule of Law; Individual Liberty; Mutual Respect and Tolerance’ (PACEY, 2015). Consequently, ethnic, religious, class and disability diversities are the basis on which positive relationships are built. The EYFS aims to give ‘Every child ... the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential’ (DfE, 2012: 2). The term ‘unique child’ is used rather than child-centredness (DfE, 2012: 3). Four overarching principles ‘shape practice in early years settings’ (DfE, 2012: 3):

- Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
- Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships
- Children learn well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond well to their individual needs and there is a strong relationship between practitioners and parents and/or carers
- Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates (DfE, 2012: 3).

No specific teaching practice is stipulated rather three characteristics of effective learning are identified: ‘playing and exploring; active learning and creating and thinking critically’ (ibid. 7). Whilst the emphasis is on children learning through a ‘mix of child- and adult-led activities’ (Georgeson et al, 2015: 1872), the EYFS also ‘describes play as planned and purposeful’ (ibid) which might suggest that it is governed by an adult agenda about school readiness (the acquisition of reading, writing and numeracy skills) rather than allowing children to develop their own learning pathways.

4.6.2 Italy: The Reggio Emilia Approach – Truly Listening to Young Children

The Reggio Emilia program combines aspects of three intellectual traditions: ‘European and American strands of *progressive education*, Piagetian and Vygotskian constructivist psychologies, and Italian post-war *left-reform politics*’ (Edwards et al, 1998: 8). Education is always socio-culturally situated, so it is important to note that the Emilia Romagna region of Italy:

has been found to have a high level of civic community –citizens bound together by horizontal relations of social solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperation, as opposed to vertical relations of authority and dependency (ibid:8)

These communal values are integral to the success of the Reggio approach: ‘more so than the philosophy or method. ... Nowhere else in the world is there such a seamless and symbiotic relationship between a school’s progressive philosophy and its practices’ (Edwards et al, 1998: xvi). The schools are seen as ‘public spaces’ and ‘a site for ethical and political practice ... where relationships combine a deep respect for otherness and difference...’ (Rinaldi, 2006: 10).

The acquisition of knowledge is judged to be of secondary importance, with no specific goals or standards stipulating what should be learned as ‘these would push our schools towards teaching without learning’ (Malaguzzi, in Edwards et al., 1993). The Reggio Emilia curriculum is seen as a ‘voyage of discovery’ Edwards et al, 1998: 13). Based on a pedagogy of listening, the children are encouraged ‘to construct their own personalities and to determine the course of their own investigations and learning’ in collaboration with their teachers (OECD, 2004: 13). Within this curriculum, learning does not develop in a ‘determined and deterministic way’ it ‘grows in many directions’ thereby challenging the mainstream notion of ‘knowledge acquisition as a linear progression’ (Rinaldi, 2006: 7).

4.6.3 America: The High/Scope Curriculum – Active Learning Through Key

Experiences

High Scope is informed by the developmental perspective of Piaget and Vygotsky and the progressive educational philosophy of Dewey. Crucially, this approach acknowledges that a curriculum cannot simply be ‘copied from somewhere else, but must be developed in the historical and cultural context of each country’ (OECD, 2004: 28). High Scope is based on the concept of ‘‘Active learning’ – the belief that children learn best through active experiences with people, materials, events and ideas, rather than through direct teaching or sequenced exercises’ (OECD, 2004: 8). The curriculum identifies ‘58 key experiences’ in preschool development and includes ‘a wide range of strategies for promoting these key experiences’ as summarized below:

- 1. Creative Representation** (to draw, paint, role play, pretend, make models).
- 2. Language and Literacy** (to talk about personally meaningful experiences, describe, write, have fun with language.)
- 3. Initiative and Social Relations** (to make plans, decisions, solve problems encountered in play, express feeling, be sensitive to others.)
- 4. Movement and Music** (to feel and express steady beat, move in various ways and with objects, explore the singing voice, develop melody.)
- 5. Logical Reasoning** (to classify-explore and describe similarities, differences, and attributes of things; to seriate-comparing, arranging and fitting and ordering things by attributes; to develop number-comparing, one-to-one correspondence, counting; to be aware of space-changing shape, experiencing different play spaces, and interpreting spatial relations; to be aware of time-starting and stopping, time intervals, anticipating and describing sequences of events. (OECD, 2004: 9).

High/Scope aims to give children ‘a sense of control’ over their activities using a ‘*daily routine*’ in which the teacher’s role is to scaffold the learning experiences of the child and facilitate participation using a:

“plan-do-review sequence” in which children state an intention and make a plan, carry it out during work time, and then reflect on what they have discovered and discuss it with the teacher and other children (review) (OECD, 2004: 9).

There are no recommendations about specific materials or equipment instead the classroom is divided into interest areas:

which are intended to support children as they engage in ‘building, pretending and role play, ‘reading’ and ‘writing’, playing with sand and water, drawing and painting, counting, sorting, climbing, singing and dancing (French, 2012: 130).

High Scope training emphasizes strategies for positive interactions, shared control, focusing on children’s strengths, supporting children’s play, and using a problem-solving approach to social conflict (OECD, 2004). The teacher is trying to achieve an ‘authentic dialogue’ with the child which supports development and avoids questions that he or she cannot answer (ibid: 9). This problem-solving and dialogical approach is also used to manage classroom behaviour as an alternative to punishment and reward strategies.

4.6.4 New Zealand: Te Whariki – A Woven Mat for All to Stand On

The *Te Whariki* curriculum encompasses different theoretical perspectives including Piaget and Vygotsky and indigenous Maori theories of learning and development’ (Hedges and Cullen, 2011: 928). The name is a ‘central metaphor’ in which ‘the early childhood curriculum is envisaged as a Whariki, ‘a woven mat for all to stand on’ (OECD, 2004: 16). This metaphor describes ‘a spider web model of curriculum’ which emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning (OECD, 2013: 48).

Four key principles underpin the curriculum: the empowerment of the child, the importance of family and community, holistic development and reciprocal relationships

(OECD, 2013: 48-49). The Maori principle of empowerment is taken as its foundational element and the curriculum is taught in English and the Maori languages to protect the Tagata Pasifika culture (OECD), 2013).

No specific teaching practice is stipulated rather the emphasis is on children learning through active participation and ‘reciprocal relationships with people, places and things’ (Hedges and Cullen, 2011: 927). The term play occurs infrequently in *Te Whariki* nevertheless ‘spontaneous play and play are valued as meaningful learning ... among the goals for learning and development’ (ibid.).

4.6.5 Sweden: The Swedish Curriculum: Goals for a Modern Preschool System

The Swedish Curriculum exemplifies Dewey’s educational aim in that it provides an example of democracy being given its fullest expression in ‘the enterprise of education’ (Dewey 1916). The overarching aim of the preschool is to ‘impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based’ (OECD, 2013: 28):

The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable (Swedish Ministry of Education and Science, 1998a).

To uphold these values ‘the attitudes from which they are derived’ must be ‘clearly apparent in daily activities’ (OECD, 2013: 29). The preschool aims to encourage children to become responsible and active participants in society (ibid). To this end, the curriculum contains five sets of goals that each institution should aim for: ‘1) Norms and values; 2) Development and learning; 3) Influence of the child; 4) Preschool and home, and 5) Co-operation between the preschool class, the school and the leisure time centre’ (OECD, 2004: 22).

Teachers are given maximum flexibility in adapting the framework to different age groups based on the principle that:

...the child's learning is grounded in play and meaning making. Knowledge is not to be found in the child or in the world (including adults) but in the relationship between them (Marton and Booth, 1997: 21).

Academic-based subjects include 'communication, language and text, numbers, spaces, and shapes, and science' alongside a:

strong focus on the development of social skills, creativity, sense of wonder and the need to investigate: soft skills that are related to active participation in society and lifelong learning (OECD, 2013: 29).

Strategies include 'play, social interaction, exploration and creativity, as well as ... observation, discussion and reflection' (Swedish Ministry of Education and Science, 1998a).

Children are encouraged to:

discover, reflect on and work out personal positions on ethical dilemmas ...and learn to respect all forms of life as well as care for the surrounding environment (OECD, 2004: 23).

This approach ensures that 'Democracy and related notions' provide 'both a content and a method in the preschool' (ibid.). On this model:

democracy becomes both an object of learning as well as informing the act of learning. This implies that children have to think about democracy as well as to experience democracy in the preschool centre' (ibid)

This curriculum places maximum emphasis on facilitating the autonomy, independence and agency of both teachers and children. As Alvestad (2001) points out, within this model, 'teachers become curriculum makers, and children are part of that construction' (OECD, 2004: 22).

4.7 Legal Definitions of Child-Centredness: UNCRC

In November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly made up of delegates representing a wide diversity of 'legal systems, cultures and religious traditions, unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child' (CRC)' (Gillett-Swan & Coppock, 2016:

7). Today, the CRC is ratified by virtually the entire international community and is generally regarded as the most crucial advocacy tool for children's rights:

civil, cultural, economic, political and social – it creates an international legal framework for the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons under the age of 18 (ibid.).

The CRC has had a major effect on the way that children's rights are 'considered, conceptualised and enacted' but there are tensions around the extent to which this 'rights agenda' can be:

embraced fully within societal institutions, as adults, researchers, policy-makers and professionals continue to grapple with actualising the rights enshrined within the CRC in their 'real world' practices (ibid: 8).

Three recurring themes have dominated the academic literature on children's rights. The first theme is 'autonomy and participation rights' which arises directly from Article 12 of the CRC stipulating that States Parties must:

... assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (UNCRC, Article 12.1, 1990: 5).

Article 12 has prompted a proliferation of policy and practice initiatives premised on allowing the child to consult on all matters affecting him/her. And, to participate in the 'design, delivery and evaluation of services that affect them' (Gillett-Swan & Coppock, 2016: 8). According to Prout (2003) 'the mandate to 'listen to children's voices' has become so ubiquitous that it has become part of the rhetorical orthodoxy' (2003: 11). The drive towards increasing participation rights recognizes the child 'as a competent, autonomous being' and it has led to a paradigm shift in the sociology of childhood: first, 'childhood is understood as a social rather than a biological construction'; second, 'children are viewed as social actors and, as such, are considered worthy research *subjects in their own right and from their own*

perspectives’ (Alderson 1993) and lastly, children are ““knowers” – able to generate knowledge as well as being the recipients of all knowledge, or being the objects of knowledge’ (Foley, 2001: 99-100).

A second major theme identified by Reynaert et al (2009) is ‘the dichotomy between children’s rights vs. parental rights’, and specifically:

the right of parents to raise their children, on the one hand, and the rights of children to autonomy and self-determination on the other hand (2009: 524).

Historically childhood dependence was:

‘codified in law in the form of parental rights, in which the wellbeing of children was assumed to be secure and positive as long as the family fulfilled its obligations’ (Gillett-Swan & Coppock, 2016: 9).

However the notion of the child as ‘competent ... implied that children became visible as a member of the family’ (Reynaert et al, 2009: 524). According to Fox Harding (1996), this intervention into family life has always been a challenge for the liberal state. Reynaert et al (2009) also point to the fact that ‘rights thinking’ directs attention towards the individual rather than on ‘relationships between parents and children, and distracts from wider structural conditions impacting their lives, such as poverty’ (Gillett-Swan & Coppock, 2016: 9).

The third theme to emerge from the literature is ‘the global rights industry’ (Reynaert et al, 2009: 526). One key criticism is that debates around children’s rights have been reduced to technicalities including ‘standard setting, implementation and monitoring’ rather than any critical engagement ‘with the meaning of children’s rights’ (Gillett-Swan & Coppock, 2016: 9). Consequently, children’s rights have been de-contextualised from children’s experiences, which, according to Reynaert (2009) highlights the need for ‘research that provides empirical evidence on the impact the rhetoric of children’s rights has in daily practice’ (2009: 529).

This discussion highlights the potential problems that can arise when transferring curriculum designs and pedagogical practices from one cultural context to another. This research project will propose that the three main themes ‘autonomy and participation rights’, ‘the dichotomy between children’s rights vs. parental rights’, and ‘the global rights industry’ and the ‘complex issues, tensions and contradictions that arise from them’ are evident in the lived experiences of both teachers and children in developing countries (Gillett-Swan & Coppock, 2016: 8-9).

As the UNCRC is based on a European framework of democratic rights, increasing calls have been made ‘to temper the implementation of children’s rights with the particular socio-cultural experiences of the diverse societies which have subscribed to its framework’ (Kaime, 2011: 4). As Kaime points out, ‘The call for this ‘culturalisation’ has been justified by reference to the economic, social, cultural and political diversity that characterises the community of states’ (ibid.). A diversity of regions with ‘varying religious beliefs, social systems and economic organization’ makes it virtually impossible ‘for states, and even communities within a single state, to have a common conception and understanding of the normative prescriptions set out by the CRC’ (ibid.). Given the high stakes it seems vital ‘to develop analyses that examine the transition of these prescriptions from paper into the lived reality of children’ (ibid: 5).

4.8 Summary

The key question addressed by this review was ‘how does social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centred learning in the West?’ To provide an answer to this question firstly, this chapter examined the historical, political, philosophical and theoretical origins of Western European and American ideas about child-centredness. Secondly, the chapter identified the key thinkers whose ideas and theories have left a lasting legacy on the provision of ECCE today. Thirdly, this chapter has explained how

the provision of ECCE is always socio-culturally and politically situated and informed by a specific image of childhood. Socio-cultural theory insists that a child's development can only be understood within 'a network of social relationships and cultural influences' (Hargreaves et al, 2014: 11). This is an approach which involves the 'whole child' (ibid.) yet this concept can only be understood in terms of a rights-based approach.

Thirdly, this chapter has provided five curricula outlines based on the common pedagogic principles of *'instruction, involvement and engagement'* (ibid: 15), which are the hallmarks of high quality ECCE. These require a commitment to *'give centres, teachers and children the largest possible freedom'* whilst maintaining 'the direction of overall common goals' (OECD, 2004: 26). To this end, the design and content of each curriculum is underpinned by a Western discursive framework of ideas drawn from early educational pioneers such as Rousseau and Pestalozzi followed by Froebel, Montessori, and pioneers of DAP including Piaget and Vygotsky. These curricula are also within the legislative framework of the UNCRC in which the child is seen as a rights-bearer and an active participant in the creation of knowledge. Therefore, the dominant pedagogical approach is praxeological, in the sense that it is based on maximising the autonomy, independence and agency of teachers and children within a democratic socio-political context based on equality and participatory rights. As research by Georgeson et al (2015) confirms, the term child-centred has 'rich pedagogical associations that can be easily subsumed into different value systems prizing, for example, individuality, child development or democracy' (Georgeson et al, 2015: 1862). Consequently, the task of developing a curriculum which both respects the choices of the child and meets societal goals poses a greater challenge in 'political, cultural and social contexts which are not so free' (Hope and Montgomery, 2016: 316). This is essentially the task which the Crown Prince has set for himself in realising Vision 2030, and this study will be examining the extent to which there are positive signs of this in ECCE.

Chapter 5 will present the second Literature Review which will discuss Arabic/Islamic approaches to child-centredness in Saudi Arabia. This chapter will aim to provide an answer to the research sub-question ‘how does social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centred learning in Saudi Arabia?’

Chapter 5 - Literature Review Part 2: Child-Centredness in Saudi Arabia

5.1 Introduction

The main question posed by this research project is How does using Practice Architecture to explore Child-Centred Education in Public Sector Preschool in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030? In order to provide a comprehensive answer, six sub-questions have been formulated. This second Literature Review chapter will provide an answer to sub-question 3: ‘how does social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centred learning in Saudi Arabia?’ In the previous Literature Review it was noted that within international frameworks, the concept of child-centredness has become synonymous with high quality early years education. Saudi Arabia has *adapted* a child-centred curriculum in order to meet its obligations under the EFA Global Development Program but crucially, the Kingdom has no previous history, theory or practice associated with the concept. In Arabic, the term child-centred is taken literally to mean the centre of the child and this term is not used in official policy documents. The child-centred curriculum in Saudi Arabia is called The Self-Learning Curriculum. The Self-Learning Curriculum is defined as a ‘child-centred program, which emphasizes an interactive self-learning approach that focuses on children’s choices’ (Al-Othman et al, 2015: 2513). The curriculum is ostensibly based on the following principles: ‘flexibility, play, freedom, interaction, respect, child-identity and culture, knowledge, skills and relationship with parents’ (ibid.). The classroom is divided into activity corners which are designed to support the development of children’s skills. This environment is intended not only to meet ‘children’s interests and needs, but also to enable the teacher to be guided with appropriate discipline strategies’ (ibid.). This statement should alert us to the fact that there may be differences in how the concept is interpreted in Saudi Arabia as the idea of disciplining very young children is at odds with Western ideas of child-centredness.

The aim of this second chapter of the Literature review is to trace the development of Arabic ideas about child-centredness and to examine how these ideas have influenced child-centred theory and practice in the context of the early years public preschool in Saudi Arabia, where early childhood education is still at a relatively early stage of development. The chapter will explore certain key areas and questions presenting an Arabic and Islamic perspective to assist the understanding of the reader in grasping key ways in which issues are viewed differently in the Saudi context.

First, the fundamental question about the nature of knowledge and its relationship to religion is explored showing that through the past centuries, there have been different views on Islam and how the present position has been arrived at. As Williams and Pronin-Fromberg (2012) point out, the form and content of early education programs and curricula is an attempt to answer debates that have their origins in ancient philosophical questions concerning:

...the nature of knowledge, what knowledge is valuable and for whom, how does one understand “the good” for society, how do people create meaning in their lives, what constitutes beauty and how might justice be actualized? (ibid: 305).

The answers to these questions are generally derived from philosophy ‘which may come into direct conflict with religion: the Islamic civilization has experienced controversies between religious lawyers (*fuqaha*) and philosophers in this respect’ (Al-Talbi, 1993: 1). Unlike the Western context, in Saudi Arabia the Qur’an is the only source of knowledge which can provide answers to the philosophical question of what should be taught. First, ideas from key thinkers favouring a philosophical stance like Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd will be examined followed by those thinkers strongly rooted in the Islamic tradition, Hanbal, Al Ghazali and Wahhabi.

Second, the social and cultural perceptions of child centredness in Saudi Arabia will be explored. As the section of this chapter on Islam and knowledge will suggest, the Western concept of child-centredness does not appear in the context of Islamic thought. ‘In order to

fully understand Saudi Arabian education, it is important to acknowledge how deeply the national religion is embedded in the culture and the social structure' (Al-Qassem, Dashash & Alzahrani, 2016: 2-3). As Naidoo points out:

Within theological education' the 'institution has its own unique cultural script which operates in separate intellectual, religious and social worlds that shape the beliefs and practices of those involved in the life of the institution (Naidoo, 2017: 2).

Third, child-centredness and child development in a Saudi context are shown to have different bases and principles from those espoused in the west.

Fourth, pedagogic principles are also shown to derive from different principles from those prevalent in the west. Finally, the chapter will provide a summary.

5.2 What Constitutes Knowledge Which Should be Taught?

5.2.1 Philosophical Writers

In the following section a selection of Islamic thinkers are presented in order to highlight the key aspects of their thinking on a range of education related issues. What is important is that the reader sees that there is a wide range of views among these thinkers and that there are precedents in some of these thinkers for a more diverse approach to education and learning than is often considered. A key issue between these thinkers was the relationship between philosophy and religion. Some of them gave primacy to philosophy whereas others privileged religion over philosophy, a view which has been current for some time in the Islamic world. The section first presents an outline of three thinkers who considered philosophy to be more important: Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd. The first of these was Al-Farabi, a contemporary of Alfred the Great in Britain!

5.2.1.1 Al-Farabi (A.D. 872-950)

Early Islamic scholars like Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Al-Farabi (A.D. 872-950) were profoundly influenced by Western thought. Al-Farabi compiled the *Summary*

of *Plato's Laws* and he earned the name of the 'Second Teacher', by reference to Aristotle, the 'First Teacher' (Al-Talbi, 1993: 1).

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| <p>Thinker Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Al-Farabi (A.D. 872-950)</p> | <p>Main ideas</p> <p>Author biography:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He studied 'grammar, logic, philosophy, music, mathematics and sciences' and he was 'affiliated to the Alexandrian school of philosophy' (Al-Talbi, 1993: 1). • The 'first founder of epistemology which relies upon 'universal reason'. • Also 'established logic within Islamic culture' (ibid.). <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenced by Plato and Aristotle he viewed philosophy as the 'highest form of learning for mankind' • Viewed religion and philosophy as 'simply two expressions of a single truth' ... 'philosophy explains religion and provides proof of it; it is neither in conflict nor in contradiction with it' (Al-Talbi, 1993: 2). • Believed human beings are born with certain natural abilities and knowledge is gained through the senses. • The goal of humanity's existence in this world is to attain happiness, which is the highest perfection – the absolute good (ibid). <p>Educational aim:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To lead the individual to perfection through knowledge of God and his attributes (practical moral virtues) whilst also completing his intellectual knowledge (wisdom). • To create the ideal society by achieving a unity of thought, wisdom and religion, each of these being the foundations of the community's government, which should mirror the unity and order found in the universe (ibid.). • His aim was 'to form an integrated personality, in body, intellect, ethics, aesthetics and technology' (ibid: 1). <p>Pedagogical approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods of instruction should be age-appropriate • Pedagogies are varied according to the material |
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- He followed Plato's method of dialogue and reasoning in the belief that learning is better than memorisation

Although Farabi was writing over 1200 years ago it is really interesting to note that he stressed the acquisition of knowledge through the senses and that human beings are born with certain natural abilities (in child-centred terminology these aptitudes are defined as 'learning dispositions'). He believed that knowledge is gained primarily through the senses ('multi-modal learning' in child-centred terminology). He considered learning to be more important than memorisation because 'the action of memorization deals mainly with words and expressions, in other words with details' whereas 'the action of understanding concerns meanings, universals and laws – defined matters, finite, and which are valid for all' (Al-Talbi, 1993: 7). Al-Farabi 'places the learning of religion (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalam*) at the end of the curriculum' (ibid: 7). He followed 'Plato's method of dialogue or debate' in instruction (ibid: 5): a teaching method that is diametrically opposed to Qur'anic instruction in the Saudi preschool. However, it should be noted that the acquisition of 'ethical virtues' relies on the traditional Qur'anic methods of 'habituation and repetition until they form a deep-rooted pattern in the mind whence issue excellent moral behaviours' (Al-Talbi, 1993:6).

Aesthetics is important. Al-Farabi includes 'proficiency in the arts' as a central goal of education because it is 'a sign of wisdom; the wise are those who are very proficient in the arts, and reach perfection in them' (Al-Farabi, 1968: 54). Knowledge 'becomes an intellectual conception by way of imagination' (Al-Talbi, 1993: 4) because 'metaphors or appropriate illustrations' are representations which 'establish meaning in the mind' and create an 'acceptance of what has been understood' (ibid: 5). As Al-Talbi (1993) observes, Al-Farabi's educational philosophy can be considered progressive because the overall goal is 'to form an integrated personality, in body, intellect, ethics, aesthetics and technology', this is an aim

‘which no contemporary education system would neglect’ (ibid: 5). In these respects, he was demonstrating a line of thinking which is remarkably ‘modern’.

5.2.1.2 Ibn Sina (A.D. 980-1037).

Still in the early Middle Ages, in this line of philosophical thinking, Al-Farabi was followed by Ibn Sina who has been called ‘the leader of Islamic philosophy’ (Al-Dhahbi cited in Al-Naqib, 1993: 1).

Thinker

Ibn Sina Abu Ali Al-Husayn (known in the West as Avicenna A.D 980-1037)

Main ideas:

Author biography

- He was Persian but had learned Arabic and The Qur’an by the age of ten.
- He studied philosophy, geometry and Indian mathematics, Muslim law (*fiqh*) and the Sufism movement.
- His views on education are concerned with ‘humanity, society, knowledge and ethics’
- He also discusses topics such as the upbringing of children in *al-Qanum*.

Main influences/beliefs

- Influenced by the virtue ethics of Plato and Aristotle: equated virtue with a balanced character, which is achieved through the exercise of reason.
- Believed that human beings are born with ‘natural dispositions’
- They are: ‘neither good nor bad by nature, although tending to good more than evil’ (Al-Naqib, 1993:3).
- Acquiring morality begins at birth
- Moral character could be achieved by practising good behaviour on every occasion.
- Human beings are created by God but they are dependent on the formation of societies for their survival
- The whole of society must be governed by God’s holy laws, which are revealed ‘through the Prophet who legislates, guided by divine revelation’ (Al-Naqib, 1993: 4).
- A personal interpretation of Islamic law is necessary as ‘judgements

concerning special circumstances' cannot be predetermined (ibid).

- No particular rules should be laid down so judgements can take account of any new events and circumstances in the following eras, especially anything connected with political and practical affairs.

Main theory

- His social theory is based on two principles: the social nature of the human being and the divine nature of society (i.e. beliefs, rites of worship and ethical codes) (Al-Naqib, 1993: 5).
- The human being changes and adapts according to the influences of the environment and its education systems (ibid. 1993: 3).
- Intellectual knowledge is effective only when regulated by logic 'to verify thought and reasoning' (ibid. 1993: 5).

Educational aim

- His main focus is on creating a happy childhood.
- Education should promote the individual's growth: 'physical, mental and moral', and emotional, followed by preparation of this individual to live in society through a chosen trade according to his aptitudes' (Al-Naqib, 1993: 6).

Pedagogical approach

- Memorising The Qur'an is given a priority
- His approach to education involved the whole child. Learning should be age or developmentally appropriate
- He demonstrates a deep understanding of the psychological bases of moral education (concerned with incentive and preventive measures for producing the desired behaviour).
- For children under six years, games and play are 'necessary elements' and he advises that the child should also be engaged in exercise and music.

- Rejected all formal learning (including Islamic principles and rules of conduct) until the child is aged fourteen.

Ibn Sina recognised that education was closely connected to the economic and social development of society. Therefore the overarching purpose of education was ‘the making of an upright citizen in body and mind, and preparing him for some intellectual or practical work’ (Al-Naqib, 1993: 7). Unlike Al-Ghazali, whose educational system does not engage with philosophy, the education of the philosopher was central to Ibn Sina’s writings. His main aim was to apply a philosophical approach to the interpretation and ‘analysis’ of the Qur’an. In the Qur’an, the basis of spiritual and ethical values are found in ‘the religious constraint deep in the human soul’ whereas for Ibn Sina, ‘it arises from the domination of reason over wrongdoing’ (Al-Naqib, 1993: 6).

The curriculum proposed by Ibn Sina reflects the societal concerns of his time: Islamic culture and its basic elements comprising ‘the Qur’an, poetry, devoutness and ethics’ (Al-Naqib, 1993: 10). Memorising the Qur’an is given a priority, but his approach is recognisably child-centred; he is concerned with the child from birth and he sets out age-related stages of development. He acknowledges the role of individual aptitudes and abilities in defining the type of learning or trade in which each student should specialize (ibid). He is insistent that personal preferences should be observed so children can follow their natural inclinations, learning should not be forced and children should not be subjected to physical punishment except in cases where it is deemed to be necessary.

Ibn Sina believed in the divine nature of society but he appears to be diametrically opposed to Wahhabism when he states that ‘the gate of *ijtihad* (personal interpretation of Islamic law)’ should remain open to take account of the historical evolution of human society, ‘especially anything connected to political and practical affairs’ (Al-Naqib, 1993: 4).

5.2.1.3 Ibn Rushd A.D. 1126-1198

Ibn Rushd's influence is fundamental to Muslim philosophy in the West and he extended the tradition of Greek philosophy in the Islamic world. He was critical of the 'anti-philosophical sentiments within the Sunnite tradition sparked by Al-Ghazali' (Saiah, 2013: 171).

Thinker

Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad bin Rushd (A.D. 1126-1198).

Main ideas:

Author biography

- A Spanish-Muslim jurist and physician with an interest in the tension between religion and philosophy.
- Challenged the claim of many Muslim theologians who believed that 'philosophers were outside the fold of Islam' and therefore 'had no base in scripture' (Saiah, 2013: 171).
- Notable for his views on women in Islam
- Famous for stating that 'every prophet is a philosopher but not every philosopher is a prophet' (ibid).

Main influences/beliefs

- Plato's Republic
- It was necessary to engage critically and philosophically with religion to retain its 'deeper meanings' and to avoid 'deviant and incorrect understandings of the divine' (ibid.).
- Doctrines about God must be accepted in their entirety 'such as the existence of God as Creator and Sustainer of the world, the creation of the world by God, the validity of the prophecy, and the resurrection of the body on the Last day' (ibid: 173-4).
- Muslim belief in the afterlife motivates people towards living an ethical life.

Main theory

- Philosophy is a means by which to reveal religious truths.
- There is no tension between philosophical texts (Aristotle) and religious texts (The Qur'an),

“philosophy has always existed among the adepts of revelation, i.e. the prophets, peace be upon them.” (ibid: 174).

- His central principle was that ‘women and men constitute a single complementary design of human nature’ which ‘logically and philosophically supports equality between the sexes’ (Political Islam Online 2016).

Educational aim

- To bring together religion, science, philosophy and law
- To challenge and reject the idea that men should be allotted any preferential position in society.

Ibn Rushd is an important thinker whose ideas have a direct bearing on the problems facing modern-day Saudi Arabia, where ‘the deep-rooted exclusion of women and their subordination at the legal, social, political, and economic levels remains unmatched in the Muslim world’ (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 1). For Alzahrani, it is impossible to achieve progress in Arab and Muslim society without first ‘resolving the role of women in the manner of Ibn Rushd, with reason, justice and the common good playing the greater role’ (Political Islam Online, 2016). For Ibn Rushd, the ideal state as derived from Plato’s Republic, matched the description of the Arab Caliphate (Baffioni, 2004). Ibn Rushd did not explicitly address the role of women, nonetheless he ‘clearly demonstrated compelling originality and depth of thought in deconstructing the traditional tribal masculine bias against women’ (Political Islam Online 2016). Alzahrani’s study of Ibn Rushd provides the resources with which to challenge the Wahhabi fundamentalists who argue that there is ‘a contradiction between the philosopher’s views and passages in the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* which they contend establish the inferiority of women’ (ibid.).

5.3 Religious thinkers

5.3.1 Religious Origins of Child-Centredness in Saudi Arabia

Islam is the state religion in Saudi Arabia and the majority of the population are Wahhabi Sunnite Muslims, ‘followers of the purest doctrine Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’ (Lipsky, 1959, p: 35). Wahhabism dates back to the eighteenth century and was founded in Nejd (today known as Riyadh the capital city of Saudi Arabia. This sect was motivated by ‘the desire to return to the unadulterated Islam of the Prophet Mohammed’ (ibid.). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab ‘preached against moral and religious laxity among Nedji tribesmen and townsmen and their return to pre-Islamic practices’ (ibid. p: 42). According to al-Wahhab, the ‘most rigid orthodox interpretation, the Hanbali, was the core of the faith’ (ibid: 42-43).

5.3.1.1 Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (A.D. 780-855)

The work of Islamic scholar Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal continues to exert a profound influence on every aspect of Sunni orthodoxy. His text *The Musnad* is viewed as an accurate recording of the sayings of the Prophet Mohammed handed down by his immediate followers.

| Thinker | Main ideas |
|--|---|
| Imam Abu Abdullah Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal (A.D. 780-855) | <p>Author biography:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An early Islamic scholar who collected over twenty seven thousand hadeeths which he compiled in <i>The Musnad of Imam Ahmed</i>.• One of the most respected scholars in the tradition of Sunni Islam• Founder of the Hanbali School of Sunni jurisprudence: one of the four most orthodox legal schools of Sunni Islam.• Often referred to as the living exemplar of the true Islam.• Viewed as the most reliable authenticator for the <i>hadiths</i> (words, advice, practices) of the Prophet and his main companions. <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prophet Mohammed and his closest followers. Hanbal believed that The Qur’an and the Hadiths (or Sunnah) provided a sound basis for governing Islamic law and life. |

- Religion is intrinsic to life and no separation is possible
Educational aim:
- Hanbal claimed that he compiled *The Musnad* ‘to be a reference, if people differ concerning the *Sunnah* of the messenger of Allah they may refer to it’ (Al-Hanbal, 2012: 16).
Pedagogical approach:
- Traditional methods of teaching first developed in the *ktatib* (mosque schools): prompting, repetition, memorisation and role modelling.

Wahhabi teachings are based on the rigid doctrines of the third century Hanbali School. Inspired by the work of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, Wahhabi doctrine is concerned with ensuring that ‘the strictest practices, rituals and moral conduct be observed. External manifestation of piety is obligatory’ (Lipsky, 1959: 43). According to Al-Rasheed (2002) this religious tradition which relies on a literal interpretation of the Qur’an and Hadiths does ‘not encourage an easy immersion in modernity’ (2002: 5). This means that the success of Vision 2030 will largely depend on Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s ability to use the resources of a more tolerant and moderate Islamic tradition to meet the objections of conservative clerics.

5.3.1.2 Al-Ghazali: (A.D. 1058-1111).

The educational philosophy of the Islamic scholar Abu Hamad Muhammed Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) is described as ‘the high point of Islamic thinking on education’ (Nofal, 2000: 5). Al-Ghazali’s aims and principles of education continue to exert a profound and lasting influence over educational policy in Saudi Arabia today.

| Thinker | Main ideas |
|---|--|
| Abu Hamad Muhammed Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) | <p>Author biography: Al-Ghazali attended a traditional Islamic school (<i>madrassa</i>) at age seven and began studying Arabic, Persian, The Qur’an and the principles of religion. He studied Islamic jurisprudence (<i>fiqh</i>), Koranic exegesis (<i>tafsir</i>) and the Prophetic tradition (<i>hadith</i>) (Nofal, 2000: 4).</p> <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> |

- He read Aristotle, Plato and Plotinus alongside Islamic thinkers, including Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) in order to reconcile philosophy with religion.
- Explicitly privileges religion over philosophy based on hadith of Abu Bakr Siddeeq in *The Musnad* by Al-Hanbal.
- Religion is intrinsic to life and no separation is possible

Main theory:

- For Al-Ghazali ‘philosophy was correct in so far as it agreed with the principles of Islamic religion and was flawed whenever it was at variance with it’ (Nofal, 2000: 2).
- The means by which knowledge could be acquired were both religious and philosophical and involved the ‘senses, reason and revelation’ (ibid: 3).
- ‘The senses and reason’ are ‘deficient’ (ibid: 4). Man cannot be a source of knowledge i.e. truth. He can discover the material world through sensory perception but the truth (the meaning of man’s existence) lies in man’s personal relationship with God through the Qur’an.
- This world or temporary existence is subject to the will of God; it is not governed by a set of scientific laws, but is maintained, governed and driven by the direct and continual intervention of God (rejection of causality) (ibid).
- Childhood is a distinct phase of life: a crucial stage in the formation of character.
- Children are a ‘*tabula rasa*’ or blank slate; they ‘acquire personality, characteristics and behaviour through living in society and interacting with the environment’ (ibid: 7).
- Children should be modest, generous and civil and they should only mix with other children who are intelligent, moral, of good character, abstemious and truthful.
- Women should obey men and remain at home.
- Women are deemed to lack moral values and to possess limited intelligence.
- Women should learn nothing beyond ‘the fundamentals of religion’ (ibid: 12).

Educational aim:

- The application of Shari’ah (God’s law) is the ‘purpose of society’ therefore ‘the aim of education is to cultivate man so that he abides by the teachings of religion, and hence is assured of salvation and

happiness in the eternal life hereafter' (Nofal, 2000: 5).

- A 'good upbringing' is essential to a 'righteous life' (ibid: 5).
- Education includes other areas of development: 'intellectual, religious, moral and physical' (ibid: 5-6).
- The arts and artistic education should be limited.
- He vehemently attacks drawing and painting 'in conformity with the Islamic prohibition regarding 'the depiction of man or animals, which was associated with the veneration of idols or icons' (ibid: 6).
- He condemns listening to music and singing. Singing is prohibited except on official occasions '(religious festivals, celebrations, banquets, etc.)' (ibid.).

Pedagogical approach:

- He believed that effective learning comes through practice.
- The teacher is a role model and exemplar, 'not merely a purveyor or medium of knowledge' (ibid: 9).
- All aspects of the personality and life of the pupil should be modelled on the teacher. The pupil should think of the teacher 'as a father, to whom he owes obedience and respect' (ibid.).
- The basic religious tenets should be 'instilled' into the child by the age of seven so that he can perform 'the ritual ablutions and prayers' (ibid.).
- The Qur'an should be memorized 'without explanation', religious principles should be 'inculcated without clarification' and practice should become habitual 'before the emergence of a commitment rooted in tradition' (ibid: 10).
- The child should be shaped to match the curriculum.
- Play offers a break from the rigors of study rather than something which is intrinsically valuable.
- Mistakes should be avoided and repeated mistakes should be punished 'with a light beating' (ibid). The aim is to chastise rather than to inflict physical harm.

In Al-Ghazali's writing, we find the 'theoretical basis' and 'a practical method for attaining the religious ideal of the good Muslim' (Cheddadi, 1994: 2). Al-Ghazali's thought contributed to the weakening of philosophy and the natural sciences. Unlike the early Islamic philosophers, who saw religion as one dimension amongst others of human life and

experience, Al-Hanbali and Al-Ghazali viewed religion as intrinsic to every aspect of life. This belief shapes the main objectives of Saudi educational policy: to promote monotheism, the belief in one God whose Prophet is Mohammed, and Islam as a way of life (*Teacher Guide Book*, MOE: 2013a). Al-Ghazali ‘clearly defines the aims of education, lays out the path to be followed, and the means whereby the objectives can be achieved’ (Nofal, 2000: 13).

5.3.1.3 Ibn Taymiyyah, Ahmad ibn Abd. al-IIalim (A.D. 1263-1328).

Ibn Taymiyyah has been named “the father of Islamic fundamentalism” (Krawietz, 2003: 39). He is considered the second most influential Hanbal theologian and jurist after Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.

| Thinker | Main ideas |
|--|--|
| <p>Ibn Taymiyyah, Ahmad ibn Abd. al-IIalim (A.D. 1263-1328).</p> | <p>Author biography:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born in Harran, Syria. He memorized The Qur’an at an early age and read many of the hadiths including the two <i>Sahihs</i> of al-Bukhari and the <i>Musnad</i> of Ahmed Ibn Hanbal. • Famous for <i>Kitab al Iman (The Book of Faith)</i> which has become one of the founding texts of the Islamic faith. <p>Main influences/beliefs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His understanding of <i>Iman</i> was based on what he believed was the true interpretation of The Qur’an, hadith, sayings and doings of the Prophet Mohammed and the deeds of the earliest pious ancestors during the first three Islamic centuries. • He held that language was originally revealed to man by Allah (God) who also gave man the gift of speech • The ‘fundamental Islamic concepts must be interpreted from the <i>roots</i>, found in The Qur’an and the Sunnah, and go back to the ‘understanding and interpretation of <i>the pious ancestors</i>’ (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2009: 18) of the Hanbali School. <p>Main theory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejects rationality and dialogue as a path towards true knowledge, Ibn Taymiyyah contends, ‘Know that Iman, (<i>faith</i>) and Islam combine to form religion as a whole’ (ibid). • <i>Iman</i> is defined as: ‘affirming your belief in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Day of |

Judgment, and believing in qadar, *predestination*, both in its good and its evil’ (ibid: 19).

Educational aim:

- He aimed to instruct people about the basic principles of the Islamic faith with reference to The Qur’an and the Sunnah as the foundations.
 - *Kitab al-Iman* was written as a corrective to the ‘misconceptions’ and ‘popular ideas’ of other Islamic sects which were primarily based on al-culum alcaqliyyah, *rational thinking*’ (ibid: 8).
 - To teach every Muslim child the five pillars of Islam.
- Pedagogical approach
- Children must repeat the following statement ‘We testify that there is no god but Allah, and He has no associate; and we testify that Muhammad (pbuh) and his family, is His servant and Messenger’ (ibid.).
 - The other four pillars of Islam include ‘performing prayers, giving zakah, making pilgrimage to the Sacred House, and fasting during Ramadan’ (ibid: 20).
 - Obedience and submission are the central requirements of a good Muslim.
 - For Ibn Taymiyyah ‘all acts of obedience comprise one’s belief’ he continues ‘Allah has endeared belief to you’ (ibid: 56).

According to Ibn Taymiyyah if a person is a believer then he or she will necessarily possess the will or desire to be obedient. This ideal of the ‘good’ Muslim as one who believes in God unquestioningly remains a potent force in Saudi Arabian society and culture.

5.3.1.4 Ibn Khaldoun (A.D. 1332-1406).

Ibn Khaldun was an Arab historian and historiographer. He has been referred to as ‘the father of Sociology’ for his contribution to understanding the history of civilisation (Potter, 2017: 181). He is famous for his text the *Muqaddima* in which he sets out a scientific method for the social sciences.

Thinker
Abū Zayd ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān
ibn Muḥammad ibn

Main ideas
Author biography:

Khaldūn al-Ḥaḍramī (A.D. 1332-1406).

- Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis into an upper class Andalusian family descended from Arabs.
 - He memorised The Qur'an by heart, studied Arab linguistics as the basis for understanding the Qur'an, hadith, Sharia (Islamic law) and fiqh (jurisprudence)
 - Studied mathematics, logic and philosophy, especially the works of Aristotle and Avicenna.
 - Wrote the *Muqaddima* to provide a comprehensive account of Muslim society and its educational system from a sociological and historical perspective.
- Main influences/beliefs:
- The Qur'an, Aristotle and Avicenna.
 - The capacity for learning is an innate aspect of human nature: God gave man a brain with which to think constantly (Ibn-Khaldun, 2001).
 - The capacity to think is what makes us human
 - The nature of thought involves the 'ceaseless search for knowledge and achievement' (Al-Zamel, 2017: 101).
- Main theory:
- The *Muqaddima* outlines two basic types of society: primitive and elementary (rural and tribal) and civilized and complex society (urban)
 - The rural/tribal and urban worlds are separate entities, but the unifying factor is the 'Koranic teaching that was virtually obligatory for all' (Cheddadi: 1994: 2).
 - Education is a social process in terms of its 'essence, content, function and objectives' that cannot be separated from society (Al-Zamel, 2017: 96).
 - Education is the main process for the social cultural and economic development of society (Al-Zamel 2017).
 - Education is a craft or industry which involves theoretical and applied knowledge
 - Scientific knowledge changes the world but the sciences cannot develop without high levels of civilisation and urbanisation
- Educational aim:
- To improve the quality of education by identifying what constituted effective conditions for learning
- Pedagogical approach:
- Learning involves the teacher, the learner and the method of study
 - Teachers must be highly qualified in terms of content knowledge and pedagogy
 - Violence and coercion should not be used
 - His pedagogical principles are based on the 'habitus'. The habitus is embodied and is formed through 'continuous repetition until the form is fixed' where,

according to Ibn Khaldun, it is ‘like a dye that lasts until the cloth to which it has been applied is destroyed’ (Cheddadi, 1994: 2).

- This teaching method is the most effective when ‘modelled on the most perfect exemplars (the Prophet Mohammed) with the help of the best teachers’ (ibid.).
- Subject matter must be appropriate to the child’s ‘state of preparation’ in terms of both teaching practice and content (ibid.).
- Only one subject should be taught at a time.

Unlike many Islamic scholars, Ibn Khaldun approaches the issue of education not from a strictly philosophical, religious, moral or judicial perspective but from a historical and sociological one. He recognised the structural deficit implicit in Islamic systems of education which are focused too heavily on teaching the Qur’an before children can fully comprehend what they are being taught. In relation to the double purpose of education (Kemmis 2008) Ibn Khaldun believes the first objective is to ensure individuals acquire the talent (knowledge, skills and capacities) for understanding and mastering the subject at hand. The second objective is to ensure that education is a form of activity that can best serve the practical needs of society. In an echo of the statements made by contemporary global development agencies, Ibn Khaldun argues that education can provide a tool for facilitating social, cultural and economic development because ‘high levels of civilisation and prosperity are essential for the spread of science and industries’ (Al-Zamel, 2017: 100).

5.4 Wahhabism

5.4.1 Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (A.D. 1703-1792)

Ibn Wahhab was determined to eliminate any vestiges of ‘pre-Islamic religion and superstition, particularly among the Bedouins’ (Lipsky, 1959: 43). He was supported in this venture by Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman Al Saud, the founder of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia who died in 1765.

Thinker

Main ideas

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (A.D. 1703-1792)

Author biography:

- Muhammed ibn Abdul al-Wahhab was born in the Najd of al-Yamaamah (modern day Riyadh).
- A member of the Tameem tribe, which is specifically mentioned in the hadiths of the Prophet Mohammed and is known for its religious leaders and scholars.
- He was introduced to Hanbali *fiqh* (law and jurisprudence) and to books of *tafseer* (Qur'anic commentary) and hadith, in addition to books on *tauheed* (Islamic monotheism). He had memorized the Qur'an by the age of ten.

Main influences/beliefs:

- Using the work of bin Hanbal and Ibn Taimiyyah, Ibn Wahhab developed his insights into the meaning of Islamic monotheism and related aspects of belief that cannot be understood through jurisprudence (*fiqh*).
- Called for a ban on all 'innovations, heresies, and polytheistic acts' (Zarabozo, 2003: 25).
- His monotheism is expressed as follows: 'There is none worthy of worship except Allah, the pillars of Islam, ordering good and eradicating evil. If you adhere to it and support it, Allah will give you dominance over your enemies' (ibid: 36).
- In *Kitab al-Tawheed* he sets out this belief in the principles and practices of what he terms 'the pure Islam' (ibid. 32).
- Faith (*aqeedah*) is at the core of Ibn Wahhab's teaching and 'is the foundation of a person's life and actions' (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 80).
- 'Straying in matters of belief and faith has ramifications for one's entire outlook, goal, purpose and behaviour' (Elliott House, 2013: 17).
- Belonging to the *umma*, or community of believers takes 'precedence over all other social bonds' (ibid.)
- Methodology is crucial 'in attaining the proper beliefs' and 'the basic principles concerning this matter can be derived from The Quran and Sunnah.
- All hadiths of the Prophet must be believed regardless of topic
- The early scholars (3rd century including Al-Hanbal) are considered as evidence
- Complete allegiance and submission to Allah is required

Educational aim:

- To create the ideal Islamic society by implementing the Shari'ah (Islamic law) in every aspect of life based on the five pillars of Islam

Pedagogical approach:

- Used all available means of communication including ‘Friday sermons, writing books, writing letters and epistles, sending instructors to other lands’
- Prayers must be publicly performed at the mosque
- Avoid ‘all discussions of the philosophers and dialecticians in matters of faith in favour of the clear teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah’ (Elliott House, 2013: 85).

According to Zarabozo (2003) ‘To this day, in his homeland, one can still feel the influence of Ibn Abdul-Wahhab’s call to the pure monotheism’ (Zarabozo, 2003: 189). As Al-Rasheed argues, the Saudi state derives its legitimacy by:

claiming to apply the *Shar’ia* (Islamic Law) in all aspects of life and submitting to a universal Islamic ethos’ which derives its ‘legitimacy from divine sources rather than man-made modern constructions of national identity (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 14).

Today, the intertwining of religion with tribalism still forms an integral aspect of self-identity in modern-day Saudi Arabia as many people are proud to be able to trace their lineage back to the Bedouin. As a result, Saudi state is also dependent on kin and tribal solidarities for its consolidation’ (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 5).

For most Wahhabi religious leaders, education is still viewed as the key instrument for perpetuating a devout Islamic society. Saudi pedagogy derives its methodology from the principles and practices of Wahhabi Islam. When religion is not a matter for dialogue and debate, children are taught to memorise, repeat and copy rather than think for themselves. As a result, they emerge from education without the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable them to participate and compete in modern twenty-first century economies.

5.5 Social and Cultural Perceptions of Child-Centredness in **Saudi Arabia:**

5.5.1 Child-Centredness in Saudi Arabia

As this literature review has revealed, the Western concept of child-centredness does not appear in the context of Islamic thought. The whole of Saudi society is based on ‘a particular vision of the moral and religious life’ (Baki, 2004: 2) with ‘Wahhabism as religious knowledge and tribalism as social organization’ (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 19). The Quran supports the rights of the child ‘to be brought up as ‘moral, righteous human being’ (Ahmed, 2011: 6) because this is in their ‘best interests’ (ibid: 6). By contrast, a Western child-centred approach necessarily involves treating children ‘as (quasi) equal partners in interactions’ (Demuth, Keller & Yoysi, 2012) and giving their ‘wishes and preferences’ a priority whenever possible (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204).

In the West ‘families are understood as a group of separate individuals, each having his or her own feelings, cognitions, intentions, and preferences, striving for independence from others’ (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204). As a result,

Parents want their children to become self-contained, competitive, assertive individuals, as these aspects constitute important personal characteristics to become a competent and successful member of this cultural group (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204).

In this context, the socialization of children is constantly reaffirming the ‘uniqueness and separateness’ of the child (ibid.) by concentrating on ‘children’s personal traits and mental states’ (ibid.). Hence, the most important behavioural strategy is child centredness’ (ibid.). In Saudi Arabia, the process of socialization uses a very different system of cultural values:

The dominant relationships in Saudi society are personal. Allegiance to Islam, loyalty to family (defined in terms of a group of close male kin) and loyalty to the tribe are the strongest bonds felt by most Saudi Arabians (Lipsky, 1959: 2).

According to Al-Dajany’s study (2000) focusing on the nature of social change in Saudi Arabia since 1970, amongst the Bedouin Utaiba tribe, ‘Overall economic and technical

development have changed many aspects of Utaiba life, but have not changed their Islamic values or sense of Bedouin identity' (Al-Dajany, 2000: 3). Loyalty to family and tribe is expressed by maintaining family honour. Family honour is 'directly related' to a woman's chastity, 'known as *ird*' (Baki, 2004: 2). Saudi culture is built around the protection of *ird* by keeping women within tightly controlled limits. The primary role deemed most religiously and culturally appropriate for women is that of nurturing mother and housewife (Sabbgah 1996).

There are no Saudi text books explaining child-centred approaches to child-rearing: ideas about how to raise children are taken directly from the Qur'an. Socialization is focused on 'children's adoption of the hierarchical structure and their identification with social roles' (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni & Maynard, 2003). The Islamic religion:

exhorts providing good rearing and care for the child, and keeping him or her away from whatever may harm his or her health, psychological and social conditions, so the child can grow into a righteous citizen who has a sense of belonging to his or her people, society and homeland (Tantawi, 2005: 1).

Tantawi stipulates that the right way to raise children is:

through providing them with an honourable upbringing, through teaching them the basics of science and ethics, and through keeping them away from all sinful acts, and all forms of violence and discrimination that adversely affect their conduct within society and divert them from the straight path (Tantawi, 2005, p: 1).

According to Elliott-House 'If Westerners love individualism, most Saudis are frightened at the mere thought of being different. To be different is to attract attention' (2013: 27). The first responsibility of all parents is not to find out about their 'children's personal traits and mental states' (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204) it is to ensure their children conform to social and religious norms by 'performing religious duties' (UNICEF 2005) by respecting their elders and by keeping 'social harmony' (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204). Parents are directed 'to set a good example for their child through their own good conduct' and to 'embrace the child with kindness and compassion, and avoid

harshness and cruelty' (ibid.). The importance of early training is heavily emphasized because 'it allows religious practice to become an easy and acceptable habit that children will maintain and preserve' (ibid.).

5.5.1.1 Child-Centredness and the Ideal of Autonomy

Parents must firstly ensure conformity in their children hence the requirement to 'perform religious duties' (Bates and Lewis, 2009: 25). This is the opposite of a Western child-centred approach based on the 'ideal of autonomy' (Bates and Lewis, 2009: 25) and 'individual psychological relatedness' (Gerhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204). In the West, children are given 'many choices and chances to decide for themselves' and they are 'encouraged to express their individual opinions in everyday life' (Keller 2011 cited in Gerhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204). This approach emphasizes developing the child's ability to 'make sense' of his/her world 'and lead a rich and fulfilling life' (ibid.). In Saudi Arabia, the pursuit of autonomy i.e. individual needs and wants could result in a person losing 'the support and protection of the family' (Elliott-House, 2013: 27). The focus is on preparing for after-life through piety, duty and obedience, learned at home and reinforced by the education system. The Qur'an advises that parents should treat their children kindly and not be too harsh, but physical chastisement is not uncommon when teaching good manners and respect (Lipsky, 1959) and is generally regarded as the norm.

5.6 Child-Centredness and Child Development in Saudi Arabia

5.6.1 Socio-Cultural Constructions of Child-Centredness and Child Development

Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, and Maynard, (2003) state that the recent literature on how learning is organized within different socio-historical contexts has revealed the existence of 'two idealized developmental pathways, one emphasizing individuation and independence, the other emphasizing group membership' (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, and Maynard, 2003: 463). Each ideal is the result of a 'larger socio-cultural system' that is either 'socio-centric or

collectivistic' (ibid.). Hence, the 'cultural constructions of self will be independent and/or interdependent' (ibid.). These:

adult conceptions of the ideal and actual self also serve as developmental goals that organize socialization experiences in characteristic ways (Kagitcibasi, 1990). These goals, experiences, and the resultant behaviours define pathways across the life span (ibid.).

The Western concept of child development which is designed to maximise 'individuation and independence' through what Greenfield and Bruner (1966) refer to as 'a cognitive separation of self and world' (ibid.) does not appear in the Saudi literature. In the West, child centredness is based on an independent developmental pathway, in which:

social obligations are individually negotiated; opportunities to select social relationships (personal choice) and to act freely in those relationships (individual rights) are maximized (Raeff et al. 2000: 67).

In Saudi Arabia, the social, cognitive and physical development of the child is conceived within a developmental pathway that is designed to emphasize membership of the Muslim community. Therefore 'social obligations and responsibilities are given greater priority, while individual choice is much less important' (ibid.). Earlier research by Whiting and Whiting (1973) found that:

the distinction between independent and interdependent pathways of development originates in cross cultural comparative research identifying altruism and egoism as the outcomes of different socialization processes under different environmental conditions (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, and Maynard, 2003: 463).

Social and material conditions are important factors but cultural values are equally important: 'the causal influence of ideals or meanings inside the psyche' (ibid.). In Saudi Arabia, the dominant value system is Islam and the ideal-self is the good Muslim: based on Ibn Tamiyyah's concept of absolute Iman, which is embodied in the person who emulates the lifestyle, values and daily practices of the Prophet Mohammed. Children are trained in religious beliefs and practices to ensure they 'perform all they are commanded to do and abandon all

they are prohibited from doing’ (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2009: 429). The Qur’an is read to babies as soon as they are born to familiarise them with the sound of the verses so that from the moment they are born children are habituated into the knowledge that ‘Iman, belief and Islam combine to form religion as a whole’ (ibid: 18).

In Islam children are thought to pass through age-related stages of development. From birth until age seven the child is *pre-mumayyiz*: incapable of differentiating good from bad as well as lacking the capacity to understand. At age seven the child is *mumayyiz* and has a different level of capacity. The stipulated age of seven as *mumayyiz* originates from a hadith narrated by ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Rabi’ ibn Sabrah:

Meaning: Teach your children to pray when they are seven years of age and smack them (lightly) if they disobey when they are ten’ (Sulaiman, Jamsari and Noh, 2014: 34).

The above hadith implies that cognitive ability is not present until the age of seven, which explains why the Saudi Arabian approach to advancing the desired developmental goals uses ‘an apprentice model and an authoritarian, hierarchical relationship between a novice and a competent expert, providing special training’ (Rogoff 1990).

5.7 Child-Centredness in Education Theory and Practice

5.7.1 Constructions of Child-Centredness in Saudi Policy and Practice

The family, religion and schooling are the main components of socialization. Schools reflect the ‘value orientation’ of the wider socio-cultural context and they ‘generate the construction of socializing practices’ (Greenfield & Lave 1982, Maynard 2002). The authors note that:

The interactional routines and artefacts that are utilized in cultural learning have a key role in socializing a child to proceed on a particular developmental pathway (Greenfield 2000a, Rogoff 1990, Mistry & Rogoff 1994, Saxe 1991)

Pedagogy can be thought of in terms of an ‘interactional routine’ which ‘encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it’ (Alexander, 2000: 540). This definition of pedagogy draws attention to the fact that ‘*teaching* is part of pedagogy but it is the *thinking* behind teaching that is at the heart of pedagogy’ (Papatheodorou, and Donna Potts, 2013: 58). According to Othman, in Saudi Arabia, educational policy is based on ‘care, play and education’ (Al-Othman, *et al*, 2015: 2513). The Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum is modelled on American High Scope, and incorporates Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

Cross-cultural frameworks of knowledge can also be found in teacher training. Research by Al-Jadidi (2012) into teacher training programs in a Saudi university revealed a taught module entitled ‘Rights of the Child in Islam and Contemporary Legislation’ (Al-Jadidi, 2012: 187). One participant said this module taught her everything she needed to know about the child:

from when he is a foetus to how I should deal with him/her, and teach him/her correct Islamic protocols and manners. I also learnt about the rights of children internationally, not just in an Islamic context’ A2 (ibid.).

However, Wahhabi Islam provides the dominant thinking behind the policy and practice in the Saudi Arabian preschool where teachers are directed to ‘Form a religious instinct based on monotheism as the natural direction’ (*Teacher Guide Book*, 2013a: 19). This ‘unquestioning’ belief is given expression in the first pillar of Islam (*ash-shahadah*): “‘There is no god but God (Allah) and Mohammed is His Prophet’” (Lipsky, 1959: 37). This principle is implemented using the traditional approach: ‘memorising circles where the teachers focus on memorising the Qur’an and the basic skills of reading and writing’ (Othman *et al*, 2015: 2512).

5.8 Pedagogy of the Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed

5.8.1 *How and What Children Should be Taught*

Questions concerning *how* children should be taught and whether it is developmentally appropriate are answered with reference to the Qur'an, which emphasises the need for an exemplar:

Taking into consideration the ethics of the child's behaviour and facilitating the absorption of the Islamic faith through the right tendencies of the teachers using a good example of the role model of the Prophet Mohamed in front of the child (*Teacher Guide Book*, 2013a: 19).

Although Jesus Christ is the 'holy figure of faith, who matters to Christians' this does not include any 'attempt to copy Jesus, the man, in his earthly personal habits, dress or lifestyle' (Elliott House, 2013: 34). The religious requirements of Islam are simply to understand 'correctly and completely' the Five Pillars of Islam: the creed (*ash-shahadah*); prayer; fasting; almsgiving; pilgrimage (Lipsky, 1959: 38-39). However, 'The Sunna, the example set by the Prophet's words, deeds and practices is considered the ideal and is practiced and passed on by all pious Muslims' (ibid). As Muslim scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr points out, 'There has been no greater force for the unification of the Muslim peoples than the presence of this common model for the minutest acts of daily life' (Nasr, 2000: 74).

The teaching of small children necessarily involves a predominantly transmissive style which can be 'assumed to be in line with a high cultural emphasis on social responsibility and hierarchical relatedness' (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 205). Obedience is consistently emphasized and is thought to be an important 'duty of the citizen: 'Obey Allah and his Prophet and those with authority' ... 'obedience is due to the rulers and to the teacher, as well as to the head of the family' (Prokop, 2003: 80). This religious philosophy 'inculcates passivity, dependence, an *a priori* respect for authority and an unquestioning attitude' (ibid). As the Qur'an and the Sunna 'are considered inviolable' debate is prohibited (ibid.).

5.9 Islamic Law: Human Rights in *Shari'ah* Law

5.9.1 Human Rights Protections in Shari'ah Law

The Qur'an and the Prophet's Hadiths (written records of Mohammed's declarations) form the Saudi Basic Law of Governance. The role of the state is to 'protect Islam and implement its *Shari'ah*' (Tantawi, 2005: 24). The *Shari'ah* has 'an internal mechanism to guarantee the adherence of Muslims to its principles' (ibid). The State will order its 'people to do right and shun evil; it fulfils the duty regarding God's call,' (Jerichow, 1998). The State will protect human rights as accorded by the *Shari'ah* (Baki, 2004: 2). According to Tantawi (2005):

Universal principles have called for recognizing the rights of all children without discrimination. The Islamic Sharia, in its own way, has affirmed these rights in terms of Qur'anic and Prophetic directives (ibid)

Tantawi claims that these Islamic principles with regard to child protection, which date back 14 centuries, are 'perfectly compatible in their broad framework with some of the general principles underlying 'any convention or declaration on human rights' (2005: 24). The Shari'ah guarantees children a set of basic rights 'without discrimination on the grounds of 'race, gender, religion, economic or social status or health conditions' (Tantawi, 2005: 26). Islamic scholars must ensure that parents fulfil these obligations towards their children.

5.9.2 Rights of Children in Islam

The issue of childhood 'constitutes one of the major objectives in Islamic legislation' (Tantawi, 2005: 3). Islamic Shari'ah has five objectives for humanity which are as follows: 'the safeguarding of progeny, the safeguarding of life, the safeguarding of sanity, the safeguarding of property and the safe guarding of faith' (ibid.). Childhood is at the heart of the first objective, specifically keeping children safe and protected from harm. The Shari'ah stipulates, 'with the child, play for seven (years), discipline for seven (years), accompany for

seven (years) and then let go' (ibid: 4). These 'rules, laws and guidelines' together form a 'childhood jurisprudence' (ibid: 4).

5.9.2.1 Rights of Children Under the Saudi Basic Law of Governance

The Saudi constitution includes the Basic Law of Governance which stipulates that children have rights to a name and nationality, an identity i.e. a family name, property and inheritance, sponsorship in a family, health care and education (*Saudi Arabia: Basic Law of Governance*. 1976: 32-33). In addition, paragraphs 87, 88 and 89 come under the heading 'respect for the views of the child (art. 12)' which is a reference to Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ibid. 31). In acknowledgement of Saudi Arabia's duties and responsibilities under the Convention on the Rights of the Child Articles 12 and 13:

freedom of opinion and expression, both oral and written, is fully guaranteed to the child in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in accordance with the appropriate regulations and, primarily, with the requirements of the best interests of the children themselves, without any undue influence or coercion (ibid: 33).

However, freedom of speech remains very vague in Saudi statutes and should not be taken as synonymous with the Western concept of such freedoms.

5.9.2.3 Religious and Moral Restrictions on Children's Rights

In Saudi Arabia, basic rights and freedoms are constrained within a religious and moral framework to ensure no conflict with Islamic principles, 'the movement of a Muslim, whether child or adult, is governed by a comprehensive system of morality' (Tantawi, 2005: 3). The personality, mind and conscience of the Muslim child is 'controlled by *halal* (what is permissible) and *haram* (what is prohibited)' (Tantawi, 2005: 3). This framework has implications for rights-based approaches to education:

While there are some pedagogic systems that facilitate the opening of doors for children to indulge in such activities under the pretext of freedom and the prevention of violence, Islam opposes deviations that it deems to be aberrations, diseases and ills that should be resisted and from which the young generation should be protected (ibid: 4).

5.9.3 The UNCRC in Saudi Arabia: Education as a Right

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN in 1989 and has been ratified by Saudi Arabia. Hence, the UNCRC is part of the legal framework within which the long-term development plans of the Kingdom are designed and implemented. Education 2030 is the most recent agenda for the provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Saudi Arabia and is an attempt to meet its legal obligations under the CRC. Within this new agenda, education is not only seen as a basic right but also as a process of lifelong learning which can benefit society and ensure future economic prosperity. In Saudi Arabia, the success of Education 2030 will largely depend on whether ‘the children’s rights agenda’ (Gillett-Swan & Coppock, 2016: 8) can be transferred cross-culturally. As Benavot argues ‘Local context and diversity shape both the challenges and the solutions ahead. Education is place-based and situational’ (Benavot, 2016: 13). Kaime (2011) states the ‘economic, social, cultural and political diversity that characterises the community of states’ has made it virtually impossible to ‘have a common conception and understanding of its normative prescriptions’ (2011: 4). One criticism of the ‘international norms respecting the promotion and protection of children’s rights’ is that they are ‘heavily steeped in ‘Western’ rights ideology’ (ibid: 4-5). One suggested solution is that they should be more culturally relevant. However, this solution could produce a situation in which the ‘indigenous pedagogy may entirely redirect some or all of the central aspects of the curriculum in question’ (Rajab and Wright, 2018a: 2).

There is a huge body of literature focusing on the ‘organization and functioning’ of Islamic education and ‘analysing its standards and values’ (ibid: 2). The idea of lifelong learning is not a uniquely Western concept and support for this idea can be found in Islamic teachings:

In Islamic thought, education, which here takes in religion and morals, is a process that ends at no determined stage or age but lasts an entire lifetime, as expressed in the saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammed: ‘Learn science from the cradle to the grave (Cheddadi, 1994: 1).

However, the political ideals underpinning the Self-Learning Curriculum for Kindergarten, which are based on maximising ‘autonomy and participation’ rights might be harder to realize unless they are perceived as ‘culturally legitimate’ (Gillett Swann & Coppock, 2016: 8).

Previous Saudi education ministers have failed to achieve significant reforms in education because the content of the curricula has not changed. As a result, within the Self-learning Curriculum ‘religion, culture and ideology are confusingly entwined with individualism, universalism and rationalism’ (Rajab and Wright, 2018b: 12). According to Al-Rashed ‘To achieve deep educational reform requires political, as opposed to economic, capital’ (cited in Braude, 2016). If real change is to happen, the impetus needs to come from within Saudi Arabia. Vision 2030, will be instrumental in giving cultural legitimacy to the children’s rights agenda in education. The current Education Minister Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Issa has written several books on educational reform in Saudi Arabia. Titles include *Higher education in Saudi Arabia: A Quest for Identity* (2010) *Education Reform in KSA: Lack of Political Vision, Religious Cultural Obsession and Education Management Failure* (2009). Dr Al-Issa has emphasized the fundamental importance of preschool education which must be age-relevant and meaningful to the life and experience of the child (Al-Issa, 2009: 122). He argues that a child-centred approach based on listening, exploring, communicating, participating and learning to co-operate and collaborate with others is key to the development of young children aged 3-5 years (ibid.).

5.10 Summary

Firstly, this review has traced the philosophical and religious roots of Arabic ideas about child-centredness to reveal that many early Arabic scholars were influenced by Western philosophy. However, it is the religious scholars who have shaped child-centred theory and practice in the public preschool in Saudi Arabia. This chapter has also explained how Islam

provides a religious and moral framework that directs all aspects of social and cultural life. Secondly, this review revealed that the Western concept of child-centredness is absent from the Islamic literature. The term used is Self-Learning. Thirdly, this chapter has shown that ideas about child-centredness and child development are based on principles derived from the Qur'an. Fourthly, this issue is shown to be particularly significant in relation to Saudi pedagogic principles which are based on role modelling the Prophet Mohammed. Another key difference is the Islamic concept of rights, which is tightly constrained within a religious and moral framework bound by Islamic Shari'ah. This intertwining of religion, culture and society has major implications for how the 'children's rights agenda' is implemented in the preschool classroom.

The 2030 Vision Statement, recognises that high-quality education is crucial factor in future prosperity 'our real wealth lies in the ambition of our people and the potential of our younger generation. They are our nation's pride and architects of the future' (Al-Saud, 2017:7). However, the country is widely perceived as 'conservative and religious' and these values and beliefs continue to shape the 'principles, thoughts and attitudes' of its people (Al-Othman et al, 2015: 2511). The wide scale program of economic and social reforms proposed under Vision 2030 are providing Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman with an opportunity to usher in a more moderate and tolerant interpretation of Islam. Consequently, Vision 2030 is providing a mechanism for bringing an Islamic system of values and beliefs into closer alignment with a Western framework of democratic values and beliefs.

Chapter 6 will explain the rationale for the methodological approach deemed most appropriate for this study. The chapter will set out the research questions, and explain the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the study. Details of the research sample, the settings for the study, and the data collection and analysis methods will be provided. The chapter will end by highlighting any specific challenges in relation to the research.

Chapter 6 – The Research Design and Methodology

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the rationale for the methodology adopted in the present study. The chapter will begin by presenting the research questions, followed by an explanation of the theoretical and philosophical assumptions that underpin the approach taken in this study. The research sample and the setting of this small-scale qualitative study in three schools will be described. This chapter will also explain the data collection methods and the analytical framework of the study which is based on the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis and Grootenboer, 2008). The theory of Practice Architectures has been selected as the analytical tool because it enables the researcher to examine not only individuals and organisations but also the interrelations between the two. The construction of child-centred education is viewed as a notion of practice that is shaped by the knowledge and actions of educational stakeholders and by the wider religious and socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia (Kemmis et al 2008; 2014). This chapter will go on to address the ethical considerations raised by the study and the trustworthiness of the findings. The final section will highlight any particularly challenging issues that arose during the research.

6.2 Research Objectives

This research will explore what child-centred educational policy, theory and practice means in the context of public preschool education in Saudi Arabia. There are four specific objectives involved.

1. To understand what the term child-centeredness means in the context of preschool educational policy in Saudi Arabia.
2. To examine the theoretical frameworks informing child-centred policy and practice in the context of the Saudi public sector preschool.

3. To investigate how various government employees including senior and middle management staff and preschool teachers interpret the idea of child-centeredness.
4. To discover the extent to which two potentially conflicting frameworks of ideas, beliefs and values can be brought into harmony with each other under Vision 2030.

6.3 Research Questions

In order to realize the objectives of this study one main research question and six sub-questions have been devised.

6.3.1 Main Research Question

How does using Practice Architecture to explore Child-Centred Education in the public sector preschools in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030?

6.3.2 Sub-Questions

1. What is Practice Architecture and how can this facilitate the understanding of contrasting educational issues?
2. How does social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centered learning in the West?
3. How does social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centered learning in Saudi Arabia?
4. What is an appropriate way in which to research this topic?
5. How is child-centered education constructed by the government in the public sector preschool in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?
6. How is the concept of child-centered education perceived by a range of key educational stake holders?

Each of the following chapters including Chapter 3 Practice Architecture, Chapter 4 Western Literature Review, Chapter 5 Saudi Literature Review, Chapter 7 Documentary Analysis and Chapter 8 Interview Data has been written to answer a specific sub-question.

6.4 The Philosophical Assumptions Underlying this Study

6.4.1 Ontology

According to Kumar (2014) there are multiple ‘definitions and understandings of research’ which can be ‘attributed to the different philosophies that underpin research thinking’ (Kumar, 2014: 11). All research projects are framed by a series of related assumptions often referred to as a paradigm. According to Guba (1990):

The net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm (Guba, 1990: 17) or interpretive framework, a “basic set of beliefs that guides action (Guba, 1990: 17).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) have defined a paradigm as:

... a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of ‘the world,’ the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 1079).

Punch points out that:

... inquiry paradigms’ address three basic questions: ‘*The ontological question*: What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it? *The epistemological question*: What is the relationship between the knower and what can be known? *The methodological question*: How can the inquirer go about finding out what can be known? (Punch, 2009: 16).

Two opposing research paradigms are positivism and constructivism. Scientific research is based on a positivist paradigm because it works on the assumption that there is a singular, objective world or ‘reality’ out there. The job of the researcher is to capture that reality through the use of research instruments such as experiments or questionnaires. In scientific research, the researcher is viewed as objective and independent from the objects of research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Scientific realism is often referred to as received knowledge or simply as a common sense view of the world (ibid). Children were not considered to be an appropriate topic for scientific study but there is evidence to show that from the time of

Rousseau onwards ‘children were subject to observation, although it was not until the late nineteenth and twentieth century that systematic observation of children took place’ (Mukherji & Deborah, 2015: 14). Whilst it seems possible that:

the *biology* and *physiology*’ of children can be studied using scientific methods, it is difficult to see how these methods might be used to ‘investigate attitudes and feelings and the social world in general. This is a key criticism of positivist research (ibid.).

This does not mean that scientific methods should be dismissed but rather that ‘children are complex individuals in whom there is a highly sophisticated interplay between physical, biological and chemical characteristics and ‘psychological’ characteristics’ (ibid.). In addition, from a Western perspective children are viewed as ‘active agents able to both adapt and alter their environments’ (ibid.). However, as this research will show, this view of children as ‘active agents’ is not necessarily shared cross-culturally. As Greig et al (2007) point out, children and childhood are such complex issues that ‘no single approach will be wholly satisfactory...’ (Greig et al. 2007) and scientific methodology may be ‘part of an eclectic approach to research about and with children’ (ibid.).

At the opposite end of the continuum, a constructivist or interpretivist paradigm is not concerned with making generalisations about the world but acknowledges there may be ‘multiple explanations for actions and is interested in the *meanings* people ascribe to their actions – the reasons why particular people do what they do’ (Mukherji & Deborah, 2015: 25).

According to Hughes (2010):

Interpretivists argue rather than simply perceiving our particular social and material circumstances, each person continually makes of them within a culture of socially constructed and shared meanings, and that our interpretations of the world influence our behaviour in it (Hughes, 2010: 41).

This quotation emphasizes that multiple realities exist and “‘the way we think life is and the part we are to play in it is – *self-created. We put together our own personal reality*’” (italics in original) (Guba and Lincoln, 1985: 73). From this perspective knowledge is constructed

‘through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society’ (italics in original) (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011: 103). Researchers who adopt an interpretivist perspective *‘must participate in the research process with our subjects to ensure we are producing knowledge that is reflective of their reality’* (ibid.).

In this study, the researcher is attempting to understand how a Western concept of child-centred education is interpreted and implemented in the context of a Saudi Arabian public preschool. The researcher needs to understand this phenomenon from the perspectives of those involved in the design, administration and practice of public preschool education.

6.4.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and what is known (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The basic question is ‘How can what is assumed to exist be known?’ (Arthur et al, 2012: 16). All research is engaged in a search for knowledge but how we approach this task and the type of knowledge we can expect to find will be governed by more general philosophical questions about how we understand social reality which, in turn, will determine what are judged as the most suitable methods for studying it. In the case of cross-cultural research, these philosophical questions assume even greater importance because it is likely that the researcher will be dealing with more than one paradigm. O’Toole and Beckett (2010) contend that this can be a difficult balancing act for any researcher as “...teaching is a political, cultural and ideological act in which we are all situated very specifically” (O’Toole and Beckett, 2010: vii).

It is important that the researcher is aware of the fact that his/her ‘world view’ based on individual life experiences and knowledge will be implicit in the research process. It is crucial for the researcher to develop an ability to critically reflect on his/her theoretical position and to acknowledge its effect on the research process and the knowledge that is produced. This research can be categorized as subjectivist, transactional and interactive as ‘the findings are

literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two' (Guba, 1990: 27). As a Saudi woman, who trained and worked as a public preschool teacher, the researcher cannot be said to stand apart from the world of the participants who are the object of this study. Both the researcher (subject) and the participants (objects of the study) are engaged in co-constructing meanings.

6.5 Research Design and Strategy

According to Cheek, 'as specific investigations are planned and carried out, two issues must be confronted immediately: research design and choice of strategy of inquiry' (Cheek in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 375). The research design 'involves a clear focus on the research question, the purposes of the study, "what information most appropriately will answer the specific research questions, and which strategies are the most effective for obtaining it"' (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993: 30). The research design must provide guidelines for connecting the theoretical paradigms to the strategies of inquiry and to the chosen methods for collecting empirical data. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that:

A research design situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, people, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:14).

The ontological and epistemological assumptions will affect the positionality of the researcher, 'which in turn determines the methodology and methods chosen by them to conduct a research project' (Basit, 2010: 7). This research is based on a 'constructivist ontology/interpretivist epistemology' (Arthur et al, 2012: 16) because it is concerned with investigating social phenomena: the phenomenon of child-centred education in Saudi Arabia. This study is an investigation into what happens when two very different philosophical paradigms about child-centred preschool education are brought together in the context of Saudi public preschool education.

The strategy of inquiry is a small-scale qualitative enquiry. The main data collection methods used in this research are documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews, which are the most appropriate means to obtain trustworthy. These methods will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

6.6 Positionality

It is critical to pay attention to positionality, reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that are inherent in the research processes in order to undertake ethical research (Sultana, 2007: 380).

Consequently, ‘the identities of both researcher and participants have the potential to impact the research process’ (Bourke 2014). Our identities come into focus ‘via our perceptions, not only of others, but of the ways in which we expect others will perceive us’ (Bourke, 2014). According to Kezar (2002) ‘Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity’ (2002: 96). Positionality involves examining the nature of our values and value judgements as researchers are located in ‘an already interpreted world ... undermining the notion of objective reality’ (Cohen, Manion et al, 2011: 225). Consequently, it is important for the researcher to be self-reflexive in order to recognize the ways in which their own biases influence the research process. The recognition and acknowledgement of such biases can help researchers to ‘gain insights into how we might approach a research setting, members of particular groups, and how we might seek to engage with participants’ (Bourke, 2014).

One of the key debates within ethnographic research concerns the researcher’s position as an insider or outsider to the culture being studied and how this can affect the process of the research. As Sultana points out, positionality is ‘implicated in how one relates to the participants and what can/cannot be done vis-vis the research within the context of institutional, social and political realities’ (Sultana, 2007: 380). This issue and how it intertwines with social

and cultural identity is especially pertinent to the current research project, as Saudi Arabia is traditionally a very closed culture which is difficult for outsiders to access and research. The researcher's status as an insider i.e. a female Saudi Arabian Muslim citizen gave her privileged access to the participants and helped to facilitate access, rapport and trust. However, the social and cultural identity of the researcher also affects the interpretation of data in a qualitative study, which seeks to attribute meaning to the participants' voices.

My researcher identity is multi-dimensional. My ethnic background is Arabic/Asian. My mother is Indian and my father is Arabic and I grew up in a multi-lingual household in which Arabic, English and Urdu were spoken and written so I moved between languages and switched language codes. We were brought up within the Islamic religion as Muslims. My father is a traditional Saudi man, religiously observant and socially conservative, unlike my mother, who studied in a British school in India and was influenced by Western democratic cultural values under colonialism. Under pressure from my father, my mother conformed to the rigid religious and social norms in Saudi Arabia but did not observe them when she travelled to India.

My position as an insider/outsider to traditional Saudi culture and the research context was not straightforward and involved a continuously shifting positionality. As a female Arabic speaking researcher there were certain ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities I shared with the research participants. For example, I shared a macro-cultural identity as a marginalized Saudi Muslim woman with the research participants and there were shared cultural assumptions about gender and social norms. As someone of mixed ethnic heritage who is not 'pure' Arab I was viewed as socially inferior to those participants who could claim a tribal background and therefore a tribal name. A tribal heritage is synonymous with social and religious conservatism and is a marker of social distinction. My name identifies me as a tribal outsider from an urban background.

I am an insider in that I have an undergraduate degree in Early Childhood from a Saudi University and experience as a preschool teacher. I hold an MA from a British University which placed me as an ‘insider’ to those teachers who also qualified outside Saudi Arabia and shared my concern to facilitate more socially democratic teaching and learning practices. In terms of the power hierarchies, I was an outsider to the head teachers, to the administrators and to the supervisors from the Ministry of Education in Makkah.

Power hierarchies are also inherent in speaking and writing. Our locations in the social world influence how we see things, as Temple and Young point out, ‘there is no neutral position from which to translate’ (Temple & Young, 2004: 164). As a multilingual translator I am aware that simply consulting a dictionary will not reveal the meaning of a text but rather that ‘language is tied to local realities, to literacy forms and to changing identities’ (Simon, 1996: 137). This cross-cultural research project highlights the fact that communication across languages involves not literally conveying information but discussing the construction of ideas and concepts which are ways of seeing the world i.e. part of the cultural meaning. As Kaime (2011) points out, with reference to concepts in international law, quite often a translation will not ‘sufficiently reflect the idea’ or ‘the principle in its entirety’ (Kaime, 2011: 107). As both translator and interpreter I was required to make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carried. For example, Arabic contains no conceptual equivalent of the term child-centred. The Saudi Government uses the term self-learning to mean child-centred. My ability to research from inside the language of the participants and our shared common culture placed me in an advantageous epistemological position in terms of checking the validity of interpretation. This process of reflexivity not only affects the interpersonal relations within fieldwork but also has implications for researchers who are involved in cross-cultural research which requires representing voices from other cultures.

6.7 Sampling (Participants and Contextual Settings)

According to Cheek, ‘The who and what of qualitative studies involves ... instances of phenomena and/or social processes’ (2005: 378). Three public sector preschools and the Ministry of Education in Makkah, Saudi Arabia will provide the contextual settings. As this research study is about early childhood education, these institutions will provide the examples of data instances. There will be 28 participants in total: this number includes one senior Ministry of Education official (if such a person is available) and five Ministry of Education Supervisors. The school participants will include four Head Teachers, three Administrators plus five teachers from each school. The data sample will also include a range of educational policy documents. The final decision on which schools are selected for the research and which policy documents will be made available to the researcher will be taken by a Ministry of Education Official. Consequently, this research study is based on ‘purposive sampling’ and not ‘random sampling’ (Cheek, 2005, 378). A purposive sampling model allows the researcher to ‘seek out groups, settings and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur’ (Cheek, 2005: 378). An expansion on the strategy of purposive sampling (studying the particular in order to study the general) is given in the ‘method of instances’ (Cheek, 2005: 378). According to Cheek:

Every instance of a case or process bears the stamp of the general class of phenomenon to which it belongs. However, any given instance is likely to be particular and unique. Thus, for example, any given classroom is like all classrooms, but no two classrooms are the same (2005: 378).

Collecting data across three public preschools and the Ministry of Education will allow the researcher to engage in ‘a process of constant comparison – between groups, concepts, and observations’ (ibid.). The task of this researcher therefore is to understand how each ‘instance works and what rules of interpretation are operating, to map and illuminate the structure of the interpretive event itself’ (Cheek, 2005: 378). In Saudi Arabia, the design and implementation

of education at all levels is highly centralized which means that all of the public administration systems and the public sector preschools share certain structural features and overarching objectives. The educational policy documents including the curricula and assessment methods will be exactly the same across all the organizations. All of the research participants are female Muslims who are native speakers of Arabic. The teachers use the same lesson plans (although the implementation might vary according to the perspective, knowledge and experience of the teacher and her main influences). (See Appendices for teacher profiles).

A small-scale qualitative inquiry involving three public sector preschools will enable the researcher to:

present a rich description and details of the lived experiences of specific cases or individuals and offer an understanding of how these individuals perceive the various phenomena in the social world and their effect on themselves (ibid: 19-20).

By using three different public preschools in Makkah, the researcher can also take account of the differences and similarities in each context including the social and educational backgrounds of the interviewees. The interview data will be used to enable the researcher to ‘look at discrepancies between participants’ perceptions’ (ibid: 20). Another major advantage of this approach is that it can make a positive contribution to existing knowledge.

6.8 Data Collection Methods

6.8.1 Documentary Analysis

Within the theoretical framework of Practice Architectures the concept of child-centred education is viewed as ‘a form of socially established co-operative human activity’ comprised by sayings (what people understand, say and think), doings (actions and activities) and relatings (how people interact with each other) (Kemmis et al, 2014: 31). In order to develop an in-depth understanding of how the ‘distinctive project’ (ibid) of child-centred education is constructed and understood in Saudi Arabia the researcher will employ two methods of

empirical data collection: a) documentary analysis, b) semi-structured interviews. The use of two different data collection methods will allow the researcher to make ‘constant comparisons between groups, concepts and observations’ (Cheek, 2005: 378) in order to highlight the discursive, material and relational dimensions of practice in the Saudi context. The researcher will use information collected from the documentary sources to answer sub-question 5: ‘how is child-centred education constructed by the government in the public sector preschool in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?’ According to Mason (2002) such documents can be thought of as ‘constructions ... embedded in or constitutive of social or cultural relations, rather than revealing facts about them’ (Mason, 2002: 111). The researcher was given access to a range of documents which are not generally publicly available, including the existing Ministry of Education Executive plans, Educational Policies, Investment Plans, the structure of the kindergarten curriculum, health and safety requirements, job and person specifications, lesson plans, Government Reports on preschool provision and the *Teacher Guide Book 2013*. According to Scott (2000) policy documents are important sources of information as they reveal the underlying assumptions that form the basis of policy reforms (Scott, 2000: 27). They not only ‘represent an outlook or ideology’ but also ‘embody the contradictions and tensions that are inherent in state policy’ (Arthur et al, 2012, p: 213). Crucially, the authors warn against the idea that such documents ‘reflect educational practices in a straightforward manner’ (ibid: 29).

All of the documentary sources were translated from Arabic into English by the researcher. The English transcripts were then back-translated into Arabic by the researcher and checked against the initial Arabic documents to verify their accuracy. The documents were recorded using NVivo to classify the data and identify the main themes.

6.8.1.1 Conceptual Analysis of Documentary Data Using Practice Architecture as the Critical Lens

The three central concepts of Practice Architectures (sayings, doings and relatings) were used to provide an in-depth analysis of the purpose and meaning of child-centred education in the Saudi public sector preschool. Using these concepts as the critical lens enabled the researcher to reveal how the preschool functions as a site for teaching and learning and to understand how these educational policy documents function as meta-practices that are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by enabling and constraining factors. (Kemmis et al, 2014). As Kemmis et al point out, in order to transform practices there must be a change in what we say, what we do and how we relate to each other, which in turn requires a change in the practice architectures of the site in question (ibid.) Hence, the educational reforms in Saudi Arabia can be viewed as an attempt to change the practice architectures of the preschool. The Saudi Self-Learning curriculum is based on American High Scope and an approach known as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), which is based on the work of progressive educationalists including Friedrich Froebel, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. These thinkers have provided the dominant discursive frameworks or ‘sayings’ within which child-centred education is constructed and understood in America and Western Europe. The pedagogical principles or ‘doings’ are based on self-learning as the framework for implementation. The aim is to provide children with opportunities for independent learning to maximise their autonomy and agency in the classroom. This is education for democracy which requires ‘structures, practices and relationships’ (Kemmis, 2008: 3) or ‘relatings’ that are designed to ensure everyone has equal participatory rights.

In her analysis of what constitutes child-centred practice and the distinctive project of child-centred education the researcher was looking for evidence that the Government’s policy making and policy implementation come together in teaching and learning strategies that

respect the rights and autonomy of preschool children by maximizing their participation in classroom activities. The evidence collected from the documentary sources was used to support and reinforce the interview data (Yin 2003).

6.8.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

This method reflects the ontological and epistemological position of the researcher: ‘people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions are meaningful properties of social reality’ (Mason, 2002: 63-64). Semi-structured interviews assume that ‘a legitimate way to generate data on these ontological properties is to interact with people, to talk to them, to listen to them, and to gain access to their accounts and articulations’ (ibid.). These findings will be used to answer sub-question 6: ‘How is the concept of child-centred education perceived by a range of key educational stake holders?’ The aim of these interviews was to find out how those individuals involved in the administration, supervision and implementation of child-centred education understood the concept of child-centeredness and how they used their own knowledge, beliefs and values to inform their teaching practices in the preschool classroom. Conformity to socio-cultural norms and religious practices is an overriding value in Saudi Arabia. For this reason, semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method as they allow the researcher ‘greater flexibility to probe for detail in relation to a particular response’ whilst at the same time the questions can be ‘adapted to suit the needs of the interviewee’ (Mukherji and Deborah, 2015: 154). See Appendices for interview questions.

6.8.2.1 Piloting Semi-Structure Interview

The interview questions were piloted with one head teacher, one supervisor and one classroom teacher in August 2014. These initial interviews established that the questions were clearly formulated and that participants understood the concepts being used. The researcher was aware that whilst a mandate for the research had been granted by the government and the

school principals, some participants might feel that the questions were not legitimate. This was more likely to occur with participants from a tribal (i.e. religious and socially conservative) background. As there is often reluctance to express opinions which could be construed as against Islam and the government, the researcher was able to eliminate any questions that participants might feel uncomfortable about answering. On the basis of the pilot study, the researcher was satisfied that the questions were respectful of the values and practices already in place, whilst simultaneously creating the opportunity for the interviewee to contribute their views if they felt comfortable in doing so.

6.8.2.2 Conducting the Interviews

The interviews were undertaken by face-to-face interaction with twenty-eight female participants. The first six interviews were conducted at the women's section of the Ministry of Education in Makkah. The remaining twenty-two interviews were conducted at the three preschools in Makkah. Each interview lasted for between thirty minutes and one hour and was recorded verbatim using a small hand-held recording device. The researcher was highly aware of the need to conduct this research within the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) which stipulated that all participants:

...should be treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference (BERA, 2011: 5).

The researcher ensured that participants understood the interview process, why they had been asked to participate, how the findings would be used and how and to whom they would be reported. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research process at any time. The researcher respected their right to confidentiality and anonymity, for example, at the request of the participants, a number of interviews were conducted at a hotel to

protect their privacy. As requested by every participant, the researcher agreed to delete all of the audio recordings after transcription.

As Bazeley and Jackson point out, the process of transcription is important as it helps the researcher in ‘building familiarity’ with their data (2013: 57). The interview audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in Arabic by the researcher. The Arabic transcripts were translated into English. The English transcripts were then back-translated into Arabic by the researcher and checked against the audio tapes and the initial Arabic transcripts to verify their accuracy.

Transcribing involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules. Transcripts are not copies or representations of some original reality, they are interpretive constructions that are useful tools for given purposes (Kvale, 1996: 165).

The above quotation takes on even more significance when the transcription involves translating from one oral language into a different written language. To further verify their accuracy, the researcher randomly selected five back translated transcripts and asked the relevant participants to check their veracity.

The data was imported into NVivo. Each of the three schools was used to provide a data instance with the interview transcripts as the main source of information. The Ministry of Education provided the fourth data instance with the interview transcripts as the main information source. Each interview transcript was assigned to the case node for the relevant institution. As ‘verbatim transcripts reflect “the undigested complexity of reality”’ (Patton, 2002: 463) they require ‘classification to make sense of them’ (Bazeley, 2007: 66). Coding is one way of classifying data and identifying the main themes. The findings were presented in two separate chapters and were classified according to the main themes occurring in both sets of data. The themes identified in the policy documents were reflections of enabling and constraining factors in the Saudi government’s construction and understanding of child-centred

education. Similarly, the themes occurring in the interview data were reflections of enabling and constraining factors in the experiences, knowledge, values and beliefs of the educational stakeholders in this study.

6.8.2.3 Conceptual analysis of semi-structured interview data using Practice

Architecture as the critical lens

In her analysis of the interview findings the researcher was aiming to articulate and make explicit ‘the beliefs and implicit theories of early childhood educators, as well as to examine the conditions out of which they have emerged’ (Salamon et al, 2016: 432). These ‘embedded beliefs and taken-for-granted discourses’ can enable and constrain the practices of early childhood educators’ (ibid.). It is these ‘silent narratives’ or ‘sayings’ that play an important role in shaping the pedagogical experiences of children (ibid). The concepts of sayings, doings and relatings are used to explore and examine the characteristics of child-centred teaching and learning practices. How teachers understand and talk about the meaning and purpose of education will, in turn, shape their actions and influence how they relate to each other. In Chapter 3 the researcher provided an Islamic model of Practice Architecture to show how the concept of practice and its outcomes are shaped not only by the knowledge of participants but also by the socio-cultural context. Once these inter-related dimensions of ‘sayings, doings and relatings’ that comprise the distinctive project of Saudi child-centred education have been examined, early childhood educators ‘can then reflect on, analyse and critique the resulting social and power relations between children, adults and families, and how they might enable and constrain the ECCE experience of all involved’ (Salamon et al, 2016: 433).

The overarching aim of this project is to show how Vision 2030 is helping to improve the educational curriculum by providing the principal mechanism for bringing Western perceptions and understandings of child-centred education and a traditional Wahhabi approach to Islam into closer alignment. The researcher believes that Vision 2030 is transforming the practice

architectures of preschool education by shifting from a teacher-centred to a more student-centred educational philosophy. The focus on facilitating participation in education by promoting a more moderate, tolerant view of Islam will change how we talk and think, what we do and how we relate to each other. The researcher believes that these changes will open up further learning opportunities that are child-centred in the sense that they recognize each child as a unique individual Muslim with different skills, capacities and learning styles. Vision 2030 will also open up learning opportunities for teachers who must become part of the knowledge economy by learning to teach in ways that are significantly different from how they were taught themselves, as they do not rely on the traditional Islamic methods of memorising, prompting and repeating.

6.9 Ethical considerations and problems with data collection

This research project was carried out within the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011). The initial ethical permission for the research was granted by the Hull University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. According to BERA 2011:

Appropriate consent should be sought from local authorities in cultures that adopt a collective approach to consent (e.g. community or religious leaders or local government officials) (2011: 5).

My next step was to approach the Saudi Cultural Embassy in London and ask them to obtain permission on my behalf from the main Ministry of Education in Riyadh. Once I had been granted permission to conduct the research in selected educational institutions in Makkah, the Saudi Cultural Embassy authorized my departure from the UK to Saudi Arabia for the two phases of data collection. The process of obtaining these permission documents took between 6 to eight weeks to finalize.

There were two data collection trips to Saudi Arabia, with each trip taking around 3 weeks (July/August 2014 and July/August 2015). On my first trip (July/August 2014) I approached the Ministry of Education in Makkah to gain further permissions. All of these bureaucratic processes are mandatory. Once initiated, it was another two weeks before the documents were approved, which left only one week for data collection. The BERA guidelines note that ‘Any additional regulations and cultural sensitivities of the host jurisdiction must also be observed’ (2011: 6). In Saudi Arabia the socio-cultural norms governing both religion and gender must be strictly observed. Strict gender segregation applies to all areas of life in Saudi Arabia and women cannot travel unaccompanied so my husband took responsibility for collecting the authorization documents. All of the paperwork was dealt with by the men’s section of the Ministry of Education in Makkah. My husband gave copies of the permissions from Hull University and the Cultural Embassy, my UK student ID and his own ID to the Ministry of Education. He also supplied a copy of my interview questions which had been translated from English into Arabic. This translation was requested so that the Ministry could check that my questions did not contravene Islam or the authority of the government and clerics. I was asked to sign two papers testifying to this fact.

Once this paperwork was signed my husband was asked to return one week later. On his return he was given a letter granting permission for the two methods of data collection, information about which schools I was visiting, how many people I was allowed to interview and who they were. My participants included one senior official in the Education Department - five Ministry Supervisors, four head teachers, three administrators and fifteen preschool teachers. This official letter also contained details of the policy documents that I would be allowed to access.

I took this letter to the women’s section of the Ministry of Education where I found one senior official and five supervisors who were willing to participate in the research, subject to

the agreement of their husbands. Everyone was fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research and they were made aware that their voices would be recorded. I obtained their permissions using an Arabic translation of the Hull University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee Consent Form. Before obtaining their signatures each participant was also given a copy of the interview questions in Arabic and English. I was asked to swear on the Qur'an that the research was not against Islam or the Government and that I would erase the comments of the senior official as soon as the interview was transcribed and would maintain anonymity and confidentiality for all participants. All of these consent forms were resubmitted to the men's section of the Ministry of Education in Makkah with another approval letter issued by a senior official at the women's section. My husband returned all of these documents to the men's section and final approval was granted.

The official policy documents used for documentary analysis were preselected by the government. I did not have any choice regarding which documents were issued. All educational policy documents are created by the main Ministry of Education in Riyadh and copies are sent to the main regional ministries. The official documents given to my husband in hard copy for documentary analysis were as follows: Ministry of Education: Riyadh (2012) *The Executive Plan of the Agency's Education Girls and Boys: Early Years Education 2012*; Ministry of Education (2006) *Educational Policy Document: Government Decree 1 600/2R (2/12/2006)*; Ministry of Education (2006) *Educational Policy: Government Decree 446/21/1S24/110/123*; Ministry of Education, General Administration of Girls Education in Makkah, Kindergarten Administration, 1976-2013. *Regulation of the inner workings of the role of kindergarten in Saudi Arabia*; Ministry of Education Riyadh (2015) *Investment of the Current Reality of Kindergarten in Educational Regions and Provinces*.

My first interview was with a senior official in the women's section of the Ministry of Education. After the interview, the following documents were issued in hard copy for my

documentary analysis: Ministry of Education (2006) *General Structure of the Self-Learning Curriculum in Early Years Education*; Ministry of Education 2013-2014. The General Presidency for Girl's Education, the General Directorate for Educational Guidance, Kindergarten Division: *List of Internal Organization of Work in Nurseries (2013-2014) Report about the roles of early years education in the preschool in Saudi Arabia*; Ministry of Education 2013-2014 *Teacher Guide Book*.

The next task was to visit the three schools allocated for research. The following documents for analysis were issued by the schools: Ministry of Education 2014 *The Ministry of Education plans for the Early Years School 2014 (design use in descriptions of schools)*; Ministry of Education 2014-2015 *Lesson Plan: Book Unit*. The government told me I could interview the preschool head teacher, one administrator and five classroom teachers from each school. I was not able to conduct all of the interviews during my first trip and returned to complete them on my second trip in July/August 2015. In each case I followed the same procedure for obtaining consent - outlined above once I had made sure that participants were fully aware of the nature and purpose of the research. Each participant had obtained prior permission from her husband before taking part.

The BERA guidelines note that 'Ethical issues also arise when researching in sensitive situations influenced by contexts of cultural difference and which impact on educational experience' (2011: 6). Some potential interviewees had already rejected my request as they were concerned about the sensitive nature of the information and for this reason, were not comfortable with having their voices recorded. A number of interviewees expressed concern about their jobs and requested that the interviews be conducted at my hotel, where they could speak more freely. Whenever interviews took place outside the school, the women were always accompanied by their husbands.

The researcher assured the participants that all data would be kept in a safe and secure file with their anonymity protected and no names displayed. The researcher agreed to the request from all interviewees that the voice recordings would be deleted immediately after the transcriptions were completed and checked.

6.10 Summary

This chapter has provided the rationale for the research design and strategy adopted in this study. The chapter began by explaining the philosophical and theoretical assumptions underpinning the study followed by a description of the research sample and setting of this small-scale qualitative study. The main research question is ‘how does using Practice Architecture to explore child-centred education in the public preschools in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030?’ To provide a comprehensive answer, six sub-questions were devised. The appropriate data collection methods were identified as Documentary Analysis and Semi-Structured Interviews. Both sets of data were thematically analysed to identify how child-centred teaching and learning shapes and is shaped by enabling and constraining factors within the Saudi context. The theory of Practice Architecture also provided the critical lens for the subsequent stages of analysis in the Discussion Chapter. In compliance with the BERA guidelines on researching in different cultural contexts, the final section highlighted any potentially challenging issues which might arise in relation to this study.

Chapter 7 – Documentary Analysis and Data Instances: the Ministry of Education and Three Preschools in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the documentary analysis part of this research. The Saudi national policy documents used for analysis include Government Policy documents and Reports, Executive Plans, the Teacher Guidebook, lesson plans and the Self-Learning Curriculum. These documents were analysed using the NVivo program to identify the main themes, sub-themes and secondary sub-themes. These themes were used to provide the main headings and sub-headings for this section. The concept of Practice Architecture was used as the critical lens through which to analyse and interpret the data.

As noted in Chapter 3, the theory of Practice Architectures is based on a conception of practices as ‘sayings’, ‘doings’ and ‘relatings’, which are enacted by individual practitioners’ (Salamon et al, 2016: 434). According to Kemmis et al (2014) these *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* are an expression of the relationship between individuals and their particular practices:

a relationship in which the participant speaks the language characteristic of the practice (*sayings*), engages in the activities of the practice in the set-ups characteristic of the practice (*doings*), and enters relationships with other people and objects characteristic of the practice (*relatings*) (Kemmis et al., 2014: 31).

Education policy documents are examples of ‘meta-practices’ within the theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008: 9) which shape and influence how the theory-practice relationship is constructed and understood. These documents provide information about the ‘sayings’ or ‘discursive conditions’ of practice, that is, ‘the relationship that prevails between ‘hearers and speakers’ (Schatzki 2002) and ‘the ‘doings’ or work practices, that is, the relationships between educators and learners’ (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69). An

examination of these policy documents revealed how the wider religious and socio-cultural context shapes and influences relationships between educational stakeholders and what issues the Government considers are of primary importance when producing its educational policies.

Saudi Arabia is a hierarchical country and this is reflected in the centralization of education. Authority for the design, content and implementation of the Saudi public education system is vested in the main Ministry of Education in the capital city: Riyadh. This Ministry oversees all of the regional ministries, including the Early Years Ministry of Education in Makkah. Appendix A provides a visual model to illustrate this organizational hierarchy.

7.2 Aim of documentary analysis

This information in this chapter will be used to answer sub-question 5: ‘how is child-centred education constructed by the government in the public sector preschool in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?’ The researcher was looking for evidence that the Government’s policy making and policy implementation come together in teaching and learning strategies that respect the rights and autonomy of preschool children by maximizing their participation in classroom activities. The degree to which Western educational principles and practices are relevant in the Saudi context has become a pressing concern since the advent of Vision 2030: Saudi Government’s 10th Development Plan.

7.3 Main theme: Self-Learning

The first significant finding to emerge from the documentary analysis concerns the concept of child-centred learning. The term child-centred is not used in any of the official policy documents. Unlike Europe and America there is little history, theory or practice associated with the term in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned in Chapter 6, when translated from Arabic the term child-centred simply means the centre of the child. For this reason, the Saudi Government uses the term the Self-Learning Curriculum for Kindergarten to refer to its child-centred curriculum. This substitute term is intended to convey the idea of the child learning by him/herself. The

current Self-Learning Curriculum for Kindergarten dates back to 2006 when the Government issued a policy directive to all public preschools in the Kingdom under the title *The General Structures of the Self-Learning Curriculum in Early Years Education in Saudi Arabia*. Unlike the West, where ‘God is virtually unmentionable in public schools’ (Elliott House, 2013: 142) this document makes evident the role of the religious leaders in designing and shaping educational policy. The following statement is an example of how relationships of power and solidarity are realized in social space. This directive:

...sets out the obligation of all government preschools in all regions and cities in Saudi Arabia (2001) to implement the self-learning curriculum on the orders of the Minister of Education and clerics. This document must provide supervisors in education and head teachers and teachers, with the general structures of self-learning in Early Years as indicated by the Minister of Education and clerics (MOE, 2006).

The Saudi Government has based its reformed curriculum on a model of child-centred education first developed 40 years ago in America by David Weikart entitled *The High/Scope Curriculum – Active Learning through key experiences*. These reforms are also informed by the idea of Developmentally Appropriate Practice. The guiding principle of High Scope is ‘the belief that children learn best through active experiences with people, materials, events and ideas, rather than through direct teaching or sequenced exercises’ (OECD, 2004: 8). The Saudi Government have interpreted this idea to mean the child learns by himself which explains the concept of a Self-Learning curriculum. The policy document *General Structures of the Self-Learning Curriculum in Early Years Education in Saudi Arabia*, offers the following definition of self-learning:

The self-learning approach is focused on different activities and the child learns through engaging with the wider environment including (people, materials or resources and activities) and receiving support from the teacher (MOE, 2006).

In principle, this definition appears to conform to Western-based concepts of child-centred education: the child learns from their own activities which are, to a large extent, self-initiated.

This approach is based on the belief that children are naturally predisposed to learn when they are driven by their own inner motivations (needs and interests). The policy goes on to specify that the ‘teacher must plan curricular activities to help the child’s development based on the child’s needs’ however it also goes on to state:

The teacher can observe each child and take his needs and wishes into consideration but the activities are pre-determined in the curriculum. The activities are pre-determined based on what the government and clerics have decided the child’s needs and interests should be (MOE, 2006).

In its updated version of the policy produced seven years later the government states:

This does not indicate that the teacher can adapt the unit to suit the child but rather that she must match the child to the unit which has already been designed by the government to meet preset objectives (MOE, 2013a: 13).

These directives reveal that the Self-Learning Curriculum is culturally *adapted* and differs markedly from Western definitions of a child-centred curriculum. There is a tension between a child-centred approach in which children are provided opportunities for self-directed, active learning and an Islamic approach in which children are directed and guided based on religious beliefs and practices. Three other main themes emerged from the data: religion, culture and pedagogy. The concept of Practice Architectures provides a critical lens through which to examine and understand how this intertwining of religion (relatings), culture (sayings) and pedagogy (doings) shapes and influences the government’s understanding and implementation of child-centred education (Kemmis et al. 2014).

7.3.1 Self Learning: Religion

As schooling is a primary tool of socialization, religion is an area in which there is a substantial degree of *adaptation* in terms of the original curriculum design. Hence, religion emerged as a key theme with a sub-theme: religion and social control. The following statement in the *Teacher Guidebook* explains the origin of policies on preschool education which are:

...derived from the general educational policy for the country stemming from the Islamic principle, the values of Islamic society, heritage, culture, civilization, tribal traditions and the distinct social, economic conditions and circumstances (MOE, 2013a: 17).

Faith (*aqeedah*) is at the core of Ibn Wahhab's teaching and 'is the foundation of a person's life and actions' (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 80). Within Wahhabi teachings there is nothing more important than 'belonging to the *umma*, or community of believers' (Elliott House, 2013: 17). As a result, 'Straying in matters of belief and faith has ramifications for one's entire outlook, goal, purpose and behaviour' (ibid.). To avoid this happening, Saudi educational policies direct that:

Islam is seeking to take the child from birth and teach him the values and practices of Islam until he reaches the stage of mature moral development exemplified by the Prophet Mohammed (MOE, 2013a: 61-62).

The *Main Executive Plan of the Agency* (2012) defines the main role of the preschool as follows: 'The Government will prepare children for understanding the Qur'an and familiarize them with their religion' (MOE, 2012). The influence of Al-Hanbali and Al-Ghazali who refused any separation between religion and life is evident in the *General Structures of the Self-Learning Curriculum*, which specifies that:

The knowledge the child receives in the early year's school cannot be separated from the child's home life or from Islam. If there is a separation the child will not be able to achieve (MOE, 2006).

These educational aims are socio-culturally and religiously specific and they are supported by the Government in close consultation with the clerics. The *Teacher Guide Book* explains that these educational aims 'must be carefully put together in the curriculum based on Islamic method' (MOE, 2013a: 17). Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the basic religious tenets should be 'instilled' into the child by the age of seven so that he can perform 'the ritual ablutions and prayers' (Nofal, 2000: 7). The *Teacher Guide Book* advises that the first aim of

preschool education is for the child to ‘develop a religious instinct based on monotheism as the natural direction’ and the child must ‘recognize the concept of God and the Prophet Mohammed based on Islamic beliefs and heritage’ (MOE, 2013a: 19). The above policy statement serves to illustrate the way in which religion is intertwined with all aspects of education. To implement a Western style curriculum with no degree of adaptability would, in the Government’s view, lack cultural legitimacy and present considerable barriers to the child’s ability to learn.

These extracts from the policy documents reveal the areas of tension that exist when the aims of the self-learning curriculum are brought together with a curriculum based on Wahhabi Islam.

7.3.1.1 Religion: Social Control

Within Wahhabi Islam, methodology is crucial in ensuring that individuals attain the beliefs and practices of Islam. Every Muslim child is taught the five pillars of Islam and the Sunnah the example set by the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed is considered the ideal or Best Model of behaviour. In the preschool classroom:

... because this stage is so dangerous. The teacher has significant responsibility for directing and guiding the child in accordance with Islamic beliefs and practices (MOE, 1976).

Taking into consideration the ethics of the child’s behaviour and facilitating the absorption of the Islamic faith through the right tendencies of the teachers using a good example of the role model of the Prophet Mohamed in front of the child (MOE, 2013a: 19).

As these policy stipulations reveal, the concept of child development is understood primarily in religious and spiritual terms. The teacher must:

...direct the child to reach specific behavioural goals until he reaches the stage of mature moral development exemplified by the Prophet Mohammed (MOE, 2013a: 61-62).

According to the *Teacher Guidebook* ‘the first aim of directing the child’s behaviour is to ensure that he has internalized the principles and values of Islam and is guided and controlled by them’ (MOE, 2013a: 61-62). The *Teacher Guidebook* goes on to stipulate that:

The teacher must understand the principles of child development and be knowledgeable about the program for working with children such as games, stories and Islamic songs (MOE, 2013a: 20).

Prior to Vision 2030, education was viewed solely as the means to perpetuate a devout, conservative Islamic society. Consequently, Saudi children were educated within a religious framework based on obedience and submission, despite the fact that Western-style pedagogies based on ‘games, stories and songs’ are incorporated into the curriculum.

7.3.2 Self-Learning: Culture

According to (NAEYC, 1996, Hyun, 1998), Developmentally Appropriate Practice has become Developmentally and Contextually Appropriate Practice (DCAP) ‘to highlight that *what we learn* and *how we learn* are informed and influenced by the cultures of particular communities’ (Papatheodorou and Potts , 2013: 60). The culture of Saudi Arabia is derived from a long history of civilization that dates back to the original nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Rāshid, 1986). The Government’s educational policies place considerable emphasis on teaching children about this rich Islamic and tribal heritage. Young children are taught about Saudi cultural traditions, for example, the *Teacher Guide Book* directs the teacher to ‘ask the child to draw some examples of cultural objects, such as Arabic coffee kettles, dates and palm trees’ (MOE, 2013a: 237). The sword (depicted on the Saudi flag) is drawn in order to teach the child about how King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud defended the Arabian Peninsula. Teaching materials include wall pictures of the desert which the teacher should discuss with the children to inform them about the geography and climate of the country. The children receive scientific explanations about natural phenomena such as the effects of wind and sand

but in the *Teacher Guide Book*, they are also reminded that ‘God created the environment around them’ (MOE, 2013a: 125).

7.3.2.1 Culture: Social Hierarchy

The policy documents reveal the strict hierarchy of relations that prevails in the preschool. There are clear codes and conventions governing every aspect of communication, as indicated in the *Report about the roles of early years education in the preschool in Saudi Arabia*, which stipulates that:

The head teachers must understand all the roles in the preschool and divide the work amongst the employees (all employees) using her own judgment. If the supervisor does not agree with the head teacher’s decisions she will be asked to change her plans (MOE, 2013b).

The head teacher is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school where she ‘supervises the records and files and must monitor the teachers as they register in and sign out every day’ (MOE, 2013b). Head teachers do not have the power to make decisions. Authority is vested in the main Ministry in Riyadh and conveyed via the Minister of Education in Makkah to the supervisors who then pass authority on to the head teachers. Many of the teachers are trained professionals who hold degree level qualifications nevertheless their classroom activities are carried out under strict surveillance and monitoring by their superiors:

The teachers must follow the instructions and guidance of the head teachers and supervisors in order to understand how the education process is implemented in the classroom (MOE, 2013b).

The supervisor evaluates the teacher’s performance and she instructs the teachers on which training courses they must undertake to develop their professional skills. The supervisor monitors the teacher to ensure that she undertakes the training and she reports back to the Minister of Education about the outcome of the meeting and what has been advised. If the teacher does not undertake the recommended training, her salary will be cut. If a second notice

is issued she risks losing her job (MOE, 2013b). Any direct communication between teachers and supervisors is virtually impossible as it must be mediated through the headmistress:

The teacher must meet with the head teacher to discuss exactly what she has taught in the classroom and what she plans to teach the following day (MOE, 2013b).

This hierarchical system of relations is reflected in the way the concept of learning is constructed and understood. For both teachers and children, learning is non-participatory in the sense that all the classroom activities in the units are pre-planned and closely monitored. This approach makes it difficult for the teacher to respond flexibly to the needs of individual children. Any attempt to establish democratic and reciprocal relationships between teachers and children is compromised by the fact that children are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy where obedience and submission are religious and socio-cultural requirements.

7.3.2.2 Culture: Gender

The *Report about the roles of early year's education in the preschool in Saudi Arabia* stipulates that 'the child must be aware of the importance of segregation in Islamic religion and culture' (MOE, 2013b). In keeping with this requirement the Report orders that 'the school must be closed on all sides for religious reasons to protect women' and that 'women should be hidden from male view' (MOE, 2013b). One consequence of these rules is that opportunities for physical exercise and outdoor play are very restricted. The *Ministry of Education plans for the Early Years school* (2014) state that 'The school buildings include an outside playground which is located inside the building' for reasons including 'the weather, religion and gender segregation' which prohibit 'a park or garden outside the school' (MOE, 2014). Prior to Vision 2030, women were not allowed to drive, which limited other outdoor activities such as visits to local attractions, trips to the zoo or the beach that might be used to support multi-modal learning and to encourage creativity.

In the Family Corner the children are directed to engage in gender-appropriate role play activities, as indicated in the *Report about the roles of early years education*:

Clothes are available including Arabic dress for men and women, accessory items for men such as a wallet and car keys are also provided (MOE, 2013b).

As 'swapping gender roles is forbidden' (MOE, 2013a: 134-5) teachers are instructed to:

monitor the children closely to observe whether they are carrying out their gender roles correctly and to check whether they are following the correct modes of behaviour (MOE, 2013a: 134-5).

It is extremely important that the children do not mimic the roles of 'the King, or a prince or the government' as this would be considered highly disrespectful (MOE, 2013a: 134-5). In the Family Corner the girls are supplied with 'needle, thread, buttons and fabric' (ibid.). Gender segregation is used to maintain socio-political arrangements or 'relationships' that are hierarchical and patriarchal. For this reason, gender is another dimension of exclusion which limits children's freedom of choice and autonomy in the preschool classroom.

7.3.2.3 Culture: Childhood

The Western image of 'childhood' is not evident in the policy documents. The traditional Arabic view is that the child is ignorant (*jahil*) and incapable of independent thought and action until the age of seven. The use of role modelling as the main method of instruction places strong pressure on children to model their speech and behaviour on the adults around them. Unlike the Western child who is viewed as a co-creator of knowledge (Arleen and Dodd-Nufrio, 2011) Saudi children are expected to engage in classroom activities quietly and unquestioningly in compliance with the wishes of the teacher. Using the Prophet Mohamed as the Best Model conflicts with Western notions of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) which advocates play-based learning for very young children. Haughton and Ellis (2013), contend that 'play is an activity that children undertake for pleasure and is one of their primary needs in their development' (2013: 76). The concept of play as a learning strategy which facilitates

all aspects of development is not common to Saudi culture and is not widely understood nor accepted.

7.3.2.3.1 Childhood: Good Child/Bad Child

DAP is the outcome of teacher's decision-making based on three key considerations: knowledge about children's learning and development, the teacher's own knowledge about what is suitable for each child and the school and cultural context in which children are based (Rajab and Wright, 2018: 553). Yet in the preschool classroom the emphasis is on making children into good Muslims, rather than giving them 'a sense of control over their own activities' (French 2012: 130). Consequently, what constitutes good and bad behaviour is clearly specified in policy documents, which contain sets of rules for both teachers and children to follow to ensure that children behave correctly. The good child is rewarded verbally or with sweets and toys:

- The child must imitate the teacher when dealing with the things around him such as the corner activities.
- The child must imitate the teacher's clothing.
- The child must imitate the teacher's style of communication
- The child must imitate the teacher as the best role model for implementing Islamic values (MOE, 2013a: 71).

Examples of bad behaviour include:

- The child forgets to say the Quran when he begins his meal and the child forgets to thank God after he finishes his food
- The child talks in a loud voice and replies badly to the teachers without listening and respecting her
- The child cries and shouts in the classroom
- The child depends on the teacher to go to the toilet and when eating his food
- The child refuses to listen to the teachers
- The child refuses to read the Quran

- The child refuses to practice his written academic skills
- The child moves from his place and interferes with other children who are busy playing
- The child refuses to play with the corner activities
- The child starts one project and does not finish it and begins another
- The child rejects Islamic practices such as praying (MOE, 2013a: 61-62)

The *Teacher Guide Book* advises teachers that punishment is acceptable ‘as a method for changing bad behaviour into morally acceptable behaviour’ (MOE, 2013a: 71). Acceptable methods of punishment include ‘violently shaking and holding the child by the shoulders’, telling the child “you are lazy”, “you are not clever”, “you are dull”, and “you are not intelligent” (ibid.). Being punished and humiliated for not learning the rules or for making mistakes is not a child-centred practice.

7.3.3 Self-Learning: Pedagogy

The term pedagogy relates to the ‘how’ of educating. It is defined as

that set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and to the learning environment” (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002: 28).

Pedagogy also concerns the issue of “how” of adult and child interact, whilst recognizing that how children learn and develop at this stage is not just affected by ‘*what is intended to be taught*, but it is also of particular importance *how it is facilitated*’ (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002). One of the questions arising over the meaning of pedagogy is whether it should be based on a set of rules and principles or whether it should be regarded as an art or craft (Stephen, 2010). In the context of this thesis pedagogy is understood in terms of the definition put forward by Alexander in which pedagogy:

Encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it. Pedagogy connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure, and mechanisms of social control (Alexander, 2001: 214).

According to this definition pedagogy contains not only all the teaching elements but also other factors including ideas about the nature of children, the purpose of education and knowledge and understanding about how they learn. The Saudi preschool environment mirrors the wider culture where it is deemed to be in the best interests of children to be initiated into the Islamic religion, to learn the rules and obey them.

7.3.3.1 Pedagogy: Aim of Early years Education

In the policy document entitled *General Structure of the self-learning Curriculum in Early year's Education* (2006) the government's educational aims are derived primarily from:

...the Islamic heritage on human education and development supported by clerics and government' which provides 'the pillars of the self-learning curriculum (MOE, 2006).

Six years later in its *Executive Plan of the Agency's Education Girls and Boys 2012* the Saudi Government restated its policy in relation to early years education. Firstly, it aims to 'prepare children for understanding the Qur'an and familiarize them with their religion' and secondly:

The government and clerics will adopt methods of educating children how to read and write that are compatible with the self-learning curriculum and children's development (MOE, 2012).

Both of these statements refer to self-learning and development but it should be noted that this is an *adapted* curriculum because these terms are understood within the moral and religious framework of Islam. According to the *Teacher Guidebook*, which was produced at the same time, the purpose of early years education is to 'support and guide the child' towards

achieving ‘achieving a high level of competency’ and crucially ‘to develop his views and behaviour and role in life in the right Islamic way’ (MOE, 2013a: 19).

7.3.3.2 Pedagogy: Teacher’s Role

In *Regulation of the inner workings of the kindergarten* (2013) the Government defines the teacher’s job as ‘multidimensional’ because she is ‘simultaneously a teacher, mother, wise person, social worker and nursemaid’ (MOE, 2013d). In line with Western developmental aims which focus on the whole child, this policy stipulates that the teacher must ‘attend to the child and help him to grow and develop mentally, physically, emotionally and socially and to ensure his physical health’ (MOE, 2013d). This same policy document is responding to the government’s duties under the UNCRC when it stipulates that in the preschool:

The child must feel free to work and develop his abilities and to express himself without fear this will facilitate the development of the child’s natural abilities. The early years teacher must provide a suitable environment which helps the teacher to discover the child’s natural abilities and talents (MOE, 2013d).

The above quotation appears to be advocating a rights-based, child-centred approach in which the child’s interests and needs are the primary focus. However, the extent to which these freedoms can be realized depends on how teaching and learning is constructed in theory and practice in the preschool classroom.

7.3.3.3 Pedagogy: Teacher’s Knowledge

Early Years teachers must hold an undergraduate degree and have undertaken additional training courses in the Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed and in Self-Learning. The *Teacher Guide Book* (2013a) is produced by the Government and clerics and it is considered the complete and comprehensive resource for Early Years Teachers. The *Executive Plan of the Agency’s Education Girls and Boys* (2012) states that the aim of this ‘self-learning package’ is ‘for the teacher to become proficient in creative learning and to pass these skills on to the child’

(MOE, 2012). Despite the emphasis on creative learning the *Teacher Guide Book* contains explicit instructions on how to ‘implement the curriculum in the classroom in the right way (to enable the child to reach the aims set out in the curriculum)’ (MOE, 2013a). These specifications are contained in ‘a strict lesson plan that is set out in the guide book daily, weekly and yearly’ (MOE, 2013a). The lesson plans in the *Teacher Guide Book* apply to all of the units that comprise the Corner Activities in the Self-Learning curriculum. According to instructions from the government and clerics:

The teacher must deal with all of the units individually and train herself to be skilful and creative in these units and make these activities and units suitable for the children’s tendencies and needs (MOE, 2013a: 13).

Through training she is able to meet the interests of the children. This does not indicate that the teacher can adapt the unit to suit the child but rather that she must match the child to the unit which has already been designed by the government to meet pre-set objectives (ibid.).

7.3.3.4 Pedagogy: Child Development

In *General Structures of the Self-Learning Curriculum* (2006) the Saudi government has divided its preschool classrooms into seven Learning Corners. In line with the American High Scope curriculum, each corner has ‘two parts: one to develop physical motor skills and one to develop mental skills’ (MOE, 2006). Although these corners are intended to allow children to meet their ‘needs and interests’ these activities come under the ‘instruction and direction of educated teachers who are a good example to imitate’ (MOE, 2006). Consequently, there is no space for child-centred practices.

In a later policy entitled *Executive Plan of the Agency’s education for Girls and Boys* (2012) the Government’s stated aim is to ‘Establish a model of kindergarten that is consistent with developmental standards’ (MOE, 2012). To meet the requirements of a Western style DAP curriculum, the Government instructs head teachers ‘to provide a good educational environment for building the child’s personality in all aspects of child development’ (MOE,

2013a). The policy refers to Key Stages: Key Stage 1 should be 3-4 years; Key Stage 2 should be from 4-5 years; Key Stage 3 should be 5-6 years (*Report about early years education in the preschool in Saudi Arabia, 2013b*). The report stipulates ‘These years are important for achieving and investigating the healthy growth of children especially their religion and physical and mental skills’ (MOE, 2013a).

The corner activities are intended to provide the children with self-directed learning opportunities. Yet, in the Library Corner, ‘the teacher explains to the child what is in the library and how he should behave and what he should do’ (MOE, 2013a: 129). Free play is not advocated rather ‘The child needs to follow the teacher’s instructions concerning how to use his senses correctly in the play time’ (ibid. 170-171). During physical activity sessions ‘movement to develop healthy physical balance and flexibility in the playground’ takes place ‘under the teacher’s guidance’ (MOE, 2013a: 170-171). The idea of free play as both a democratic right and a developmental need is absent from these policy stipulations: development is defined primarily in terms of motor skills and hand eye co-ordination. There is no space for activities designed to help children develop a sense of autonomy and independence through an active and creative engagement with activities and interests chosen by the child.

Perhaps more importantly, in *Regulation of the inner working of the kindergarten*, the Government designates:

The period of time that the child spends in the preschool is the beautiful beginning of his life and it considered as an important period of child development. It is the time when his personality is forming and he is discovering his identity (MOE, 2013d).

The preschool stage is crucially important because it is seen primarily as the time when the child is beginning to develop religiously and spiritually. He or she is acquiring a Muslim identity by learning the Qur’an and engaging in the daily rituals of Islamic practices.

7.3.3.5 Pedagogy: Rules for Teachers and Children

The preschool classroom is a highly regulated environment in which ‘The child must imitate the teacher when dealing with the things around him such as the corner activities’ (MOE, 2013a: 61-62). In the Construction Corner, the *Teacher Guide Book* stipulates that:

Children should build their structures only to the height specified by the teacher. They should work quickly and silently. If the child wants to build more than one thing he must remain in the space allotted to him by the teacher (MOE, 2013a:125).

In the Art Corner: ‘The child must draw quietly and the teacher must stop the child if he is making a noise and disrupting other children’ and in the Library Corner, ‘The main rule stipulates that children must be quiet when they read’ (MOE, 2013a: 125). Circle Time is an important aspect of the Self-Learning Curriculum, which is supposed to provide children with an opportunity to engage in creative story telling. Yet the Teacher Guidebook stipulates that ‘The child must listen to the teacher and follow her plan’ (MOE, 2013a: 125).

The strict rules that apply to the daily life of all Wahhabi Muslims also permeate all aspects of school life. Lunch breaks are not viewed as an opportunity for children to socialize, instead they are an opportunity for instruction: children must use ‘the Islamic attitude especially when eating and drinking’ and ‘The teacher tells the child to not speak during meal time’ (MOE, 2013a).

7.3.3.6 Pedagogy: Prompting

An Islamic education places a high value on young children learning Arabic language skills in order to read and write the Qur’anic verses. Learning is facilitated using the traditional method of prompting, memorizing and repeating. The *Teacher Guide Book* reflects the influence of Al Hanbal and Al Ghazali who stated that ‘the first aim of directing the child’s behaviour is to ensure that he has internalized the principles and values of Islam and is guided and controlled by them’ (MOE, 2013a: 61-62).

The teacher repeats the Qur'an to the child and he is expected to repeat the verses after her. If the children do not understand the words or the verses the material is repeated the next day' (MOE, 2013a: 129).

Let the child repeat what he has learned from the teacher. The new concept will be instilled in his brain by repeating what he learned from the teacher (ibid).

This method of memorization, repetition and imitation has found its way into all aspects of the Self-Learning Curriculum. Whilst participating in the self-learning activities 'The child must understand he is able to learn by the ideal role model and the teacher reminds the child continually to copy' (MOE, 2013a: 170-171). Teachers are ordered to:

... interfere to direct the child's behaviour and to push the child's learning process. The teacher has the right to push the child to follow her instructions during the game' (MOE, 2013a: 170-171).

This approach is the opposite of a Western child-centred pedagogy based on 'modelling, demonstrating and questioning while engaging in fun and active experiences' (Haughton and Ellis, 2013: 79).

7.3.3.7 Pedagogy: 'Doing Experiments'

The policy stipulates that 'The aim of the self-learning approach is to allow the child to experiment and discover and do activities supported by teachers' (MOE, 2006). However, the idea of children learning experientially through a direct engagement with the learning resources in collaboration with the classroom teacher is largely absent from the Self-Learning Curriculum. Instead, the children are directed to copy experiments first carried out by the teacher. For example, the *Teacher Guide Book* under *Brief Plan of the Daily Activities* contains the following instructions:

The teacher chooses the scientific experiment from the guidebook for the child. The teacher presents this activity to the child and instructs the child to copy her (MOE, 2013a: 170-171).

This approach, based on memorization, repetition and imitation is diametrically opposed to the recommendations of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project (EPPE, 1997-2004), which identified ‘sustained shared thinking’ within adult-child interactions as a necessary prerequisite for excellent early years practice (Haughton and Ellis, 2013: 78). This approach uses ‘modelling, demonstrating and questioning’ but crucially ‘while engaging in fun and active experiences’ (ibid. 2013: 79). The idea of modelling and demonstrating acquires a different meaning in Saudi Arabia when filtered through the paradigm of Wahhabi Islam. Consequently, this results in a complete misunderstanding of how children develop their cognitive and creative skills as highlighted in the following statement:

These experiment and discovery activities help the child to develop his cognitive abilities as he practices his ideas and tries to develop them by watching the teacher and experimenting (MOE, 2013a: 170-171).

7.3.3.8 Pedagogy: Curriculum

Saracho and Spodek (2001: 1) have suggested that a curriculum can be defined as ‘an anthology of learning experiences, conceived and arranged based on a program’s educational goals and the community’s social forces’. As noted, the early years preschool classroom is divided into seven corners: Library Corner, Construction Corner, Family Corner, Technical Art Corner, Cognitive Corner, Reading and Writing Corner, Experiment and Discovery Corner (MOE, 2013a: 125). There is an academic rather than a creative focus in the curriculum because the ability to read and interpret the Qur’an correctly is seen as the socio-cultural norm:

The teacher must read to the child with a focus on developing the child’s academic vocabulary and his memory, his writing, listening and speaking skills and his cognitive skills (MOE, 2013a: 125).

7.3.3.8.1 Curriculum: Corner Activities

The corner activities are intended to allow the children a degree of choice about which activities and materials they want to use and how they want to engage with them. These

activities are intended to stimulate creativity by allowing the child to follow their own interests.

Yet, within the religious and moral framework of Islam certain symbolic representations are forbidden (*haram*). In the Art Corner:

The teacher asks the children to draw specific things such as garden, tree, sea, mountains, landscape, building and mosques without allowing the child to draw humans and animals because of the strict Islamic rules in the Holy Qur'an (MOE, 2013a: 125).

If the child is interested in drawing humans and animals the teacher must stop the child drawing and explain that it is forbidden in our culture (ibid).

The system of *halal* and *haram* controls the minds and behaviour of all Muslims and it places severe restrictions on the self-learning curriculum, which in turn, limits the development of creativity, imagination and critical thinking skills. The Government specifies that in the

Library Corner:

...All books must be religious and the contents are strictly censored and must not include pictures of humans or animals. Stories about these topics are allowed but they must not be represented figuratively (MOE, 2013a: 125).

The Government's policy document *Regulation of the inner workings of the kindergarten* stipulates that during Circle Time:

The child's needs are based on the teacher telling the child stories about the Prophet Mohamed's childhood and his historic stories in order to introduce the greatness of Islam as a whole and to help the child to follow the correct behaviour based on Islamic beliefs and attitudes (MOE, 2013d).

Stories about the Prophet Mohamed are part of the narrative history of Saudi Arabia and they inform how the country sees itself and its citizens including its children. Teaching children about Islam is intended to provide the answers to three basic questions: 'Who is Allah? Who is your Prophet? What is your religion?' (MOE, 2008: 11). These questions always form the basis from which to move on to other subjects. Notwithstanding the importance of religion, these doctrinal requirements and prohibitions inevitably come into conflict with a child-centred approach to education that aims to develop the capacity for independent thought and action by maximizing autonomy and participation rights in the classroom. To this end, children must be

given many opportunities to exercise freedom of choice and expression. From a Western perspective, providing children with direct and active learning experiences is seen as central to a meaningful life and the development of self-identity (OECD, 2004: 8). From an Islamic perspective, inculcating children into the religion is central to serving this twofold purpose.

7.4 Towards Vision 2030

Under Vision 2030 Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has acknowledged the need to transform the Saudi education system to ensure that the development of moral character goes hand-in-hand with ‘providing students with ...knowledge and behaviours necessary for resilient characters to emerge’ (Al-Saud, 2017: 28). The changes made by Dr Al-Issa are intended to ‘Provide citizens with knowledge and skills to meet the future needs of the labour market’ (ibid). This Vision 2030 policy objective can only be fulfilled if Saudi children are given the opportunity to ‘be responsible about themselves, to be critical thinkers, to engage in the most critical issues’ (Al-Issa cited in Pennington, 2017). Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has already curbed the role of the clerics and limited their involvement in education policy as part of his move to establish a more moderate and tolerant approach to Islam.

7.5 Summary

The information in this chapter was used to answer sub-question 5: ‘how is child-centred education constructed by the government in the public sector preschool in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?’ Each of the policy documents was carefully analysed in order to identify their main themes, sub themes and secondary sub themes. The first major theme to emerge was the concept of self-learning, which is how the Government and clerics have interpreted the concept of child-centredness. The concept of self-learning is intertwined with three main themes: Religion, Culture and Pedagogy. All three themes combine to shape and influence the theory and practice of preschool education in Saudi Arabia. The identification of these themes and sub themes has provided crucial information about the how the Saudi Government and clerics

understand the concept of child-centred education and what issues they consider are of primary importance when producing their educational policy documents.

The data exemplifies some of the problems that arise when an education system is being changed from one that traditionally privileges religion over philosophy to one where, as Saudi Education Minister Dr Al-Issa says “the philosophy of education should change from teacher-based instruction to student-centred instruction” (Al-Issa cited in Pennington, 2017). Despite the government’s previous efforts at curriculum reform, the policy documents revealed the predominant framework of beliefs and values remains Wahhabi Islam. As a result, the Self-Learning Curriculum for Kindergarten has been substantially *adapted* to take account of the specific religious and socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia. This *adapted* model which the Saudi Government and clerics have labelled self-learning includes a curriculum design and content and style of pedagogy that appears to come into conflict with the aims of a Western child-centred approach. However, the changes proposed under Vision 2030 will shape and influence how the theory and practice of education is constructed and understood. In this sense, Vision 2030 is providing the opportunity for a mechanism that will bring a Western system of education into closer alignment with an Islamic system of education.

Chapter 8 - The Respondents Perceptions of Child-Centred Education in the Public Preschool in Saudi Arabia

8.1 Introduction

This chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first section will present selected profiles of the key educational stakeholders who were interviewed by the researcher. The key elements are presented in tables. As this chapter will reveal, the cultural context is very important. In Saudi Arabia, the strict application of Wahhabi religious practice results in a surface homogeneity, which can mask other differences between people in terms of their personal backgrounds, values and beliefs. This internal diversity emerges as an important factor when it comes to explaining the differences in how the participants respond to the interview questions and how they understand child-centred education.

The second half of this chapter will present a detailed discussion and analysis of the thematic content. It should be noted that this data was collected in on two separate trips in 2014 and 2015 before the implementation of Vision 2030. There have been substantial changes in certain areas of policy since these comments were made. Most notably the ban on women driving has been lifted. From 24 June 2018 women were legally able to apply for a license with the permission of their husbands. In addition, the design and content of the preschool curriculum is no longer under the sole jurisdiction of the clerics whose role has been substantially limited.

8.2 Interview Transcripts Used for Analysis

A total of twenty eight participants were interviewed and the resulting data was imported and classified using the NVivo program to identify the main themes, sub-themes and secondary sub-themes. Using this approach to code the transcripts enabled the researcher to highlight the differences and similarities between participants in terms of their social and educational backgrounds, experience, beliefs and values.

8.2.1 Aim of Interview Data Analysis

The information in this chapter will be used to answer sub-question 6: ‘how is the concept of child-centred education perceived by a range of key educational stake holders?’ The second half of this chapter will present the main themes to identify what educational stakeholders consider is important and how they understand the theory and practices of child-centred education. Each theme arising from the interview data will be discussed and analysed. Again, the researcher was looking for evidence that Government’s policy making and policy implementation come together in teaching and learning strategies that respect the rights and autonomy of preschool children by maximizing their participation in classroom activities.

8.3 Profiles

8.3.1 Supervisors

The Ministry employs twenty five female supervisors in total. The Supervisor occupies the position beneath the Minister of Education in the educational hierarchy. In effect, the Supervisors are the right-hand employees of the Minister. All supervisors hold an undergraduate degree and possibly an MA obtained from a foreign university. All supervisors have undergone compulsory training in the Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum and pedagogy: Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed. Supervisors are trained in observation and evaluation techniques: what to look for when assessing head teacher and teacher performance and how to judge that performance. The following table is a sample of participant profiles:

| Participant | Religion | Age | Qualifications | Experience | Back-ground | Influence |
|-------------|----------|-------|---|------------|-------------|------------------|
| MSV 1 | Muslim | 35-40 | BA Religion/Islamic History (UQU Makkah). Diploma in Computer Science | 10 years | Tribal | Wahhabi Islam |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|--------|-------|---|---------|-------|---------------------------|
| MSV 2 | Muslim | 45-50 | BA Early Years Studies (KAU Jeddah) MA Early Years (Dubai and Egypt). Diploma in Computer Science | 6 years | Urban | Wahhabi Islam/ Western |
|-------|--------|-------|---|---------|-------|---------------------------|

8.3.2 Head Teachers

Head teachers are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry Supervisors. Their primary responsibility is to manage the preschool by following the orders of the supervisors. All head teachers have an undergraduate degree and some head teachers also hold an MA from a foreign university. All head teachers have undergone compulsory training in the Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum and pedagogy: Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed. Head teachers must ensure that policy and practice regulations are implemented correctly in the preschool. Head teachers are also trained in how to observe and evaluate staff performance. They are responsible for reporting this information back to the supervisors.

| Participant | Religion | Age | Qualifications | Experience | Back-ground | Influence |
|-------------|----------|-------|--|------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| S3 HT1 | Muslim | 40-45 | BA Child Development (KAU Jeddah) MA Early Childhood (USA University). Diploma in Computer Science | 12 years | Urban | Wahhabi Islam/ Western |
| S2 HT | Muslim | 50-55 | BA Religion/Islamic History. Diploma in Computer Science | 15 years | Tribal | Wahhabi Islam |

8.3.3 Administrator

All Saudi public preschools employ an administrator who will typically be qualified to degree level in Computer Science. Teaching is not part of their job description nevertheless all administrators must undergo compulsory training in the Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum and pedagogy: Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed. Despite not having teaching qualifications, the administrators may be asked to take on teaching responsibilities if the school is short-staffed.

| Participant | Religion | Age | Qualifications | Experience | Back-ground | Influence |
|-------------|----------|-------|---|------------|-------------|---------------|
| S1 AD | Muslim | 40-45 | BA Computer Science. Diploma in Computer Science | 15 years | Tribal | Wahhabi Islam |

8.3.4 Teachers

Saudi preschool teachers are typically trained to degree level. Some teachers also hold an MA from a foreign university. All teachers must undergo compulsory training in the Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum and pedagogy: Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed. Those teachers who had travelled abroad to gain their qualifications were very knowledgeable about both Islamic and Western approaches to child development and Early Years education. They were able to name the key Western theorists and their principles: Maria Montessori, American High/Scope and Reggio Emilia were the most commonly cited child-centred approaches. Some of these participants were informed about the UNCRC, and they acknowledged the importance of a democratic approach to education, in terms of making children’s rights a reality in the preschool classroom.

| Participant | Religion | Age | Qualifications | Experience | Back- | Influence |
|-------------|----------|-----|----------------|------------|-------|-----------|
|-------------|----------|-----|----------------|------------|-------|-----------|

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|--------|-------|---|-------|----------|---------------|---------------------------|
| S1 T3 | Muslim | 45-50 | BA Childhood Education (UMU Makkah). Diploma in Computer Science | Early | 10 years | ground Tribal | Wahhabi Islam |
| S1 T5 | Muslim | 35-40 | BA Years (UMU Makkah). Diploma in Computer Science | Early | 10 years | Tribal | Wahhabi Islam |
| S2 T3 | Muslim | 35-40 | BA Years (KAU Jeddah) MA Early Years Education (Canadian University). Diploma in Computer Science | Early | 9 | Urban | Wahhabi Islam/ Western |
| S3 T1 | Muslim | 35-40 | BA Childhood Studies (Egyptian University) MA Early Years Studies (UK University). Diploma in Computer Science | Early | 5 years | Urban | Wahhabi Islam/Western |
| S3 T4 | Muslim | 40-45 | BA Childhood Studies (Australian University). Diploma in Computer Science | Early | 8 years | Urban | Wahhabi Islam/Western |

8.4 Main Theme: Child-Centredness

The phrase child-centred does not appear in *The Teachers Guide Book* nevertheless all of the interviewees used the phrase together with the term self-learning. Some participants believed that the Saudi government's concept of self-learning did conform to Western conceptions of child-centredness in its policy and practice implementations whereas others disagreed:

Child-centred is the same as self-learning. The Arabic preschool called the curriculum self-learning which is the same as child-centred, it is not any different from self-learning, just the term of translation ... but the idea is same (S1 T3).

Self-learning is the same as child-centred, it means giving the child an opportunity to try by himself ... do experiments and discover by himself. Our curriculum is wrongwe have in our curriculum that the teacher gives the child all the information and knowledge so the child is a passive learner (MSV4).

As discussed in Chapter 7 the government's policy statements appear contradictory. The above participant went on to cite the role of the government, gender and power relations and cultural norms as further factors to consider, adding that '*Western ideas are not usually accepted from tribal people because our preschool teacher most of them is tribal*' (MSV4).

When the participants were asked what they understood child-centredness to mean, some of their answers reflected a knowledge of Western theories and pedagogical practices:

Child-centred means that the child is helping himself to be intellectual through his experiences, using his five senses and his own knowledge because the child is creator of knowledge. All knowledge comes from inside the child. Our Saudi children are clever and able to make choices and have discussions (S3 HT2)

The child-centred approach gives the child experiences and puts in front of the child games without analysing the game for him, such as cognitive games and time to practice (S2 T3)

The child-centred and self-learning approach is built on the growth characteristics of the child. He learns by discovering and using his senses because in the first five years his brain is like a sponge and absorbs anything (S1 T4).

These participants know that child-centred learning assumes children begin learning from birth, therefore a multi-modal approach in which the child is encouraged to follow-up his own interests by freely engaging with a range of age-appropriate resources is deemed most appropriate. The Saudi Self-learning Curriculum is modelled on High Scope, which is a problem-solving approach to learning. This approach is the most effective route to developing knowledge and skills because it:

...helps the child to think critically and reach or have a solution to the problem by noticing, seeing and doing experiments about the problems to reach to the solution (S3 T5).

If he is able to discuss about this point then he reaches the facts by himself more than if the teacher guides the child to learn something (S1 T4).

He will be able to learn from his mistakes and the child and the knowledge he creates is central in his mind because he learns by himself (S3 HT1).

All of the participants cited above are from an urban background. The concept of learning that is being described is ‘dynamic in nature and constitutes a process which is constantly going on and which involves us’ (Johansson and Sandberg, 2012: 909). These responses reflect Western theories of child-education, for example, the idea that the child should be the central focus in the classroom (Froebel; Dewey) and that experiential learning through active stimulus and interaction with the environment is crucial (Vygotsky). These ideas are at the root of American High/Scope on which the Self-Learning Curriculum is based.

The differences between an Arabic concept of self-learning and a Western concept of child-centredness began to emerge more clearly in the following statements:

I give the child the information about the games’ rules and how to tidy the place after the game. Generally I guide to child to understand the child-centred or self-learning because the child does not understand anything (S1 T3).

Going to the bathroom is self-learning...The teacher should give instructions to the child before he leaves for the bathroom. It will not be 'self-learning' if I leave the child on his own (S1 T1).

Self-learning needs the teachers to guide and follow up what he did wrong and correct his mistakes based on Islamic beliefs and values (MSV 5).

These responses indicate that the participants do not understand the main principles and practices of child-centred teaching and learning.

8.4.1 Child-Centredness: Pedagogy

Classroom pedagogy is determined by the overall aim of the education system and how knowledge is constructed and understood. In Saudi Arabia a Western child-centred curriculum and approach is brought together with a Wahhabi Islamic curriculum and approach. The dominant style of pedagogy is Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed, which involves three main methods of instruction: memorization, repetition and imitation. This has implications for how the Government constructs the theory/practice relationship (approach to learning) and the teacher's role in the classroom. The concept of pedagogy is complex and the data revealed a number of inter-related themes as discussed below.

8.4.1.1 Pedagogy: Prompting

The Government introduced new activities into the classroom as part of the Self-learning Curriculum but as these interviewees pointed out:

...The ideas changed when the corners were introduced but the style of teaching did not change and it is based on the prompting and repeating (S1 T3).

According to this interviewee this situation is unlikely to change in the future because:

...the Saudi culture is based on remembering The Quran, our philosophical and theoretical ideas are based on The Quran (S1 HT).

An education system based on prompting, memorizing and repetition comes into direct tension with the commitment to 'extending children's thinking' which is a central aim of child-centred education (Hargreaves *et al*, 2014: 5). This participant from a tribal background described how prompting works:

The teachers lead the class and give the information to the child and the child copies and repeats the activities after the teachers in order to understand (S1 AD1)

One major criticism was that prompting pushed the child to repeat information without actively engaging his/her thought processes and it does not pay any attention to what relevance the material has for the child. This comment is typical of the criticisms put forward by participants from an urban background:

The prompting style of teaching deprives the child of developing critical thinking skills as he has no choice but to regurgitate the teacher's words without understanding (S3 HT1).

These two participants were clear about the theoretical principles underpinning Western play-based pedagogy, which they deemed the most developmentally appropriate approach for very young children:

From a Western perspective, playful learning is crucial to educational development at early stage. This has benefits in later life, building his confidence and personality and developing his creativity and imagination. It is important to use play-based learning in our Saudi teaching process because this will give us an opportunity to practice Western theory with our Saudi children. This approach allows children to make their own choices and decisions in the classroom without any interference or direction (S1 T2)

We are trying to balance between approaches and to deliver to children these two sets of thoughts, because we are specialists and educated outside Saudi Arabia and we understand Montessori's theory, Frobel's theory, and Piaget's theory (S3 T5).

The above participants had been educated outside Saudi Arabia. The second commentator (S3 T5) gained her Master's Degree in the UK. For those participants from a tribal background with no knowledge of Western theories and practices, traditional teaching methods were deemed to be the most culturally legitimate approach as the main educational aim is to produce children who are good Muslims. This approach is supported by the Arabic view of childhood in which the child is regarded as a tabula rasa or blank slate who will 'acquire their personality, characteristics and behaviour through Islam' (S3 T3). The first participant cites her main source of knowledge as the Islamic scholar Al-Ghazali:

I give the child the answer and after that the child follows me by repeating what I did. I do not give the child the chance to discover because he is narrow minded and I do not ask the child to do that. I give the child answers without giving him space to think because he is not able to. How is he able to discover if he has limited abilities? (S2 T1)

I use the prompting and memorizing methods in my teaching because is very important for the child to memorize the Quran at this early age (S1 HT).

I direct and guide the child to push him to achieve what is in the curriculum based on Wahhabi Islamic doctrine and it is already decided by the government and clerics what is suitable for the child to learn at this age. The curriculum is based on training the child to be a good Muslim (S2 T2).

Prompting is a method of teaching which makes the child a passive learner, and actively prevents their development in certain areas. According to this supervisor from an urban background, tribal teachers often actively intercede on the child's behalf before he or she has had a chance to formulate their answer:

...the tribal teachers interfere to give the child the answer which stops the child from developing some skills, thus he is not able to develop his personality and confidence (MSV 2).

8.4.1.2 Pedagogy: Freedom

In the interview data one of the recurring issues mentioned in relation to pedagogy was freedom. The interviewees from an urban background, frequently commented on the lack of freedoms in the preschool classroom. This is a crucial issue in relation to the theory/practice relationship and the role of teachers. Child-centred education is rights-based which means it is embedded in a framework of liberal democratic participatory rights, freedoms and values. From this perspective the child is seen as an active agent in the construction of knowledge. Some participants understand these underlying principles and regard them as important, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia:

A child-centred approach is important for the child's rights-based and freedom because this is an existing issue in Saudi Arabia (S1 T4).

As these participants point out, a child-centred approach can be difficult to implement in this context because:

We have limited freedom and rights to implement our curriculum as a child-centred approach, and the theories as well as the policy documents are completely different from practice (S3 HT1).

There is no freedom and rights and this affects whether we can achieve any new Western ideas. The government knows that but they ask us to do it ... They tell you the meaning of self-learning but in practice, it's completely different because of the limit on freedom and rights and power ... Also the government make strict rules based on the religion and culture which limits freedoms and rights. I was educated outside Saudi Arabia and I acknowledge that the children have more freedom and rights to participate and to ask, discuss or solve the problem critically in Western countries (MSV4).

There is no freedom and rights and this affects whether we can achieve any new Western ideas. The government knows that but they ask us to do it ... They tell you the meaning of self-learning but in practice, it's completely different (MSV4).

...the child is not able to communicate and interact with other children because there is limited freedom and rights in the Saudi society (S3 T5).

Saudi Arabia is a collectivist culture which does not place a high value on individual freedoms rather the focus is on maintaining a hierarchy of relations based on group loyalty, obedience and submission:

The government does not support children as individuals it is the reverse of the European countries which are democratic. Saudi Arabia is a hierarchical country (S2 T3).

In Saudi Arabia, the Islamic culture does not look at the child as an individual. We look at them as a group hence - this is big problem in Saudi Arabia (S3 T2).

Firstly, these comments indicate that a gap exists between what is stated in the policy documents and what actually happens in the classroom. Secondly, they indicate that Saudi religious and socio-cultural norms place restrictions on individual freedoms and rights, which are the basic principles underpinning child-centred approaches to education.

8.4.1.3 Pedagogy: Freedom and the Role of the Teacher

A system of hierarchal relations results in a lack of collaboration which is the opposite of a democratic relationship. This system has implications for how child-centred education is constructed and implemented in the preschool. The participants described their roles as follows:

...the teacher has to do what is actually written in the paper and the curriculum without discussion, the limit of choice in this situation is difficult to discuss. Generally, we don't have any discussion between government and teacher. If the government allows freedom and rights and holds discussions, it solves the problem for teachers and head teachers. All of the early years practitioners should be involved to implement the concept of child-centred correctly (MSV2).

...the teachers do not have rights and freedom to discuss any ideas, for this reason it is difficult to help the child solve a problem or discuss or think critically (MSV4).

There is no choice and freedom to talk and discuss different points or different ideas and the child does not have rights to discuss his feelings and his emotions with the teacher and I am not allowed to make social interaction between teachers and the child and also between children and other children (MSV3).

The Self-Learning Curriculum involves everyone in having to understand “Western ideas in an Islamic culture” (MSV2). For those individuals educated outside Saudi Arabia this distinction between tribal and urban beliefs and values was very clearly drawn:

The urban teacher does not want to teach what the curriculum states and I noticed that the curriculum places limits on the child-centred approach (S1 T2).

Some individuals are able to negotiate the ‘mediating preconditions’ of the preschool classroom by using their own professional skills and judgment to make decisions:

*I change my lesson plan when the strict religious supervisor is not in the classroom ... I know how to use this idea and put it into practice by giving children the freedom to be active participants in the classroom (S3 HT1).
I use the Western democratic philosophy of child-centred education in the preschool classroom by giving the child space to make his own choices ... this helps the child to discover and create the knowledge by himself (S2 T3).*

... it is very important to teach teachers to understand children's rights (CRC) and to implement these political rights in our school. This gives children the space to maximize their freedoms and it treats each child as an individual so they can express their views and opinions freely and make their own choices. This is an opportunity for our children to become competitors in the global market (MSV2).

The fixed religious parameters (*thawabit shariya*) place some women in a difficult position in relation to how they perform the negotiation between these two sets of requirements. According to this head teacher, the shift between old and new ideas was more problematic for tribal teachers:

The tribal teachers find it difficult to implement the self-learning approach and to understand the Western ideas in an Islamic culture which has strict beliefs and values based on religion and limited freedoms and rights (S3 HT2).

8.4.1.4 Pedagogy: Teachers' Knowledge

For tribal teachers, the Qur'anic thinkers provide their main source of knowledge. Wahhabi Islam demands the strict observance of prayer and religious practices:

I practice Ahmed bin Hanbal strict religious school of thought in the classroom. I deliver the Wahhabi doctrine to ensure the strictest rituals and moral conduct are observed and practiced in everyday life (MSV3).

...our knowledge comes from God not humans. In my classroom I use Al-Ghazali's approach. He believed that the child's brain is deficient and he is not able to use his senses until he is well-trained by teachers. Also children are not able to use reason to think. For these skills, he needs direction from the teacher to teach him how to think and how to behave in our culture (S1 HT).

According to this supervisor, these strongly held attitudes and beliefs can make change extremely difficult:

The government asks people to change their style of thinking, beliefs, attitude and limitations but it is easy for people coming from abroad but for people established in Saudi Arabia it is very difficult to change (S1 T1).

The Government uses the terminology of Western child-centred education whilst simultaneously applying Wahhabi principles and methodology. This creates more confusion as one participant observed:

I am working in early years but nobody understands the concept of child-centred correctly or implements it correctly everybody teaches using the old style of prompting and repeating (S1 T4).

Knowledge is transferred from one person to another via a top-down and transmissive system of communication. Information is handed down from the Minister of Education in Makkah to the Supervisors who pass it on to the Head Teachers who pass it on to the preschool teachers. This hierarchical system could create further confusion because different ministry supervisors tended to pass on different information. As one participant observed:

Sometimes it is different from the teacher and supervisor and from the head teacher and the supervisor. The ideas of self-learning are not clear because the teachers do not have solid information about self-learning (S2 T1).

According to this teacher:

... the tribal supervisor says I must change if I am not presenting the curriculum based on Islamic values in school (S3 T4).

The lack of suitable training courses was frequently mentioned and the need for external knowledge and influence was emphasized:

We need extensive courses from Western teachers to teach Arabic teachers to fully understand how to implement the concept of child-centred correctly in the classroom (MSV2).

Being given differing accounts is obviously confusing for those teachers who do not have the background knowledge necessary to make informed decisions about what they are being told.

8.4.1.5 Pedagogy: Independence

Very few participants used the word autonomy. The following participant from an urban background - is unusual in her familiarity with the legal frameworks underpinning child-centred education:

I did my master's degree in early years education and the title of my dissertation was Participation Rights and Autonomy. I have extensive knowledge about the international legal policy framework of UNCRC. When I returned to Saudi Arabia I tried to maximize the autonomy of the child through active participation in a wide range of classroom resources designed to offer freedom of choice. This active participation or playful learning is an important element in Western/American child-centred approaches to education (MSV4).

The word most frequently used by participants was independence, which is linked to the idea of self-learning i.e. the child learning by himself:

The children are given the freedom to play and learn independently thus, the teacher provides the appropriate resources and materials. The teacher also encourages the children to be independent. Therefore the children are able to exercise the five senses (MSV2)

Is very important for children at an early age to acquire knowledge by themselves and to learn independently and to establish right and wrong and make their own decisions (MSV2).

The second quotation appears to reflect the idea at the heart of the High Scope curriculum which is that children learn through problem-solving and mistakes become part of that learning process. The following participant understands that children should learn independently because each child is a unique individual with different learning capacities. As one teacher noted:

In the nursery the children have different abilities hence, they should discover and learn independently (S1 T4).

The Arabic perspective is very different because it is based on a view of the child as ignorant or *jahil* and therefore unable to learn independently as expressed by this participant:

The family and school do not give the child responsibilities. At five years of age, the child is dependent on the parents and teacher. The Saudi society says that, between birth until 7 years the child is small and he does not understand anything. This does not give the child confidence because the parents are not patient enough to explain to them (S2 T3).

8.4.1.6 Pedagogy: ‘Doing Experiments’

The phrase ‘doing experiments’ was used by virtually all of the preschool teachers and it is connected to socio-cultural ideas about children and their dependence on adults. The following quotation makes this connection explicit whilst at the same time it illustrates an area of confusion and tension. This interviewee describes how children are encouraged to learn independently by copying the teacher as follows:

The teacher carries out an experiment in front of the class. The teacher does the experiment in front of the children in order to help them remember and learn independently by copying the teacher (S1 T5).

The idea that child can learn independently through copying exactly what the teacher does in the classroom is actually the opposite of the child learning independently. The child learns by using the teacher as a guide or model and when the child copies the teacher this is coded as learning through ‘experience’. But the child’s learning experience is mediated through the teacher therefore it is not experiential in the sense that it is not initiated and directly experienced by the child. This is a reflection of the deeply-held religious belief amongst tribal participants that:

The teacher must guide the child and the Prophet Mohammed said “learn to pray from me” (Prophet Mohammed Hadith). This shows that every child learns from adults not by himself and the child must have (a role model) to copy from (S2 T2).

The idea of ‘doing experiments’ is seen as central to the child’s ability to become creative and this connection points to another area of confusion as the following quotation makes clear:

If I do not give the child methods or hints to learn he is not able to learn and be creative in his experiment in the correct way (S2 T2).

The teachers repeatedly emphasize that they see their role as helping the child “to create” but as the above statement makes clear, creativity is strongly associated with the idea

of right and wrong so there is a “correct” way to be creative. Again, this is a complete reversal of the Western idea of creativity which is defined as the ability produce original or unusual ideas, consequently too many rules are seen as having the potential to ‘deaden creativity’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2005: 292).

8.4.1.7 Pedagogy: Self-Learning Curriculum for Kindergarten

The curriculum was frequently referred to as being limited and inflexible because it does not meet the individual needs and interests of the children. As one participant observed:

The curriculum is not able to change and integrate new ideas, and different ideas and approaches from the supervisor (S1 T2).

In addition, it was noted that the curriculum was designed without any input from teachers which in turn limited their understanding and made them invisible in policy-making:

The teacher uses this curriculum without understanding and sharing the organization of the curriculum (S3 T5).

The disadvantages to this is that the teacher is restricted and cannot add anything extra in the curriculum as she must follow exactly what they tell her in the curriculum (S3 T4).

The participants pointed out that their only source of information was the *Teacher Guide Book* (2013-14) and that this manual dictated every aspect of their classroom practice, as this teacher made clear:

As I am a preschool teacher I do not change the curriculum because all teachers use the teaching style from the teacher’s guide book and takes knowledge and information from there (S1 T5).

This comment makes it plain that whilst the terms child-centred and self-learning are often used interchangeably, they do not mean the same thing. The Government has *adapted* its child-centred curriculum by deciding beforehand *what* children should be taught and *how* they should be taught, which in turn, determines what the children should think and do.

8.4.1.8 Pedagogy: Curriculum - Circle Time

Child-centred pedagogy should be designed to facilitate independent learning. The Saudi

Self-Learning Curriculum comprises two elements: Circle Time and Corner Activities. This design is based on the American High/ Scope model coupled with Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). In theory, these activities provide an opportunity for children to have their voices heard (OECD 2006) by engaging in activities that are intended to promote active and playful learning.

In Circle Time, children should be encouraged to contribute their own ideas for songs and stories and the activity is organized along the lines of group participation as indicated in the following comment:

In Circle Time, I tell the child to read a story and to raise several questions to his friends because the children have rights and the freedom to talk and to be the centre of learning as in the child-centred approach (S2 T3).

Participatory values can be difficult to realize in situations that are highly structured, traditional and teacher-centred. The following two participants stated that in the Saudi preschool classroom, children are not heard:

During circle time the child is not allowed to answer or raise any questions until the teachers give the child a chance. If the teachers do not give the child this chance he will not be able to talk (MSV5).

During story time (circle time) the teacher chooses the story and starts to say the story to the child. The teachers are not discussing the story with the child because as our Islamic rules do not allow them to raise questions just listen to teachers (S2 HT).

Teachers and children are not placed in a reciprocal and balanced relationship here. The Islamic framework of education ensures that the relationship of teaching and learning is highly controlled and regulated.

8.4.1.9 Pedagogy: Curriculum - Corner Activities

The preschool classroom is divided into seven separate learning corners: Library Corner, Construction Corner, Cognitive Corner, Art Corner, Reading and Writing Corner, Research and Discovery Corner and Family Corner. These corners are intended to provide independent,

multi-modal learning as the following head teacher pointed out:

The materials in the classroom provide sensory means for the children i.e. using the five senses in their work. However, the tribal teachers do not use this idea. There are different activities in each of the corners of the classroom such as the art corner and the cognitive corner (S3 HT1).

In the art corners, the child has different abilities and can choose to do crafts, in the construction and demolition corners the child is able to choose different types of blocks and the teachers give the child the chance to do what shapes he wants to do in his imagination (MSV 2).

The teachers provide the materials, equipment and resources for the child. The child needs to learn through that and the teacher must not guide the child, and not use prompting methods and deliver direct information (S3, T5).

However the *Teacher Guide Book* stipulates the materials and resources that should be allocated to each corner, it sets out the role of the teacher and it provides a set of rules that children should follow in each corner. As result,

The corners and units (i.e. family, hand, water, food, house etc.) that the government established in the classroom do not implement the child-centred 'self-learning' approach because they have already decided what is suitable for the child to learn at a particular age (S3 T1).

The Qur'an is used to meet learning objectives and areas of child development, which means that the corner activities are viewed as opportunities for *academic* learning which is in conflict with the aims of a self-learning approach. The Qur'an censors certain learning materials, especially visual representations of humans or animals. This prohibition limits the imaginative capacity of children and forces them to copy. Yet, for those teachers trained only in traditional teaching methods, directing the child towards the correct activity or answer is a religious requirement:

in the art corners I do not allow the children to draw everything, just what is allowed within the limits of Islam (MSV3).

...the teachers must follow the government instructions and I draw an example of a picture and the child must copy that in the art corner (S1 AD1).

There are different approaches to what freedom of choice means in the classroom. The

first participant from a tribal background states that children do have choices in the Library Corner however, the books and CDs contain only Qur’anic verses and Islamic stories. The second participant from an urban background believes that most teachers are preventing self-learning by interfering with child’s learning processes in the classroom:

...in the reading corner the child can choose the books and listen to the story with the CD (S1 T1).

...in the corners the teachers do not give the child freedom to choose and freedom to play. Moreover, in the discovery corners they do not give the child opportunity to try by himself independently without interference and to achieve the result by himself (S3 T2).

These comments draw attention to the limits imposed by having a curriculum in which the materials and approach are pre-determined.

8.4.1.10 Pedagogy: Lack of Knowledge About Child Development

The curriculum reflects a general lack of understanding about the concept of the whole child and child development. The concept of multi-modal learning was one particular approach to learning that was not fully understood because in Saudi Arabia the focus was on “*oral and theoretical information*” without the child “*using his five senses*” (S3 HT2). The Western consensus is that pedagogy should be interactional and reciprocal, play-based, experiential and exploratory, self-directed and self-managed and collaborative. Teachers should be flexible and able to adapt their strategies to the needs of individual children. This head teacher thought the tendency amongst preschool teachers to rely on prompting had a detrimental effect on child development:

...the children repeat the words the teacher says without understanding the meanings. Therefore, this limits aspects of social, emotional, mental and cognitive development (S3 HT1)

During the interviews the connection between child development and child-centredness was well acknowledged by some head teachers and teachers although not in connection to play-based learning:

The children's confidence, brain and personality only develops as a result of the child-centred 'self-learning' approach (S3 HT2)

The early years teachers must understand the child's development mentally, emotionally, socially, because this development affects the child's abilities and creativity (S2 T3).

There was an awareness of the importance of a psychological approach to child development, amongst participants who were educated outside Saudi Arabia, as illustrated by the following responses:

I took some training courses in the UK such as child development based on Jean Piaget theory and Maria Montessori in London and I am familiar with this theory completely. Not every teacher understands this concept (MSV4).

They need to understand and know about different levels and different abilities from one child to another and the child's level of intelligence. They also need to know whether the child has integrated growth or if the child has reached the right level. In addition, the child-centred and self-learning gives the child his own independence (S3 T2).

The teacher who was educated outside does understand the different abilities the child has and how to deal with them because she does understand the child as a whole or child development theory correctly (S3 T5).

Learning at an early age is very important especially from birth to 5 years old, understanding Western theory of whole child. In this period the child's develop his personal, physical, cognitive emotional of child development (S1 T2).

The above teachers bring an informed approach into their teaching practice but they recognize that many teachers do not possess such specialized knowledge. A child-centred approach requires the teacher to adapt her teaching methods to the needs and interests of individual children. This teacher describes how she is flexible in her classroom practice:

I have in my class 3 levels of intelligence: high level, medium level and normal level and one of low intelligence. The child with the high level I must be aware of this and I give him more complicated ideas to discover and create. The

medium level I push him to discover and the last one I help him and support him to understand and discover (S1, T4).

The Saudi curriculum has traditionally placed a heavy emphasis on Islamic theology and history at the expense of other subjects including math, science, geography, history and physical education. As these comments indicate, when a problem occurs, individuals are taught that the answers lie in The Qur'an and it is forbidden to look for alternative sources of knowledge:

The teachers do not follow the psychological approach when dealing with children's matters as it contradicts their Islamic belief (S1 T5).

The preschool should have a psychologist who understands the child psychology if we do not believe in knowing how to deal with children having psychological problems. Also, the teachers are there to teach the child, we are not psychologists ... I am not a psychologist and we are Muslim, tribal and religious teachers. We do not believe in psychology. The government must understand that... (S2 T1).

Within an Islamic framework the Best Model is used to instil religious beliefs and values and to understand, explain, direct and correct behaviour. Other approaches to understanding how the mind works are regarded as un-Islamic and therefore not legitimate. Consequently, the demand that teachers should be able to understand the underlying psychology of young children in terms of their motivation and behaviour in the classroom is difficult to meet:

...there is a need to understand the child's psychology because our teachers are not psychologists they are just teachers teaching children (MSV1).

...the school doesn't have any psychologist or therapy to help child to correct his behaviour as you know our job is just to teach not to solve the psychological problems of children (S2 HT).

Another factor to consider is that the discussion of emotions and feelings and their effect on behaviour is prohibited in a public forum and this is another area of

confusion. Dealing with emotional and behaviour problems was generally regarded as not part of the teacher's role.

Another area of confusion emerged concerning the links between child development, child psychology and independence. The idea of self-learning requires that children are given a degree of choice about how they engage with a task; they are allowed to learn independently. In the absence of a psychological framework independence was often narrowly defined in terms of habit training or socialization rather than as a process oriented towards the child being able to think for him/herself:

The disadvantage of self-learning is the teachers push the child to learn by himself for example going to bathroom and change his clothes without any stages for learning (S1, T3).

The curriculum content was identified as a major obstacle to child development, especially the repetition of the same material at all key stages, which is boring and repetitive.

According to this head teacher:

The government does not recognize that every child has different abilities and the curriculum must be suitable to all levels as repeating the levels will hinder the child's development (S3 HT2)

The repetitive nature of the material in the curriculum indicates that the Government appears to have no awareness of the developmental needs and interests of different age groups and no awareness of the different abilities and levels of intelligence within each age group.

This interviewee goes on to explain that:

...the government applies the same curriculum for all children in KS1, KS2 and KS3. There is no different curriculum for difficult and easy exercises which might be suitable at all levels (MSV4).

As the above responses reveal, the Self-Learning curriculum uses the Western terminology of developmental Key Stages seemingly without any understanding of how child-centred assessment practices have the needs and interests of individual children at their core.

8.4.1.11 Pedagogy: Confusion Between Human Rights and Ideas About Right and Wrong

One specific site of tension between the different educational frameworks concerns the notion of human rights (political rights and freedoms) and moral values (the idea of right and wrong). In Saudi Arabia, education takes place within an Islamic moral framework, which explains why the concept of ‘right’ was often used as a value judgment to describe behaviour. The concept ‘right’ was understood in terms of achieving certain standards of behaviour that are judged correct according to Islamic beliefs and principles. The idea of right and wrong is an extremely powerful conditioning factor because obedience is a moral duty for all citizens, especially for females who are also expected to be submissive and pious. Disobedience is equated with *fitna* (trying to create problems and dissent, which is seen as an act of disobedience). Obedience to authority is emphasised in all Saudi textbooks as a moral duty of citizens. To avoid *fitna*, which is associated with all things negative, children are encouraged to be quiet and obediently follow sets of rules. If they fail to do so, as the following comments reveal, the tribal teacher is there to correct those behaviours deemed wrong:

The teacher gives the child the information and the child takes this information and repeats this knowledge and the teacher corrects the child so he is doing right not wrong (S3 T3).

If there are too many children they are not allowed to attend the corners. As I am a preschool teacher I shout at the children if the children break the rules (S2 T4).

Before he plays in the art corner I must give him the rules of play in the corner and I put a child as a leader in the classroom to tell me whether the children follow the rules or not ... In the food time the children eat with left hand and the children need to correct this behaviour and eat with right hand (S1 T3).

I showed the child how to make relationships with friends as shown in the teachings of the Prophet as well as the right attitude and mannerisms ... the child makes a mistake the teacher holds the child's shoulder and shakes his shoulder to force him to look at her in order to ensure he understands that he is in the wrong. This is in the Arabic Islamic culture of self-learning (S1 AD1).

The idea of right and wrong is used to justify the use of punishment and reinforcement to discourage the wrong behaviour and encourage the desired behaviour. Whilst these pedagogical practices are deemed to be ‘in the Arabic culture of self-learning’ they are the opposite of a child-centred pedagogy. Although some teachers acknowledge the idea that children should be allowed to learn through their mistakes, this approach is not culturally legitimated. The Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed emphasises both correction and coercion. As a result, there is confusion around the idea that the child should be allowed to make mistakes as a part of a problem-solving approach to learning. According to this teacher:

The self-learning approach is that the child learns by his mistakes and he must learn in the right way (S2 T5).

If the teacher does not give the child methods or hints to learn he is not able to learn and be creative in his experiment in the correct way (S1 HT).

The Saudi public preschool reflects the value orientation of the wider socio-cultural context. As the above comments reveal, whilst the Saudi Self-Learning curriculum uses the Western terminology of child-centredness, the underlying concepts are not necessarily shared. For many participants, most notably those educated within Saudi Arabia, the main *thinking* at the heart of their preschool pedagogy remains Wahhabi Islam. For this reason, Western theories and practices are perceived as not culturally legitimate because children are deemed to need a role model or exemplar. Nevertheless, those participants who were educated outside Saudi Arabia were able to negotiate between the two different knowledge frameworks with much greater ease. In part, this was facilitated by their knowledge of Western theories and practices and a more moderate and tolerant Islamic tradition.

8.5 Main theme: Culture

Many of the interviewees were understandably proud of their ability to trace their ancestral line back to the Bedouin. Amongst the tribal teachers and supervisors there was a deeply-held belief that the only right or culturally legitimate way to teach the children was using the Prophet

Mohammed as the Best Model. These two supervisors are from a tribal background and both hold qualifications in Religion and Islamic History. Their comments explain why Western values are rejected:

Government, gender, power, attitude of teachers, cultural, Western ideas are not usually accepted by tribal people because our preschool teachers, most of them are tribal (MSV 3).

The child should copy the Prophet Mohammed's behaviour in their life and not the child. The whole society is organized like that and it is too difficult to put the child at the centre of education in preschool. From a Western perspective it is important for child-centred theory to make the child the centre of learning (MSV 1).

The second quotation is a rejection of the idea that the child should follow his own inner motivations and interests; rather he should turn to the Prophet Mohammed. With reference to these tensions and difficulties one high ranking official noted “*It is difficult to use Western ideas that are completely different to Islamic culture and thoughts*” (SSMO). She continued:

The ministries try to renew the curriculum using Western ideas and they signed international documents saying that we will use the curriculum, if it does not conflict with Islam (SSMO).

These participants were clear about why there were difficulties implementing a rights-based curriculum in Saudi Arabia:

They struggle to put Islamic curriculum and Western idea of self-learning together in practice with lack of freedom or rights and strict power from the government and strict social hierarchy and the teachers are invisible in the policy documents (MSV2).

If you compare us to European countries, their government gives children freedom and the child is a rights-bearer who can talk and expresses his feelings and ideas but in Saudi Arabia it is forbidden ... the children must have the main role in education and they must have a right to express their thoughts in the classroom and be able to discuss their points with the teachers. Using a democratic philosophy based on participatory rights and participation with other children, gives teachers and children the freedom to make their own decision and choices (MSV4).

According to this interviewee, this disparity between Islamic culture and Western culture has created confusion in the government's policy stipulations:

If you see some of the policy documents, the government will say one thing and in reality it will be something else. This causes confusion, especially when the government signed the international policy but it causes a lot of problems because the Western theory is not suitable for our culture and Islamic beliefs and values which raise lots of problems (S3 HT1).

The teachers are responsible for inculcating Islamic beliefs and practices as early as possible. For this reason, Saudi educational philosophy:

... is based on the teacher more than the child. The child is not the centre of education. The teacher guides the child because the government is concerned about child's Islamic beliefs and heritage (MSV 2).

These difficulties and tensions were noted by other interviewees:

It difficult to see the child as an active learner because the teacher guides the child and the child must learn passively because this is our cultural organization and the social structure and should be respected by everyone (SSMO).

This method is used and will not change in the future because the Saudi culture is based on remembering The Qur'an, our philosophical and theoretical ideas are based on The Qur'an (S1 HT).

8.5.1 Culture: Social Hierarchy

Within a traditional family, the child is seen and not heard unless he/she is invited to speak by adults:

The child's freedom is limited by the Saudi culture as he must always follow the adults thus, the child follows the teacher and his parents. The social aspect is lacking in our culture because usually the child is not allowed to talk in front of parents and he should respect their cultural attitude and does not make any agreement with them so the child grows up with these cultural limitations on speech (SSMO).

This relationship of obedience and submission is replicated in the preschool where public displays of affection are also actively discouraged:

The child does not have this right to discuss his feelings and his emotions with the teacher and there is a lack of social interaction between teachers and the child and also between children and other children (MSV3).

The teacher avoids hugging the children because this is not an educational approach when dealing with children (SSMO).

All organizations in Saudi Arabia are organized to maintain a culture that is patriarchal, hierarchical and gender segregated. These structural constraints make it difficult to introduce a system based on equal relationships between individuals. As this participant points out:

The government follows the hierarchical structure which makes the situation worse, especially when the government is applying a Western theory in the Islamic country (MSV 4).

Knowledge is coded and transferred through designated channels of communication: This 'non-communication culture' (ibid.) creates a gap between employees and their superiors which is difficult to bridge. Men occupy the highest positions of command and information is handed down from the highest male officials in Riyadh to the regional ministries via a strict chain of authority:

Everyone should listen to the person above them in the hierarchy e.g. from ministry to ministry, ministry of education to supervisor, supervisor to head teacher and so on (SSMO).

Everyone has a specific role in this knowledge-exchange system but it can be difficult to ensure that the information is passed on correctly. People may bring different interpretations to the rules and policies:

The government gives orders about rules and policies but when we receive the orders from the Ministry of Education to pass to the child we receive slightly different information. The supervisor changes the meaning because it is being passed from one person to another and every person will have different knowledge and sometimes a different cultural background (S2 T1).

8.5.2 Culture: Gender

The head teacher is officially in charge of the preschool but her role is largely symbolic and she must defer to the supervisor who is ranked above her. As this comment illustrates:

I made changes in the classroom however, when the supervisor visited the school the teachers reversed all the changes I made in the classrooms because they were afraid of receiving a bad grade from the supervisor. Thus, the supervisor's evaluation and assessment affects the teacher's creativity ... When I tried correcting the other head teacher she did not agree with me for fear of losing her job as nobody has the power and right to change or discuss the curriculum (S3 HT2).

These teachers were afraid to introduce creativity and flexibility into their teaching practice even when directed to do so by the head teacher. The need always to show respect by deferring to those in authority justifies a system in which personal rights and freedoms are severely limited. Many teachers were aware that their roles were very limited because women are not considered as bearers of knowledge. For some teachers, this can be a demoralizing experience as one respondent explained:

We are not allowed to discuss with the government and Ministry of Education and the supervisor any issues ... I felt rejected and ignored when they said that they knew more than me ... The head teachers interfere with everything. The teachers have no freedom in their classrooms even though they seem to know more than the head teachers (S2 T3).

The teachers were aware that they were invisible in the policy documents and that they were not accorded respect as professionals in possession of valuable knowledge who could be trusted to make decisions in the classroom. This demand for female invisibility in the public sphere effectively excludes women's participation, which is difficult for those teachers who want to facilitate changes in preschool education as they point out:

Our voices are not heard and they do not take any action, when we are trying to get involved in discussions with the head teacher, the head teacher does not take our ideas seriously ... we are not involved in any discussions and do not contribute to the process of teaching and learning. We are doing precisely what is said and written in the Teacher Guide Book (S3 T5).

Every aspect of teaching and learning in the classroom is subject to this elaborate system of micromanagement facilitated by this hierarchy of authority and communication:

Some people are sent by the Minister of Education to have a word with the head teacher about how the teachers should deliver the curriculum in the early years

setting but in my opinion I want to discover independently as a researcher what and how the children should learn at each age ... Why doesn't the teacher use her knowledge about child-centredness and her ideas about the activities and discuss with the Minister of Education about how she understands it; not just theoretically but also practically? (S3 T4).

This teacher wants to be recognized as a professional so that she can use her knowledge and skills to make informed decisions in the classroom. She believes that her experience and knowledge would be a valuable contribution to policy-making decisions. However, the teachers were clear that they could not engage in dialogues with unrelated men nor could they openly criticize the Government or their superiors without the risk of being penalized. The fear of losing one's job is ever present:

The teacher must follow the government's instructions and teaching methods and the children must follow what the teachers said because we cannot speak against our government, maybe the teachers will lose their job and their position as a teacher (S1 T1).

This masculine paradigm of education was a major problem. A patriarchal and tribal hierarchy combined with gender segregation creates an unbridgeable gap between those who decide what happens in the classroom and those who are expected to put the policies into practice. These problems cannot be discussed in a collaborative way as the following interviewees explain:

Another problem is that the curriculum is designed by men and the workers are women (S1 T2).

The government gives orders and expects the head teacher to co-operate without discussions or understanding at all because men do not allow women to discuss (S3 HT1).

Activities which require learning opportunities outside the classroom were previously prohibited because women could not drive; another restriction is the need for a male guardian in order to travel as these respondents explain:

The teacher's husband does not allow the teachers to go on the trips as a result of the Saudi culture (S1 HT)

We need lot of things to facilitate the trip such as babysitters, car drivers because women are not allowed to drive a car and needs permission from manager and parents and Ministry of Education (MSV2)

As previously noted, women are now legally permitted to apply for a driving license subject to the proviso that their husbands agree.

Gender segregation is reinforced by all aspects of the culture both inside and outside the home. The preschool is one of the few areas in which children of both sexes are allowed to mix until the age of six. When children attend preschool many have already internalized the rules of the gender hierarchy, especially the boys. This issue can become a source of tension between teachers and parents depending on how strongly the parents and their children feel about gender roles:

Gender is another problem: some boys do not like to sit next to the girls and are absent from the school. He stops attending the school because he does not want the women teachers to teach him. He wants a man to teach him. Some children refuse and their fathers take them and stop sending them to the preschool (MSV4).

Boys are taught to distance themselves from the activities of women from a very early age but at the same time they are taught to be dependent on women for their care needs because women are responsible for the home and family. In a Western setting the focus would be on ensuring that all children are given equal respect and equality of opportunity without discrimination on grounds of religion, sexuality, race, class, gender or disability. In Saudi Arabia, the Corner Activities are used to reinforce cultural expectations about gender roles as this interviewee explains:

They pretend play in a man's or women's role and the men wear Saudi dress and we see that the boys play powerful roles in relation to women because the social structure expects the women to look after the house and children. The women wash dishes and wash the clothes when they are young girls (S3 T2).

The type of game means some children like to play different roles but the girl only has certain roles to play in the classroom, such as mother or teacher or

doctor. She cannot be a footballer or in the police or a lawyer ... it is not allowed for girls to play any type of sport such as football (S1 T5).

The following participant is familiar with Western liberal principles, and is describing how she uses her classroom practice to challenge gender discrimination:

I involved all children including boys and girls in this task. By the end, one girl had solved the problem in logical way in 10 minutes. I told the boys to clap their hands and bring a gift for the girl next day in order to prove to children there is no intellectual difference between boys and girls. Girls are able to think, react and solve problems as well as boys (MSV2).

Saudi Arabian culture is characterized by an intertwining of Arab ethnic traditions and religion which continues to shape social hierarchies and influence social attitudes and self-identities. The data showed that within the public preschool, many of the old customs and ways are still in evidence. This tribal and patriarchal social order has resulted in a masculine paradigm of education, which effectively excludes women. Participants from a tribal background generally interpreted their roles within the strict doctrinal constraints of Wahhabi Islam. Their overarching aim is to perpetuate and maintain the ideal Islamic state by producing children who are good Muslims. Amongst these participants Western theories and practices were generally deemed as lacking cultural legitimacy. By contrast, participants from an urban background were able to culturally legitimate their child-centred approaches by drawing on a knowledge of both Western child-centred theories and practices and a more tolerant and liberal Islamic tradition.

8.6 Main theme: Religion

The government's attempts to modernize the preschool curriculum whilst simultaneously adhering to Wahhabi Islamic principles has posed a significant challenges for educational stakeholders. These tensions are experienced most acutely by the teachers because they are caught between two potentially conflicting sets of requirements. The teachers must balance the requirement to realize children's rights in the classroom by maximizing

opportunities for participation whilst at the same time they must teach ways that do not conflict with the values, beliefs and principles of an ultra-orthodox Islamic tradition:

The choices are limited but we focus on Islam. There are no choices in the curriculum we teach the curriculum based on Islamic beliefs and values (S2 T2).

If you see in the Teachers Guide the government provides all aims based on Islamic attitudes and Islam is dominant on how to transfer knowledge to the child (MSV1).

There are two crucial issues to note here in relation to how pedagogy and religion are intertwined. Firstly it is stated in the Qur'an that the child should learn from adults hence the teacher is expected to guide the child's behaviour and to be a role model. Secondly, the 'External manifestation of piety is obligatory' (Lipsky, 1959, p: 43) so religious observance permeates every aspect of daily life in the preschool:

During the food time the child cannot open his lunch until every child is sitting at the table and he cannot eat before their friends ... Moreover, the children try to say the Quran before they eat and the child cannot stand up from the lunch until all his friends have finished and he has said the Quran. After that he is free, before that no (S1 T1).

8.6.1 Religion: as a Method of Social Control

According to one participant:

There is a lack of interaction socially between each other because we have some topics it is forbidden to talk about publicly in our Islamic religion (MSV1).

However, other participants believed that religion was wrongly used by the government to justify imposing constraints on personal freedoms. According to this participant:

The Islamic interpretation by Al Wahhabi claims that Islamic principles limit the choices, freedom and rights the children should have. However, we know that the government made this statement up because we do not have such statements in the Quran (S3 T4).

This interviewee believed that the government is fully aware of how religion is used to justify restrictions on individual rights and freedoms thus making it difficult to implement the child-centred curriculum:

Furthermore, the government appreciates that Islam causes limitations when implementing new ideas in the curriculum thus, not exercising freedom (S3 HT1)

The above participants believed that these restrictions exemplified how the government accommodated demands from the religious establishment, which were given false justification with reference to Islam. In contrast, this participant from a tribal background believed there was little support for this 'new idea':

This is our religion nobody wants to change teaching Islamic methods and include the new idea of self-learning as a teaching method ... It is difficult for the teachers to understand and teach using the strict culture and Islamic beliefs, especially in Makkah. The government pushes them to put into practice but I think this is not working because they receive several problems from this new idea (MSV1).

The data has revealed the inherent tensions between an educational philosophy based on religion and an educational philosophy based on a democratic framework of participatory rights. The following participant who is from an urban background is suggesting that tribal teachers do not understand the Western idea of rights and freedoms:

And the teachers misunderstood the concept of rights and freedoms because as a religious society freedom is limited and when translated it is a different thing in the policy document (S1 T4).

This shift between different and contradictory value ideological frameworks 'makes it difficult to implement and apply the child centred 'self-learning' correctly (S2 HT). This paradoxical situation causes tension and confusion as the following comment from this tribal teacher makes clear:

What can she do but work between discipline and child freedom and encourage the child to express his ideas freely but following God and obedient to God?

(S2 T1).

A number of participants are aware of the fact that there is a gulf between what is stated in the educational policy documents and the demands of religion, social expectations and culture. According to these interviewees it is possible to:

...bring these two different ideological systems of thought together and implement a Western child-centred approach within an Islamic framework and teach children both frameworks of ideas together in order to present a good Muslim child with Western approach of critical thinking: raising questions and discussion with other children (MSV4).

Some participants were able to use their knowledge of a more moderate and tolerant Islamic philosophical tradition to give cultural legitimacy to the child-centred approach:

I have a deep understanding of our old philosophers such as Al-Farabi who believed that human beings are born with certain natural abilities. He believed that humans are able to establish knowledge by thinking, reasoning and logic and using these intellectual ideas with our Islamic culture. For this reason, we are able to bring a Western philosophy of child-centredness based on our old philosophies such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina into practice. For example, discussion and dialogue is fundamental in Al-Farabi's philosophy. I give children opportunities to discuss and raise question and allow them to talk and express their ideas and make communication with other children in the classroom (S3 T4).

Another philosopher is Ibn Rushd. To bring religion together with philosophy he believed that it was necessary to engage critically, logically and philosophically with religion. Also he believed that logic and philosophy support equality between the sexes (MSV 2).

8.6.2 Religion: Limits on Speech and Textual Representation

Saudi educational philosophy is premised on the idea that children cannot learn if there is a separation between religion and life. From this perspective religion is seen to facilitate learning. Yet the limits imposed on speech and textual and symbolic representation is another area in which religion restricts the Self-Learning curriculum. According to this participant, these restrictions are not integral to the Islamic religion they are the result of a specific interpretation:

There are no choices in the curriculum because is forbidden. The teacher chooses for the child and provides different ideas after that the child chooses what he likes, e.g. the teacher chooses several types of picture because in the Islamic religion we are not allowed to draw humans. If the child likes to draw their parent they are not allowed because Islam says that in their Wahhabi interpretation (S2 T2)

This ban is supported with reference to a hadith by the Prophet Mohammed which expressly states that artists will be punished on the Day of Judgment if they represent human or animal life forms. This issue was frequently raised:

The curriculum already provides examples of pictures the child could draw as he is not allowed to draw human forms like faces as this is against the Islamic principles (S1 T5).

In the art corners the child chooses under the condition of what the teachers provide in the classroom. The teacher gives the child a specific topic to draw a picture because of the limit imposed by the Islam religion. The child is not allowed to draw animals or humans (MSV 5).

In the art corners every child has a drawing brochure. The subjects to draw (e.g., tree, house, sea) have already been decided from the Ministry of Education. Humans and animals are not allowed to be drawn according to the Islamic belief (S1 HT).

These constraints were of particular concern in the Art Corner, which is specifically intended to encourage to creativity by developing the children's imaginations. Whilst the concept of creativity was often not well understood, it was repeatedly cited as a main curriculum aim. This teacher is an exception. Here she explains how she uses her own imagination to overcome the limits imposed by curriculum:

If the teacher wants to give the water unit using religious stories such as water (Zamzam in the religious stories) we cannot change and cannot make a sound. The teacher cannot make the picture of a human body but the teacher can create in her own imagination (S3 T5).

This teacher is very creative in her approach. She tells the children where water comes from but she cannot use any pictures of humans or animals or alter the details of the religious story in any way. Instead she chose to fill balloons with water and hid them under a pile of sand.

She popped the balloons to release the water because she wanted to illustrate how water first appeared to humans. This example shows how one teacher was able to bring the story to life by introducing different materials and by incorporating an element of surprise. She has created an image of the story that the children will remember. This example illustrates how child-centred teaching and learning methods can be brought together with the Islamic curriculum. This teacher holds an MA in Early Years Education from a UK university. She is knowledgeable about Western theories of child-centred education and provides many of her own teaching materials.

Other arts activities are strictly forbidden by religion. There is little music recorded or broadcast in Saudi Arabia. This ban is reflected in the curriculum:

There is no music and no instruments in the curriculum such as piano because is forbidden in our Islamic religion and all needs to support our Islamic religion rules (S2 T 4)

The child is not allowed to play or use any instrument related to music such as piano because in Islam, it is not allowed to listen to the music (S3 T3).

Constraints on the freedom of expression prevent the free exchange of ideas between teachers and children and between the children themselves. These restrictions have a religious origin because some topics are forbidden. As these interviewees observe:

It is not allowed to interact socially between each other because we have some topics it is forbidden to talk about publicly (MSV 1).

It is not allowed to discuss your private life and problems publicly (MSV5).

8.6.3 Religion: Teachers' Beliefs and Values

In some cases, the tribal teachers identified their own religious beliefs as the main reason for why the Self-Learning Curriculum was not being implemented correctly:

The teachers' religious beliefs affect the pedagogy and teaching process as they bring everything back to their knowledge about religion. As tribal teachers we

find it difficult to move away from this idea and we also find it difficult to put the Western and Islamic ideas into practice (S2 T2)

Those teachers who interpreted their role within the strict doctrinal constraints of Wahhabi Islam, found it harder to incorporate new ideas into their teaching practice. Yet, it is also the case that adherence to religion is not a personal choice in Saudi Arabia:

Everyone believes in one religion; Islam for example, in one God and prophet Mohamed (S1 HT).

It was acknowledged that some families were stricter than others and there was some degree of diversity concerning religious observance which might influence how strongly the teachers felt about their Islamic teaching practices and how willing they were to accept any kind of change:

Some parents grow up in a closed family and a strict and religious family which affects her teaching and her attitude (MSV 4).

It is not surprising to find deep resistance to change amongst teachers from religious backgrounds:

As I am a teacher I do not like to change my beliefs and values of Islamic religion and I am not able to change with Western new idea (S1 T1).

Urban teachers are aware that strongly held religious beliefs can pose a barrier to understanding the theory and practice of child-centred education:

The Minister of Education is making changes but then as a tribal teacher we teach in the same style of prompting and repeating with our strong beliefs and values about religion (S3 HT2).

For tribal teachers, a heavy emphasis was placed on the value of religion as a guide to ensuring that children received a good moral education that would ensure the correct i.e. Islamic behaviour. According to the following interviewees:

Teachers obey the traditional Islamic religious of behaviours and values and ethics which influences the children's attitudes and the teacher's behaviour with children ... I teach the child it is important to learn that every good thing you do you receive thanks from God and you go to heaven (S2 T4).

The teachers teach the child strong values based on religious beliefs and good behaviour. Correcting the wrong behaviour will stop the child making mistakes in his life (S1 T3).

Some teachers take the initiative and make changes when implementing the Government's lesson plans. This interviewee is suggesting that variations in child-centred theory and practice are attributable to the teacher's own restrictive religious beliefs rather than to restrictions imposed by the curriculum:

There is one curriculum for all teachers but the lesson plan is different from one teacher to another teacher based on her beliefs, values and experience when they were educated outside Saudi Arabia, how much they understand the theory and the concept of the child-centred correctly (MSV2)

The interview data has revealed some of the tensions experienced by educational stakeholders who are required to negotiate between two different value frameworks: a child-centred approach which reflects Western socio-political values based on individual self-determination and participatory rights and an Islamic approach which reflects socio-religious values based on collective obligation, obedience and submission. The data revealed that this negotiation was easier for those individuals who could draw on their knowledge about Western child-centred theory and practice. For a number of participants the child-centred approach was given added cultural legitimacy with reference to a more moderate and tolerant Islamic tradition.

8.7 Towards Vision 2030

Under Vision 2030 Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has redefined the purpose of education so that it is no longer focused solely on preserving and maintaining the ideal Islamic state. Rather the focus is on ensuring that children receive an Islamic education whilst at the same time developing an education system that will provide children with the skills they need to become part of the twenty-first century

knowledge economy. This aim is now more in tandem with the Western purpose of education which is to secure ‘a productive, sustainable economy’ through facilitating individual and collective development (Kemmis et al, 2014: 27). By advocating a more tolerant and moderate approach to Islam, Vision 2030 is providing a mechanism for bringing these two systems of education together and giving cultural legitimacy to a child-centred approach.

8.8 Summary

This chapter examined how the respondents understand their roles and responsibilities and how they are placed within the prevailing power structures and the social milieu. Key differences emerged in the backgrounds, education, beliefs and values of the respondents which are expressed in the distinction between tribalism and urbanism. The former tends to be synonymous with strongly-held religious beliefs and conservative social attitudes whilst the latter is associated with a more moderate Islamic tradition, socially liberal attitudes and an international education.

The concept of child-centredness (the Saudi term is self-learning) is intertwined with three main themes: Pedagogy, Culture and Religion. The intertwining of these themes has resulted in a child-centred curriculum that is socio-culturally *adapted* to accommodate Wahhabi beliefs and values, rather than an *adopted* Western child-centred curriculum. One major adaptation is the dominant pedagogical style namely Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed. This approach requires the teacher to be an exemplar of the correct Islamic principles and practices as stipulated in the *Teacher Guide Book*. The teacher’s role is *directing* the child using prompting, memorization and repetition, which makes the child a passive learner rather than an active participant in the creation of knowledge. This traditional approach necessarily comes into direct tension with the commitment to ‘extending children’s thinking’ which is a central aim of child-centred education (Hargreaves *et al*, 2014: 5). Educational stakeholders from a tribal

background were more likely to refer to Islamic thinkers and to rely on Saudi pedagogy rather than trying to implement new ideas. Those from an urban background who were familiar with both Western theories and practices and Islamic educational philosophies, were more likely to try and bring the two approaches together.

Saudi culture is characterized by an intertwining of religion, patriarchy and tribalism. Gender segregation places women and children at the bottom of the hierarchy and works against the idea of teacher and child being viewed as equal participants in the learning process. Religion is integral to all aspects of life and education. However, it is clear that the doctrinal constraints of Wahhabism have created misunderstandings about the nature of child-centred teaching and learning. Tribal participants strongly supported the imposition of strict religious beliefs and practices whilst urban participants supported the underlying principles and values of a more democratic approach to education. Moderate Islamic scholars such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina were often used to culturally legitimate a child-centred approach to teaching and learning.

Chapter 9 will discuss the main arguments in relation to the research questions and the empirical data which has been collected. The concept of Practice Architectures will provide the conceptual lens through which to critically examine the findings.

Chapter 9 – Discussion

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the main arguments in relation to the research questions and the empirical data which has been collected. As the two literature reviews revealed, there are differences between Western perceptions and understandings of child-centred education, which are based on a liberal democratic paradigm and Saudi perceptions and understandings of child-centred education, which are based on an Islamic paradigm: specifically a Wahhabi interpretation of Islam. The theory of Practice Architecture, based on a conception of practices as ‘sayings’, ‘doings’ and ‘relatings’ which are enacted by individual practitioners’ (Salamon et al, 2016: 434) will provide the analytical framework for examining these differences.

The original research project began in late 2013 before the Saudi Government introduced Vision 2030 in 2017. This new set of government policies has made it possible to achieve a clearer understanding and a more constructive interpretation of the research findings. In his determination to secure a prosperous economic future for Saudi Arabia, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is planning to move away from an oil-dependent, state-driven economy towards a more diversified market-driven, knowledge-based economy. Education plays a critical role in providing Saudi children with the skills they need to become ‘independent and active members of society’ (Friedman, 2017: 5). In order to comply with the latest Education for All (EFA) agenda, which places greater emphasis on inclusion and equity, the Saudi government must remove any barriers that might prevent access to equality of opportunity for both teachers and children. To achieve these goals the government must change the way education is spoken about, how it is enacted and how individuals relate to each other by implementing a shift in the educational philosophy away from a teacher-centred philosophy towards a more child-centred approach. As this chapter suggests, the theory of Practice

Architectures ‘can serve important practical and philosophical purposes’ because it helps to illuminate the interplay between individual agency and structure: ‘the laws, policies, rules and procedures’ (Salamon et al, 2016) which function to facilitate or constrain ‘educational praxis’ (ibid: 440). This approach is particularly pertinent in Saudi Arabia where educational stakeholders are required to work with policies and practices that are radically different from those that apply in the local context. Vision 2030 aims not only to equip children with 21st century skills but also to increase stakeholder participation. The researcher has made a significant contribution to knowledge by showing not only how two seemingly oppositional systems of education can be merged together constructively but also how western-educated Saudis can use their knowledge and skills to implement these reforms in the direction of more child-centred approaches.

9.2 In What Ways Do the ‘Sayings, Doings and Relatings’ Help with Achieving Vision 2030?

Three main themes emerged from the research data: Culture, Pedagogy, and Religion. All three themes are inextricably intertwined in the design and implementation of preschool education in Saudi Arabia. These three main themes were discussed in relation to the corresponding elements from Practice Architecture to create an Islamic model. This Islamic model provided a critical lens through which to examine and understand how Saudi organizations are structured, how they function and how individuals behave within them.

An Interpretation of a Saudi Practice Architecture:

| | | |
|-------------|--|---------------|
| Main Themes | Structural Elements of Practice Architecture | |
| Culture | Sayings | Thinking Well |
| Pedagogy | Doings | Acting Well |
| Religion | Relatings | Relating Well |

To reiterate, Practice Architecture can be understood as a:

characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings) and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relating) (Kemmis et al, 2014: 31).

This arrangement of ‘sayings, doings and relatings’ comes together in ‘a distinctive project’ which includes ‘the broader bureaucratic structures and processes’ in which individuals must work (Wilkinson, Olin et al, 2010: 69). Chapter 2 explained how the religious and socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia influences and shapes the administrative functioning of its preschools. In Chapter 7 the analysis of government policy documents provided an insight into what issues the government thinks are important when designing its early years educational policies and how the concept of child-centredness is constructed and understood. In Chapter 8 the interview data provided an insight into what issues the teachers consider are important, the varied ways in which they understand the concept of child-centred teaching and learning and how they implement this knowledge in the classroom.

Saudi Education Minister Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Issa speaking at the Yidan Prize Summit 2017 in Hong Kong on Monday 11 December stated that his aim is:

...to change the philosophy of education from teacher-based instruction to student-centred instruction, from the traditional way of teaching and learning to more sophisticated engagement with students in the classrooms, and giving them opportunities to be responsible about themselves, to be critical thinkers, to engage in the most critical issues. They have to question; they have to participate in complex situations (Al-Issa cited in Pennington, 2017).

This discussion chapter is structured in three main parts corresponding to the main elements from the Practice Architecture. Firstly it will examine and discuss issues relating to culture (sayings), in the second main section it will explore aspects of pedagogy reflecting ‘doings’ and finally it will deal with religion as the driver of ‘relatings’. Each section will draw on data from both the documentary analysis and the interviews and finally point forward to how together these understandings stand to facilitate the journey towards Vision 2030. In this way this discussion chapter uses the concept of Practice Architecture as the means to interpret the data and to illuminate the emerging situation. The data exemplifies some of the issues which arise when an education system is being changed from one where traditionally religion has been privileged over philosophy.

Based on information gathered in the two literature reviews and the empirical data, the concept of Practice Architecture will be used to present the main arguments arising in relation to each sub-question. The aim of this chapter is to illuminate the differences between presenting Western perceptions and understandings of child-centred education and Saudi Arabian perceptions and understandings of child-centred education. Thirdly, this chapter will present a Practice Architecture based on Vision 2030 to illustrate how there are encouraging signs that aspects of Vision 2030 are emerging in child-centred education in Saudi Arabia.

9.2.1 Culture: (Sayings) In What Ways Does What the Educational Stakeholders Say Relate to Policy Stipulations?

This section will discuss culture (sayings) and the extent to which the current reforms in early years education in the public sector preschool relate to the policy stipulations of Vision

2030. Saudi institutions are shaped by external factors including demography, economics and politics whilst the internal factors include ‘history, values, processes and goals’ (Condreanu 2013:49). This is evidenced by the *Teacher Guidebook* which stipulates the goal of preschool education as:

...derived from the general educational policy for the country stemming from the Islamic principle, the values of Islamic society, heritage, culture, civilization, tribal traditions and the distinct social, economic conditions and circumstances (MOE, 2013a: 17).

Each organization is ‘part of a subculture of broader society’ which has developed ‘through the history of the institution; it is its own way of conceptualizing and doing things’ (Naidoo, 2017). All education systems and the people who work in them are a product of this ‘ambient culture and may relay their sensibilities to children more informally’ (Braude, 2016). Everything that has been stated in Vision 2030 documents and re-iterated by Dr Issa indicates that the education system has not prepared individuals to participate in a modern knowledge economy. This may be another example of Saudi policies stating what is expected about the purpose of education by global development agencies but in reality the curriculum content and pedagogy changes very little. When Islamic Practice Architecture is used as a critical lens, the discursive influences that inform early childhood theories and practice can be ‘thoroughly articulated, analysed, evaluated, deconstructed and reconstituted’ (Steyn 2011: 4). Both sets of data emphasise the importance of language in meaning-making. The cultural-discursive arrangements involve the language, knowledge and ways of discussing pedagogical issues that are available to the participants.

As the following sections reveal, there are key differences in terms of the linguistic tools (vocabulary and theoretical concepts) that are available to participants for articulating their thoughts and experiences.

The Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum for Kindergarten is modelled on American High/Scope and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) but it has been *adapted* to meet the specific social, cultural and religious needs of the community. The degree to which the participants recognize the curriculum as *adapted* tended to vary in accordance with the background, experiences, knowledge and beliefs of the participants. All 28 participants were ethnic Arabs and Sunni Muslims. 11 participants were from an urban background. Their ancestral roots are in other Arab countries but they have Saudi citizenship. Urbanism is synonymous with a more liberal-minded, tolerant approach. These individuals were educated both inside and outside Saudi Arabia: the list of countries includes Egypt, Dubai, Jordan, UK, Australia, Canada and America. As a result, their main influences included both Wahhabi Islam and Western perspectives. 17 participants were from a tribal background, which means they can trace their ancestral roots back to the Bedouin. Tribalism is synonymous with religious and social conservatism. These individuals were all educated inside Saudi Arabia.

9.2.1.1 Western Discursive Framework

The first Literature Review traced the philosophical, political, historical and psychological roots of Western ideas about child-centredness. The key theorists in child-centred education were identified as the eighteenth century thinkers, Jacques Rousseau and Johann Pestalozzi, followed by Friedrich Froebel, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Their ideas have provided the discursive-frameworks within which early childhood education is understood and constructed in the west. The Western concept of child-centredness is based on a specific image of the child in which ‘every child has rights, not just needs’ (Hewett, 2001 cited in Hammond et al, 2012: 1). As previously mentioned, this belief:

...that every child has rights promotes the child’s strengths, potential, and desire to discover his or her own world ... This principle reminds teachers to view each child not as needy or deficient, but as a source of strength or inspiration (ibid.).

The above statement reflects the influence of Montessori whose method developed out of her ‘observations that learning is brought about by human tendencies to do – to act, to explore, to create’ (Nutbrown et al, 2008: 50). Montessori’s observations revealed that:

...learners needed to be independent in their actions while making their own decisions about what ‘work’ they should do and learning how to control their own actions (ibid.).

Following Montessori, the social-constructivist approach to child development advocated by Piaget and Vygotsky views knowledge as a ‘continuous reconstruction of experience’ which takes ‘children’s interests, play and activities’ as the ‘starting point for learning’ (Bates and Lewis, 2009: 95). Piaget believed that children cannot be taught to understand a concept rather they learn by doing and they should be encouraged to view their mistakes as an integral part of the learning process. The role of the teacher is not simply to pass on knowledge but to nurture the child’s curiosity and to support him/her in the ‘search for answers’ (Garhart-Mooney, 2000: 62). What followed from these ideas about the relationship between child-centredness and child-development was the belief that:

(1) the “whole child” was the proper subject of education’ and (2) the curriculum should originate through observation of the children’s interests and needs, rather than through analysis of subject matter (Williams and Pronin Fromberg, 2012: 56-57).

The values embedded in Western frameworks of child-centred education include ‘Democracy; Rule of Law; Individual Liberty; Mutual Respect and Tolerance’ (PACEY, 2015). Hence, society is constructed as a network of structures, practices and relationships that ‘enable and constrain’ people so that ‘each and all have equal and achievable opportunities to self-development, self-expression and self-determination’ (Kemmis, 2008, p: 3). A Western philosophical perspective, equates the development of reason with the full development of human potential. This model of education assumes that individuals have the capacity to make informed judgments and decisions based on their capacity to reason. With very young children,

'active participatory learning through play' is deemed central 'to the full development of human potential' (French, 2012: 129).

The Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum is modelled on American High Scope: a problem-solving curriculum, which aims to support the development of children by giving them 'a sense of control' over their activities (French, 2012: 130). Those participants who had been educated outside Saudi Arabia were very familiar with the theories and practices advocated by Froebel, Montessori, Piaget and Vygotsky. Knowledge of these principles is reflected in their comments which envision the child as 'a confident, capable person' who is an 'architect' of his/her own learning and a 'knowledge-maker' (Arleen and Dodd-Nufrio, 2011: 236). The first participant is describing how she is attempting to bring these ideas together with the Islamic curriculum:

We are trying to balance between approaches and to deliver to children these two sets of thoughts, because we are specialists and educated outside Saudi Arabia and we understand Maria Montessori's theory, Froebel's theory, and Piaget's theory (S3 T5)

Child-centred means that the child is helping himself to be intellectual through his experiences, using his five senses and his own knowledge because the child is creator of knowledge. All knowledge comes from inside the child. Our Saudi children are clever and able to make choices and have discussions (S3 HT2).

The child-centred and self-learning is built on growth characteristics of the child. He learns by discovering and using his senses because in the first five years his brain is like a sponge and absorbs anything (S1 T4).

Within a child-centred approach the 'whole child' is the subject of education (Williams and Pronin Fromberg, 2012: 56-57). The importance of facilitating development across multiple dimensions was understood by participants as indicated in the following comment:

Learning at an early age is very important especially from birth to 5 years, understanding Western theory of whole child. In this period the child develops personally, physically, cognitively and emotionally (S1 T2).

Although the participants did not name any Western philosophers they did make reference to the Islamic scholars who were influenced by Aristotle and Plato. They were able to draw on this diverse knowledge to give cultural legitimacy to their classroom practices when implementing certain aspects of the self-learning curriculum:

I have a deep understanding of our old philosophers such as Al-Farabi who believed that human beings are born with certain natural abilities. He believed that humans are able to establish knowledge by thinking, reasoning and logic and using these intellectual ideas with our Islamic culture. For this reason, we are able to bring a Western philosophy of child-centredness based on our old philosophies such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina into practice. For example, discussion and dialogue is fundamental in Al-Farabi's philosophy. I give children opportunities to discuss and raise question and allow them to talk and express their ideas and make communication with other children in the classroom (S3 T4).

Another philosopher is Ibn Rushd. To bring religion together with philosophy he believed that it was necessary to engage critically, logically and philosophically with religion. Also he believed that logic and philosophy support equality between the sexes (MSV 2).

For Al-Farabi religion and philosophy were ‘simply two expressions of a single truth’ in the sense that ‘philosophy explains religion and provides proof of it; it is neither in conflict nor in contradiction with it’ (Al-Talbi, 1993: 2). Ibn Rushd was critical of the ‘anti-philosophical sentiments within the Sunnite tradition sparked by Al-Ghazali’ (Saiah, 2013: 171) and he argued for the need to engage critically and philosophically with religion to retain its ‘deeper meanings’ and to avoid ‘deviant and incorrect understandings of the divine’ (ibid.). Using this diverse Islamic tradition enabled this participant to:

...bring these two different ideological systems of thought together and implement a Western child-centred approach within an Islamic framework and teach children both frameworks of ideas together in order to present a good Muslim child with Western approach of critical thinking: raising questions and discussion with other children (MSV4).

The following participants who had been exposed to Western perspectives on education mentioned the barriers imposed on child-centred practices by the Islamic curriculum. The second commentator is suggesting that when she tries to bring the two approaches together, the supervisor insists on giving priority to an Islamic approach. All of these comments are typical of those made by urban participants:

The urban teacher does not want to teach what the curriculum states and I noticed that the curriculum places limits on the child-centred approach (S1 T2).

... the tribal supervisor says I must change if I am not presenting the curriculum based on Islamic values in school (S3 T4).

The government applies the same curriculum for all children in KS1, KS2 and KS3. There are no different curricula for difficult and easy exercises which might be suitable for all levels of ability (MSV 4).

The above comments indicate that despite the use of Western terminology i.e. key stages this concept is poorly integrated and understood. All the participants cited above were educated outside Saudi Arabia. When viewed through the critical lens of practice architectures it became clear that their sayings were shaped by both Western and Islamic knowledge and understanding in the semantic and social space. By verbalising their thoughts, concerns and experiences, the urban participants were able to re-contextualise their educational practice and move between a Western discursive framework and an Islamic discursive framework.

9.2.1.2 Saudi Discursive Framework

The Saudi constitution is based on the Muslims' holy book of The Qur'an and Sunnah (speech and teachings of the Prophet of Islam: Mohammad). As the second Literature Review revealed, there is little history of child-centred theory and practice in Saudi Arabia. The key Islamic scholars are Ibn Hanbal, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Khaldoun and Al-Wahhab. These thinkers privileged religion over philosophy in order to secure a monological culture

based on unquestioning faith in one God and adherence to Shari'ah law. As a result, the whole of Saudi society is founded on 'a particular vision of the moral and religious life' (Baki, 2004: 2) with 'Wahhabism as religious knowledge and tribalism as social organization' (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 19). These ideas have provided the discursive frameworks within which early childhood education is understood and constructed in Saudi Arabia. Today, Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) remains 'the high point of Islamic thinking on education' (Nofal, 2000: 5).

Within an Islamic framework, the main educational focus is on spiritual development, i.e. the child must develop moral values and practice ethical behaviours as these are the basis of becoming a good Muslim, which is deemed to be in the 'best interests of the child. This approach is underpinned by the Arabic view of the child as *jahil* (ignorant). In contrast to a Western perspective, teachers are encouraged to view each child' not 'as a source of strength or inspiration' nor as equal participants but as 'needy and deficient' (ibid.). The cultural values embedded in this framework include loyalty, obedience, submission, modesty and solidarity. Hence society is constructed as a network of structures, practices and relationships that 'enable and constrain people' (Kemmis, 2008) to ensure 'consensus among them on the fundamentals of faith and method, the like of which is nowhere to be found in any other part of the Muslim world' (Idris, 1995). From a Saudi perspective, religion is seen as 'fundamental to the full development of human potential' (French, 2012: 129).

Saudi educational policy documents do not use the term child-centredness. The phrase self-learning is used to refer to its child-centred curriculum. The *General Structures of the Self-Learning Curriculum in Early Years Education in Saudi Arabia* defines self-learning as follows:

The self-learning approach is focused on different activities and the child learns through engaging with the wider environment including (people, materials or resources and activities) and receiving support from the teacher (MOE, 2006).

In principle, this definition appears to conform to Western-based concepts of child-centred education. However, as the policy documents reveal, this culturally *adapted* curriculum differs markedly from Western definitions of child-centredness:

The teacher can observe each child and take his needs and wishes into consideration but the activities are pre-determined in the curriculum. The activities are pre-determined based on what the government and clerics have decided the child's needs and interests should be (MOE, 2006).

Saudi policy documents reflect the belief that religion should be intrinsic to all aspects of life: 'If there is a separation the child will not be able to achieve' (MOE, 2013b). The self-learning curriculum does not originate through observations of the children's interests and needs' (Williams and Pronin Fromberg, 2012: 56-57) rather the focus is on teaching the 'subject matter' of religion (ibid) '*because the Saudi culture is based on remembering The Qur'an, and our philosophical and theoretical ideas are based on The Qur'an*' (S1 HT). In their classroom practice, Saudi teachers must understand the principles of a child-centred approach and child development theory whilst at the same time they must 'be knowledgeable about the program for working with children such as games, stories and Islamic songs' (MOE, 2013a: 20). The following comments indicate that this shift between old and new ways of thinking was especially difficult for participants with strongly held religious beliefs, traditional tribal values and no knowledge of Western perspectives:

This is our religion nobody wants to change teaching Islamic methods and include the new idea of self-learning as a teaching method ... It is difficult for the teachers to understand and teach using the strict culture and Islamic beliefs, especially in Makkah. The government pushes them to put into practice but I think this is not working because they receive several problems from this new idea (MSV1).

The government asks people to change their style of thinking, beliefs, attitude and limitations but it is easy for people coming from abroad but for people established in Saudi Arabia it is very difficult to change (S1 T1).

The main source of influence for these participants is Wahhabi Islam. Wahhabism is based on the Hanbali School which demands strict observance of ‘practices, rituals and moral conduct. External manifestation of piety is obligatory’ (Lipsky, 1959: 43). Saudi educational policy documents emphasize the importance of meeting these obligations ‘because this stage is so dangerous’. Therefore:

The teacher has significant responsibility for directing and guiding the child in accordance with Islamic beliefs and practices (MOE, 1976).

These participants understand their role as making the child responsible to ‘...God, the Prophet Mohammed and his religion’ (Elliott House, 2013: 35) by ‘following the injunctions of the Qur’an to the letter’ (ibid: 40).

I practice Ahmed bin Hanbal strict religious school of thought in the classroom. I deliver the Wahhabi doctrine to ensure the strictest rituals and moral conduct are observed and practiced in everyday life (MSV3).

I direct and guide the child to push him to achieve what is in the curriculum based on Wahhabi Islamic doctrine and it is already decided by the government and clerics what is suitable for the child to learn at this age. The curriculum is based on training the child to be a good Muslim (S2 T2)

...our knowledge comes from God not humans. In my classroom I use Al-Ghazali’s approach. He believed that the child’s brain is deficient and he is not able to use his senses until he is well-trained by teachers. Also children are not able to use reason to think. For these skills, he needs direction from the teacher to teach him how to think and how to behave in our culture (S1 HT).

For those participants who explicitly reject Western ideas, these thinkers provide the main sources of knowledge for understanding and implementing all aspects of the self-learning curriculum. However, their comments reveal that when Wahhabi Islam is used as the dominant frame of reference this causes confusion about the basic principles of a child-centred approach:

Self-learning needs the teachers to guide and follow up what he did wrong and correct his mistakes based on Islamic beliefs and values (MSV 5).

Going to the bathroom is self-learning...The teacher should give instructions to the child before he leaves for the bathroom. It will not be 'self-learning' if I leave the child on his own (S1 T1).

I give the child the information about the games rules and how to tidy the place after the game. Generally I guide to child to understand the child-centred or self-learning because the child not understand anything (S1 T3).

The self-learning activities are intended to give children freedom of choice in the classroom and allow them to learn from their mistakes. This idea is very unfamiliar to the participants as the Islamic curriculum emphasizes the need to avoid mistakes by doing things in the right way i.e. in accordance with the beliefs and practices of Wahhabi Islam. In the second quotation the focus is on habit training, which is coded as part of self-learning.

The link between child-centredness and child development was not well understood or accepted. According to this teacher, ‘Children are a *tabula rasa* or blank slate because they ‘*acquire their personality, characteristics and behaviour through Islam*’ (S3 T3). Based on their religious beliefs coupled with the traditional Arab view of children as *jahil* (ignorant) these participants were not interested in theories about child development. Their interest does not lie in understanding ‘children’s personal traits and mental states’ (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204) but in socializing children into the beliefs and practices of Islam. Their primary objective was ‘to direct the child to reach specific behavioural goals’ until he reaches the stage of mature moral development exemplified by the Prophet Mohammed (MOE, 2013a: 61-62). Their views on psychology are expressed below:

The preschool should have a psychologist who understands the child psychology if we do not believe in knowing how to deal with children having psychological problems. Also, the teachers are there to teach the child, we are not psychologists ... I am not a psychologist and we are Muslim, tribal and religious teachers. We do not believe in psychology. The government must understand that...(S2 T1).

There is a need to understand the child’s psychology because our teachers are not psychologists they are just teachers teaching children (MSV1).

The teachers do not follow the psychological approach when dealing with children's matters as it contradicts their Islamic belief (S1 T5).

The educational stakeholders cited in the above two sections are following the same curriculum. The extent to which they correctly understand the theory and concept of child-centredness and child development differs according to which discursive framework is providing the primary source of knowledge. When viewed through the critical lens of practice architectures it became clear that the sayings of tribal participants were shaped by Qur'anic knowledge and understanding in the semantic and social space. These participants were not familiar with verbalising their thoughts and experiences and they lacked the linguistic resources to reflect on and recontextualise their educational practice. The primary focus was on teaching in the 'right way' i.e. by adhering rigidly to Wahhabi religious doctrine using the Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed.

9.2.1.3 Towards Vision 2030

The Saudi Arabian public preschool is a site where cultural beliefs and expectations about child rearing meet the beliefs and expectations of global programs of ECCE. The preschool is also the site where the needs of the labour market meet the needs of children's development (Tobin 2005). The results show major differences in how child-centred education is spoken about and understood. The discursive arrangements (language and ideas) of the Islamic model revealed how the intertwining of religion and obedience are essential elements in the Wahhabi approach to a righteous life. Hence, the values and practices of Wahhabism have become synonymous with tradition or 'authentic Islamic values' (ibid: 6) in social thought. Yet when the Saudi concept of child-centredness (self-learning) is constructed and understood through this discursive framework it emerges as the opposite of a Western child-centred approach.

Saudi culture is traditionally based on religious expression, obedience and collective obligation. This research is contributing to existing knowledge by revealing why many tribal

participants lacked the vocabulary, theoretical concepts and ways of discussing that enabled urban participants to adopt a more praxeological approach to their teaching practices. To address these constraining factors, Vision 2030 retains the stipulation that embedding ‘positive moral beliefs’ is a crucial aspect of education but the development of moral character should go in tandem with ‘providing students with...knowledge and behaviours necessary for resilient and independent characters to emerge’ (Al-Saud, 2017: 28). Vision 2030 has specifically targeted ‘student-centred learning and developing the core life skills of students’ as areas for improvement. The relevant Vision 2030 objective is as follows: ‘Establish positive values and build an independent personality for citizens’ and ‘Provide citizens with knowledge and skills to meet the future needs of the labour market’ (ibid).

During the 2017 conference in Hong Kong Dr Al-Issa stated that “Once they leave the school system and participate in the job market, they should be different people” (Pennington, 2017). The educational reforms implemented by Dr Al-Issa are designed to give Saudi children the opportunity to ‘be responsible ... to be critical thinkers, to engage in the most critical issues’ (Al-Issa cited in Pennington, 2017). These changes will also limit the influence of the clerics in the design and content of educational policy to ensure a more moderate, tolerant approach to Islam. The Relevant Vision 2030 Objective is defined as follows: ‘Establish moderation and values of tolerance, professionalism, discipline, justice and transparency’ (NTP 2020, 2016: 44). With these changes Vision 2030 is providing a mechanism for bringing together an Islamic framework which reflects a more diverse philosophical and religious tradition with a Western framework based on reasoning and dialogue. As the data reveals, the Saudi self-learning curriculum is moving towards Vision 2030 by equipping children with the twenty-first century skills they need to compete in a complex, knowledge-based economy. The shift towards individual self-expression, self-determination and self-development promoted by Vision 2030 adds cultural legitimacy to those elements of the self-learning curriculum that are currently

restricted by the strict doctrinal requirements of Wahhabi Islam. Therefore, a child-centred curriculum is entirely appropriate as it is based on forms of understanding, which consistently reaffirm the ‘uniqueness and separateness’ of the child (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204) by concentrating on ‘children’s personal traits and mental states’ (ibid.)

9.2.2 Pedagogy: (Doings) In What Ways Does What Educational Stakeholders Do

Relate to Policy Stipulations?

This section will discuss pedagogy (doings) and the extent to which the current reforms in early year’s education in the public sector relate to the policy stipulations of Vision 2030. This research understands pedagogy according to Alexander’s definition in which pedagogy:

Encompasses the performance of teaching together with the theories, beliefs, policies and controversies that inform and shape it. Pedagogy connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure, and mechanisms of social control (Alexander, 2001: 214).

Pedagogy and curriculum are closely intertwined in educational practice. A 2013 *Department for International Development* (DfID) report indicated that ‘the classroom pedagogy used by teachers’ is consistently seen as ‘the most crucial variable for improving learner outcomes and is critical in any reform to improve quality’ (DfID, 2013: 6). Whilst the term child-centred practice is used to represent a global discourse of specialized pedagogy within ECCE, pedagogy is a complex and contested term as different societies have divergent views on *what* and *how* children should be taught.

9.2.2.1 Western Pedagogy

In Western Europe and America, answers to the question of *what* is to be taught are derived from various sources of knowledge including philosophy, religion, politics, sociology, cognitive science, developmental psychology and domestic and international law. The question

of *how* children should be taught centres on the definition of what is deemed to be developmentally appropriate practice. The consensus view on developmentally appropriate practice is ‘not so much advocacy for a specific set of methods as it is for the perspective that practice should be in harmony with children’s needs’ (Williams and Pronin-Fromberg, 2012: 310).

Western European and American child-centred pedagogies are based on:

human rights principles that privilege the uniqueness of each person and with the socio-cultural theories that see children as attached to specific cultures and learning (ibid.).

This type of curriculum is intended to guide the teachers in their work of supporting child development whilst simultaneously ‘respecting the child’s natural interests and choices’ (OECD, 2004: 26). At a national level children’s development goals are identified:

These goals are then lived out in practice and worked upon in the collective arena - using *as a content* children’s individual and age-specific ways of thinking and expressing themselves’ (ibid.)

In order to develop autonomy, independence and a sense of agency ‘children must be given the largest possible freedom to grow and learn’ (OECD, 2004: 27). American High/Scope is based on ‘*the belief that active participatory learning through play* is fundamental to the full development of human potential’ (French, 2012: 129). More recently, the emphasis ‘has shifted from play to playful learning; from child-initiated play to balanced child-led and adult-led play’ (Papatheodorou and Potts, 2013: 69).

As their comments indicate these two participants were knowledgeable about how play facilitated child development:

I have extensive knowledge about international legal policy framework of UNCRC, when I returned back to Saudi Arabia I tried to maximize the autonomy

of the child through active participation in a wide range of classroom resources designed to offer freedom of choice. This active participation or playful learning is an important element in Western/American child-centred approaches to education (MS4).

From a Western perspective, playful learning is crucial to educational development at early stage. This has benefits in later life, building his confidence and personality and developing his creativity and imagination. It is important to use play-based learning in our Saudi teaching process because this will give us an opportunity to practice Western theory with our Saudi children. This approach allows children to make their own choices and decisions in the classroom without any interference or direction (S1 T2)

This participant from an urban background fully understands the importance of children learning independently through play:

The children are given the freedom to play and learn independently thus, the teacher provides the appropriate resources and materials. The teacher also encourages the children to be independent. Therefore the children are able to exercise the five senses (MSV2).

The planning of ‘art-based experiences’ is central to the High Scope approach and reflects the belief that ‘the language of art’ can be used to support children’s development (OECD, 2004: 11). The teacher must have the knowledge and skills to support the child in using the learning resources to develop a set of competencies based on his/her learning dispositions. These participants are describing how they create an ‘Active Learning’ environment through balancing ‘child-led and adult-led’ activities (Papatheodorou and Potts, 2013: 69).

I use the Western democratic philosophy of child-centred education in the preschool classroom by giving the child space to make his own choices ... this helps the child to discover and create knowledge by himself (S2, T3).

The teachers provide the materials, equipment and resources for the child. The child needs to learn through that and the teacher must not guide the child, and not use prompting methods and deliver direct information (S3, T5).

Within Western child-centred pedagogies the child is understood as an individual with ‘his or her own feelings, cognitions, intentions, and preferences, striving for independence from others’ (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204). As this participant points out:

Is very important for children at an early age to acquire knowledge by themselves and to learn independently and to establish right and wrong and make their own decisions (MSV2).

The above findings reveal how the semantic resources (sayings) of western child-centred pedagogies intertwine with and shape pedagogical practices (doings). With their shared knowledge and perspectives, these participants were able to make their own teaching practices an object of reflection. Based on this praxeological approach, the pedagogical practices of the above participants were aimed at maximising the autonomy, independence and agency of individual children using a more flexible play-based approach.

9.2.2.2 Saudi Pedagogy

In Saudi Arabia answers to the question of *what* is to be taught are derived from religion. Wahhabi Islam provides the dominant knowledge and schemas: the ‘*thinking*’ behind the pedagogy. Saudi educational policy documents appear to be advocating a pedagogical approach that is compatible with child-centredness and child development theories:

The aim of the self-learning approach is to allow the child to experiment and discover and do activities supported by teachers (MOE, 2006).

This balance between ‘child-led and adult-led’ activities (Papatheodorou and Potts, 2013: 69) is intended to facilitate an ‘Active Learning’ environment, and it is central to the High Scope approach. However, the bringing together of two different educational paradigms has resulted in a contradictory role for teachers. Firstly, the teacher is directed to:

...deal with all of the units individually and train herself to be skilful and creative in these units and make these activities and units suitable for the children’s tendencies and needs (MOE, 2013a: 13).

At the same time the teacher is made aware that:

This does not indicate that the teacher can adapt the unit to suit the child but rather that she must match the child to the unit which has already been designed by the government to meet pre-set objectives (MOE, 2013a: 13).

The question of *what* and *how* children should be taught and whether it is developmentally appropriate has been answered as follows:

Taking into consideration the ethics of the child's behaviour and facilitating the absorption of the Islamic faith through the right tendencies of the teachers using a good example of the role model of the Prophet Mohamed in front of the child (MOE, 2013a: 19).

The main pedagogical role of teachers is to 'Form a religious instinct based on monotheism as the natural direction' (MOE, 2013a: 19). This 'unquestioning' belief or *iman* is defined by Ibn Tammiyah and given expression in the first pillar of Islam (*ash-shahadah*): 'affirming your belief in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Day of Judgment, and believing in qadar, *predestination*, both in its good and its evil' (Ibn-Taymiyyah, 2009: 19).

The good Muslim is first and foremost one who understands Islam 'correctly and completely' according to the Five Pillars of Islam: the creed (*ash-shahadah*); prayer; fasting; almsgiving; pilgrimage (Lipsky, 1959: 38-39).

Islamic pedagogy uses the teacher not simply as 'a purveyor or medium of knowledge' (Nofal, 2000: 9) but as a role model and exemplar based on the Sunna: 'the example set by the Prophet's words, deeds and practices' (ibid). The pupil-teacher relationship is based on 'obedience and respect' (ibid.). Wahhabism rejects rationality and dialogue in favour of *iman*, and all acts of obedience are seen to comprise one's belief:

Teachers obey the traditional Islamic religious of behaviour and values and ethics which influences the children's attitudes and the teacher's behaviour with

children ... I teach the child it is important to learn that every good thing you do you receive thanks from God and you go to heaven (S2 T4).

For those participants with no previous knowledge of Western approaches, role modelling was the dominant pedagogical practice:

The child should copy the Prophet Mohamed's behaviour in their life and not the child. The whole society is organized like that and it is too difficult to put the child at the centre of education in preschool (MSV 1).

The teacher must guide the child and the Prophet Mohammed said "learn to pray from me" (Prophet Mohammed Hadith). This shows that every child learns from adults not by himself and the child must have (a role model) to copy from (S2 T2).

This idea is deeply ingrained in Saudi culture and society and is reflected in its educational policies, which state:

Let the child repeat what he has learned from the teacher. The new concept will be instilled in his brain by repeating what he learned from the teacher (MOE, 2013a: 129).

The *Teacher Guide Book* is derived from the work of Islamic scholars such as Imam bin Hanbal, Al Ghazali and Al Wahhab who stated that 'the first aim of directing the child's behaviour is to ensure that he has internalized the principles and values of Islam and is guided and controlled by them' (MOE, 2013a: 61-62). As a result, these traditional methods of prompting and repeating extend to all aspects of the curriculum as indicated in the *Teacher Guide Book* which states 'The child must imitate the teacher when dealing with the things around him such as the corner activities' (MOE, 2013a: 61-62). The use of prompting, repetition and memorization serves to reinforce the idea that there are ways of speaking and behaving that are either *halal* (permissible) or *haram* (forbidden). The Corner Activities operate according to sets of rules for both teachers and children to ensure the right behaviour

and correct the wrong behaviour. In the Construction Corner *The Teacher Guidebook* stipulates that:

Children should build their structures only to the height specified by the teacher. They should work quickly and silently. If the child wants to build more than one thing he must remain in the space allotted to him by the teacher (MOE, 2013a: 125).

In the Art Corner ‘The child must draw quietly and the teacher must stop the child if he is making a noise and disrupting other children’ (ibid). These statements reveal that a pedagogy based on Best Model of the Prophet Mohammed denies the child’s agency by depriving him/her any freedom of choice in relation to the classroom activities, as indicated by these responses:

The teachers lead the class and give the information to the child and the child copies and repeats the activities after the teachers in order to understand (S1 AD1).

Before he plays in the art corner I must give him the rules of play in the corner and I put a child as a leader in the classroom to tell me whether the children follow the rules or not (S1, T3).

The teacher chooses several types of picture because in the Islamic religion we are not allowed to draw humans. If the child likes to draw their parent they are not allowed because Islam says that in their Wahhabi interpretation (S2 T2).

These participants defined their roles within the strict doctrinal constraints of Wahhabi Islam in the belief that the use of traditional Islamic teaching methods was in the best interests of children. Again, these responses are informed by the traditional Arabic image of the child in which he or she is seen as ignorant (*jahil*):

I use the prompting and memorizing methods in my teaching because is very important to the child to memorize the Quran at this early age (S1 HT).

I give the child the answer and after that the child follows me by repeating what I did. I do not give the child the chance to discover because he is narrow minded and I do not ask the child to do that. I give the child answers without giving him space to think because he is not able to. How is he able to discover if he has limited abilities? (S2 T1).

The participants mentioned how the curriculum places emphasis on teaching the children to read and write the Qur'an before they go to primary school:

...the teacher must read to the child with a focus on developing the child's academic vocabulary and his memory, his writing, listening and speaking skills and his cognitive skills (MOE, 2013a: 125).

Whilst a commitment to 'extending children's thinking' is a central aim of child-centred education (Hargreaves *et al*, 2014: 5) these traditional teaching methods based on the Qur'an are designed to limit the child's capacity for independent thought and action. Children are encouraged to repeat what the teacher has said without necessarily understanding the content. As this supervisor noted '*thus he is not able to develop his personality and confidence*' (MSV2). These quotations reveal how 'the local or indigenous pedagogy may entirely redirect some or all of the central aspects of the curriculum in question' (Rajab and Wright, 2018a: 2). The phrase 'doing experiments' was used by almost all of the preschool teachers and was connected with the idea of children learning independently. This is another area of confusion and tension as indicated in these comments:

The teacher carries out an experiment in front of the class. The teacher does the experiment in front of the children in order to help them remember and learn independently by copying the teacher (S1 T5).

If I do not give the child methods or hints to learn he is not able to learn and be creative in his experiments in the correct way (S2 T2).

The idea that there is a "correct" way to be creative is a complete reversal of how this concept would be understood from a Western perspective. Here the child's learning experience is not initiated and experienced directly by the child, it is mediated through the teacher, which is the opposite of child-centred experiential learning. The following participant from an urban background acknowledged that there was a need for external sources of knowledge:

We need extensive courses from Western teachers to teach Arabic teachers to fully understand how to implement the concept of child-centred correctly in the classroom (MSV2).

The above findings reveal how the semantic resources (sayings) of Islamic pedagogy (the Best Model of Prophet Mohammed) intertwine with and shape pedagogical practices (doings). With their knowledge of Wahhabi teaching practices these participants were focused on following strict doctrinal requirements using prompting, memorizing and repeating. When these pedagogical practices are applied to the Self-Learning curriculum they effectively exclude ‘the flexible playful approach’ which maximizes the agency of both teacher and child by providing an ‘opportunity to draw upon experiences and interests’ (Papatheodorou and Potts, 2013: 69).

9.2.2.3 Towards Vision 2030

Child-centred learning is ‘a 21st century concept’ in which ‘the teacher is considered a “guide on the side”’ (Overby, 2011: 1). Yet, a transmissive style of teaching using the Best Model is still the dominant pedagogical practice in an education system restricted by clerical and tribal tradition with ‘a heavy emphasis on religious study and rote learning’ (Kinninmont, 2017: 21). As evidenced above, socio-cultural adaptations to the Self-Learning Curriculum have resulted in an ‘incoherent curriculum in which religion, culture and ideology are confusingly entwined with individualism, universalism and rationalism’ (Rajab and Wright, 2018b: 12). Consequently, ‘the core concepts emerging in the language of policy reform produce radically different meanings and practical implications’ (ibid). One major implication is that Saudis are not ‘accustomed to thinking or acting independently ... but Mohammed bin Salman clearly wants that to change’ (Elliott House, 2017:13). The biggest barrier to the success of Vision 2030 is ‘a lack of qualified human resources who have the knowledge and skill to actually effect the change of the vision’ (AGSIW, 2017: 6). To address this issue, the Vision 2030 Objective is ‘Establish positive values and build an independent personality for citizens’ and ‘Provide citizens with the knowledge and skills to meet future needs of the labour

market' (NTP 2020, 2016: 60). To achieve this objective the Ministry of Education must first meet Interim Objective Three 'Improve the learning environment to stimulate creativity and innovation' (NTP 2020, 2016: 60).

Braude argues that to achieve the goals of economic reform under Vision 2030 there must be 'a strategy to change, for example, the nature of the cleric's preaching, or how Islam is taught in schools' (Braude, 2016). Within Wahhabi teaching a personal relationship with God and the ability to interpret the Qur'an are seen as the norm. In 2016 the government launched a new training program for existing teachers and school leaders to further develop their knowledge and professional skills in line with internationally recognized standards. This program was modelled on the 2014 Tatweer Teacher Development Project, aimed at 'preparing new teachers to work in public education schools by helping them understand their responsibilities, and developing their knowledge and skills of teaching pedagogy, lesson planning, class management, assessment, and providing feedback to students' (Alyamani, 2016: 35). These reforms recognize that in a knowledge economy, teachers must learn new ways of teaching which involve a different set of actions and activities including collaboration, and personal and professional development with colleagues in a cross-cultural context. According to Dr Al-Issa (2017) 1, 000 teachers will be annually selected by the ministry to participate in an international training programme. This training, which will run until 2030, is intended to create:

... a new opportunity for teachers to look at the world differently. They engage in a real-life experience, they have this type of, let's say, tolerance, acceptance of other people and talk with people from different religions, with different backgrounds. So, this is the way that we think education should move forward (Al-Issa, cited in Pennington, 2017).

Dr Al-Issa has openly criticized an Islamic religious and moral framework based on the concepts of *halal* and *haram* which have a detrimental effect on the personalities, attitudes and behaviour of children and affect how they interact with their peers. He has acknowledged that

‘the evolving curriculum, which also applies to religion, is still developing’ (Pennington 2017).

According to Dr Al-Issa this *evolved* curriculum will address these constraints by providing students with:

a chance to participate, to question, to open their eyes to different ideas, this is the way that the students will engage and this is the way that they can develop their own critical thinking and communications skills (Pennington, 2017).

These reforms to teacher training and curriculum design and content are crucial if the government is to successfully achieve Vision 2030 Strategic Objective 5, ‘To improve student’s values and core skills’ (NTP 2020, 2016: 60). Based on American High Scope, the Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum is designed to provide opportunities for ‘research, experimentation, cooperative effort in decision-making and problem solving’ (Yahya, 2018). In this sense the curriculum is already going some way towards realizing this long-term objective. A child-centred approach to learning is the most appropriate behavioural strategy for facilitating the development of these ‘values and core skills’ (ibid). Vision 2030 has redefined the purpose of education so that it is no longer solely focused on perpetuating and maintaining the *ideal* Islamic state. Rather this aim is now in tandem with the Western purpose of education which is ‘securing a productive, sustainable economy’ through facilitating ‘individual and collective self-development’ (Kemmis et al (2014: 27). In this sense Vision 2030 is providing a mechanism for bringing these two models of education into closer alignment and giving cultural legitimacy to modes of action based on a child-centred approach.

9.2.3 Religion: (Relatings) In What Ways Does What Educational Stakeholders Say About Religion Relate to Policy Stipulations?

This section will discuss religion (relatings) and the extent to which the current reforms in early year’s education relate to the policy stipulations of Vision 2030. ‘Child centredness is a pervasive attribute of teaching, not a specific teaching method’ (Alexander, 2007: 17). It is an

approach which involves the ‘whole child’ (ibid.) but this concept can only be understood in terms of a rights-based approach. Consequently, the task of developing a curriculum which both respects the choices of the child and meets societal goals poses a great challenge in ‘political, cultural and social contexts which are not so free’ (Hope and Montgomery, 2016: 316).

9.2.3.1 Western Socio-Political Context

Global programs of child-centred education are underpinned by the Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (UNCRC)’ (Gillett-Swan& Coppock, 2016:7). The UNCRC provides an international legal framework for the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons under the age of 18’ (ibid.). The framework of the UNCRC is based on European democratic values including ‘Democracy; Rule of Law; Individual Liberty; Mutual Respect and Tolerance’ (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY, 2015). Article 12 of the CRC stipulates that States Parties must:

... assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (UNCRC, Article 12.1, 1990: 5).

In response to Article 12 a Western child-centred approach necessarily involves treating children ‘as (quasi) equal partners in interactions’ (Demuth, Keller & Yoysi, 2012) and giving their ‘wishes and preferences’ a priority whenever possible (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204). The following two supervisors were very knowledgeable about the legal policy frameworks governing children’s rights:

I did my master’s degree in early years education and the title of my dissertation was Participation Rights and Autonomy. I have extensive knowledge about the international legal policy framework of UNCRC. When I returned to Saudi Arabia I tried to maximize the autonomy of the child through active

participation in a wide range of classroom resources designed to offer freedom of choice (MSV4).

... it is very important to teach teachers to understand children's rights (CRC) and to implement these political rights in our school. This gives children the space to maximize their freedoms and it treats each child as an individual so they can express their views and opinions freely and make their own choices. This is an opportunity for our children to become competitors in the global market (MSV2)

In Western literature, John Dewey is the thinker most closely associated with the development of democratic education. Dewey rejected traditional methods of schooling which rely on a top-down approach to knowledge in favour of the 'expression and cultivation of individuality' (Dewey, 1955: 5-6). He rejected external discipline in favour of free-activity and he rejected text book learning and learning from teachers in favour of 'learning through experience' (ibid). Dewey also rejected learning through drilling in favour of learning in ways that hold direct appeal for the child (ibid). For Dewey, high-quality educational experiences necessarily involve relationships of equal respect and collaboration between children and teachers, which in turn require democratic social arrangements.

None of the participants mentioned Dewey by name but they were familiar with his principles, not least because they are echoed in all global frameworks of child-centred education. Maximizing autonomy and participation rights in response to Article 12 emerged as an area of contention. Those participants educated outside Saudi Arabia were aware that child-centred education is rights-based and they were able to highlight the differences between Western values and practices and Saudi Arabian values and practices:

A child-centred approach is important for the child's rights-based and freedom because this is an existing issue in Saudi Arabia (S1 T4).

The government does not support children as individuals it is the reverse of the European countries which are democratic. Saudi Arabia is a hierarchical country (S2 T3).

If you compare us to European countries, their government gives children freedom and the child is a rights-bearer who can talk and expresses his feeling and ideas but in Saudi Arabia it is forbiddenthe children must have the main role in education and they must have a right to express their thoughts in the classroom and be able to discuss their points with the teachers. Using democratic philosophy based on participatory rights and participation with other children, gives teachers and children the freedom to make their own decision and choices (MSV4).

The above quotations highlight the tensions between the two frameworks of ideas. In the West, children are given ‘many choices and chances to decide for themselves’ and they are ‘encouraged to express their individual opinions in everyday life’ (Keller 2011 cited in Gerhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204). This cultivation of individuality is seen as central to a ‘rich and fulfilling life’ (ibid). Saudi educational policy documents use the terminology of rights and freedoms whilst at the same time, according to this participant:

There is no freedom and rights and this affects whether we can achieve any new Western ideas. The government knows that but they ask us to do it ... They tell you the meaning of self- learning but in practice, it's completely different (MSV4).

This tension creates a gap between global policy ideals and what happens when these ideals are realized in the preschool classroom. All teachers follow the same lesson plan. However, these participants are describing how they use their knowledge and experience of Western approaches to bridge this gap in their classroom practice:

I change my lesson plan when the strict religious supervisor is not in the classroom ... I know how to use this idea and put it into practice by giving children the freedom to be active participants in the classroom (S3 HT1)

In Circle Time, I tell the child to read a story and to raise several questions to his friends because the children have rights and the freedom to talk and to be the centre of learning as in the child-centred approach (S2 T3).

The intertwining of religious doctrine with tribal and patriarchal hierarchies and conservative social attitudes has influenced ideas about women and children. The preschool

classroom is not traditionally seen as an arena for offering equality of opportunity but rather as an opportunity to prepare children for their predetermined gender roles. A number of participants were aware of how gender discrimination was used ‘to perpetuate relations of domination, obedience and submission’ (Naidoo & De Beer 2016:3). The following supervisor was challenging the socio-religious view that women’s roles should be restricted to nurturing mothers and housewife (Sabbgah 1996). She referred to Ibn Rushd as a way of legitimating her approach to gender equality. She is using the common cultural practice of gift-giving to reinforce the desired behaviour:

I involved all children including boys and girls in this task. By the end, one girl had solved the problem in logical way in 10 minutes. I told the boys to clap their hands and bring a gift for the girl next day in order to prove to children there is no intellectual difference between boys and girls. Girls are able to think, react and solve problems as well as boys (MSV2)

These relational aspects are crucial as a collaborative relation between teachers and children is integral to a child-centred approach. A relationship built on mutual interest and interdependency creates a space for children to learn and take risks without fear of reprisals because there is no one ‘correct’ way of doing things. However, the participants’ comments revealed that a Western child-centred approach based on the ‘ideal of autonomy’ (Bates and Lewis, 2009: 25) and conceived within a liberal framework of democratic values and practices, is not easy to implement in the preschool classroom in Saudi Arabia.

9.2.3.2 Saudi Socio-Religious Context

In Saudi Arabia, the state exists to ‘apply the *Sha’ria* (Islamic Law) in all aspects of life’ (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 14). This ‘Islamic ethos ... derives its legitimacy from divine sources rather than man-made modern constructions of national identity’ (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 14). The Quran supports the rights of the child ‘to be brought up as a moral, righteous human being’ (Ahmed, 2011: 6) because this is in their ‘best interests’ (ibid: 6). The Shari’ah guarantees children a basic set of rights ‘without discrimination on the grounds of ‘race, gender, religion, economic

or social status or health conditions' (Tantawi, 2005: 26). In response to its duties and obligations under the UNCRC Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) the Saudi Basic Law of Governance states:

freedom of opinion and expression, both oral and written, is fully guaranteed to the child in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in accordance with the appropriate regulations and, primarily, with the requirements of the best interests of the children themselves, without any undue influence or coercion (*Saudi Arabia: Basic Law of Governance*. 1976: 32-33).

The above statement uses Western terminology but these rights and freedoms are constrained within a religious and moral framework to ensure there is no conflict with Islamic principles. As a result, freedom of speech remains very vague in Saudi statutes and is not to be confused with the Western concept of freedom of expression. Within Wahhabi Islam questioning “how” or “why” was outlawed and continues to be so:

...the teachers do not have rights and freedom to discuss any ideas, for this reason it is difficult to help the child solve a problem or discuss or think critically (MSV4).

If the government allows freedom and rights and holds discussions, it solves the problem for teachers and head teachers. All of the early year's practitioners should be involved to implement the concept of child-centred correctly (MSV2).

In contrast to the West where the ‘pursuit of autonomy’ is actively encouraged, in Saudi Arabia ‘the pursuit of autonomy’ could result in a person losing ‘the support and protection of the family’ (Elliott-House, 2013: 27). Therefore, the socio-political arrangements or relations that shape early years practice are rooted in relationships of power and solidarity and realized in the medium of patriarchy and hierarchy (loyalty and obedience to King, clerics, family and tribe) and gender segregation in public space. Consequently, the main purpose of an Islamic education is to ensure that children conform to social and religious norms by ‘performing religious duties’ (UNICEF 2005) by respecting their elders and by keeping ‘social harmony’ (Gernhardt, Lamm, Keller and Doge, 2014: 204). Hence, ‘allegiance to Islam’ and loyalty to family and tribe are the ‘strongest social bonds felt by most Saudi Arabians’ (Lipsky, 1959: 2).

This religious, patriarchal and tribal social hierarchy is institutionalized in the Saudi public sector preschool where it is estimated that:

... fully 70 percent of the three thousand supervisors who directly oversee public schools around the kingdom are conservative Salafis, a more politically correct term for Wahhabis, whose priority is not reform but religious orthodoxy (Elliot House, 2013: 150).

This hierarchy shapes the administrative procedures and processes and the relationships between staff and pupils. Consequently, 'What would be considered micromanagement by many Western organizations would be perfectly normal in Saudi Arabia' (Alkahtani, Dawson and Lock, 2013: 4). *Report about the roles of early year's education in the preschool in Saudi Arabia* stipulates that:

The teachers must follow the instructions and guidance of the head teachers and supervisors in order to understand how the education process is implemented in the classroom (MOE, 2013b).

This top-down organization is the opposite of a democratic system and it is 'characterized by the weak authority given to teachers' (Tayan, 2016: 66).

According to Giddens (1979) people are influenced by the cultures they interact with and this exposure leads to changes in their national native culture when they return home. This claim is borne out by data which revealed that participants who were knowledgeable about Western approaches to education were eager to apply this knowledge in their teaching practices. However, the system of micromanagement in the preschool combined with religious and social prohibitions around the role of women effectively denied them a voice in policy decisions. This was a continuing source of frustration as it denied them the opportunity to apply their professional knowledge. As gender inequality and gender-segregation are embedded in the education system, female participants are not consulted during the decision-making

processes on educational policies. As these quotations illustrate ‘The knowledge and experience of many talented female employees in Saudi Arabia is not effectively leveraged by the organizations’ (Alkahtani et al, 2013: 5):

...the teacher has to do what is actually written in the paper and the curriculum without discussion, the limit of choice in this situation is difficult to discuss. Generally, we don't have any discussion between government and teacher (MSV2).

the government gives orders and expects the head teacher to co-operate without discussions or understanding at all because men do not allow women to discuss (S3, HT1).

Within Wahhabi Islam it is regarded shameful for women's voices to be heard in the public domain: women's ‘invisibility in the public sphere’ is taken as ‘a visible token of state piety and the nation's commitment to Islam’ (Al-Rasheed, 2013: 113). Furthermore, in the classroom, certain topics must not be discussed as they are forbidden (*haram*). As a result collaboration and mutual dialogue were severely restricted:

There is a lack of interaction socially between each other because we have some topics it is forbidden to talk about publicly in our Islamic religion (MSV1).

The child does not have rights to discuss his feelings and his emotions with the teacher and I am not allowed to make social interaction between teachers and the child and also between children and other children (MSV3).

Within a child-centred approach the close observation of children is used to discover their needs and interests as part of classroom practice. Within a hierarchical system, close observation is used to effectively place everyone under surveillance to ensure they are following the rules correctly. During the preschool classroom corner-activities the *Teacher Guide Book* directs teachers to:

monitor the children closely to observe whether they are carrying out their gender roles correctly and to check whether they are following the correct modes of behaviour (MOE, 2013a: 134-5).

This traditional tribal masculine bias ensures that the children:

...pretend play in a man's or women's role and the men wear Saudi dress and we see that the boys play powerful roles in relation to women because the social structure expects the women to look after the house and children. The women wash dishes and wash the clothes when they are young girls (S3 T2).

A number of teachers commented on how these tribal and religious restrictions on women's freedoms (including the recently changed ban on driving and the recently revised guardianship rules) made certain aspects of the curriculum difficult to teach, especially when trips outside the school were involved:

The teacher's husband does not allow her to go on the trip as a result of the Saudi culture (S1 HT)

We need lot of things to facilitate the trip such as babysitters, car drivers because women are not allowed to drive a car and permission from head teachers and parents and Ministry of Education (MSV2)

Within an Islamic model of education what constitutes practice and the distinctive project of education is preparing children to become good Muslims with a central focus on piety, duty and obedience, which are learned at home and reinforced in the preschool.

9.2.3.3 Towards Vision 2030

Global programs of education are governed by sets of rights and freedoms. In Saudi Arabia, the legal system (*Shari'ah Law*) is founded on the strict application of the Hanbali School of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, which has systematically rejected all attempts at reinterpretation. For Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Education Minister Dr Al-Issa, the real challenge lies in 'establishing reforms which go beyond power-oriented relationships' (Tayan, 2017: 68). The Relevant Vision 2030 Objective is to 'Preserve the Saudi, Arab and Islamic cultural heritage' and to increase the accountability of government by 'Enhanc[ing] interaction between public authorities and citizens' (NTP 2020, 2016: 44). The successful realization of this objective will depend on whether Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman can

introduce tolerance and moderation in relation to religious, gender and sexual preferences ‘to make way for a more modern, competitive economy’ (Elliott House, 2017: 17).

As the interview data and policy stipulations revealed, the complex intertwining of religion and traditional Arab ethnic norms and values has resulted in an *adapted* version of child-centredness, which is the Saudi Self-Learning Curriculum for Kindergarten. Change is underway as evidenced by a 2017 conference report compiled by The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW) which stated that ‘the role and influence of religion in shaping policy and framing Saudi identity’ is now waning as the ‘prominence of Wahhabism’ gradually recedes (AGSIW, 2017: 9). The hierarchical and patriarchal ordering of relationships within the preschool was identified as another restriction. This institutionalized culture will become more collaborative under Vision 2030 as the lack of professional development and the rigidity of the supervisory process have been specifically targeted for reform. Dr Al-Issa intends to reorganize ‘the process of educational supervision, increasing the effectiveness of development and vocational training on an ongoing basis’ (The Business Year 2017). The Minister aims to create an educational environment that does not stifle initiative but rather ‘stimulates creativity and innovation ... by providing opportunities for students and faculty members’ to have their voices heard and their talents recognized (ibid). To facilitate increased participation, he intends to:

restructure the education sector formulating a modern system of regulations, instructions, and executive rules governing the development of curricula and the enrolment of teachers in educational institutions (ibid).

Under Vision 2030, ‘80% of parents’ will be ‘engaged in school activities and the learning process of their children’ by 2020, under the ‘Irtiqaa program’ (Al-Saud, 2017: 33). IRTIQAA is an Arabic word for progress. Teachers will undergo specific training programs in communication skills to ‘raise awareness’ of the importance of parents participating in the

education of their children (The Business Year 2017). This program is socially and politically significant as it opens-up collaborative spaces for dialogue and debate in a culture which traditionally imposes strict prohibitions on freedoms of speech.

Gender inequality emerged as another restriction on curriculum activities. In 2017 King Salman introduced a number of legislative measures intended to address and rectify gender inequalities, the guardianship rules have also come under scrutiny. On Tuesday 26 September 2017 a royal decree was issued ‘requesting that driver’s licenses be issued to women who wanted them’ (Chulov, 2017). This radical move prompted Sultana al-Saud to claim “...the patriarchy is slowly but surely turning to a land of equality” and “...we didn’t even reach 2030 yet” (Profanter, 2014: 220). Before the advent of Vision 2030 any emphasis on diversity and equality was seen as promoting a ‘liberal political agenda’ that is nothing to do with Saudi society and culture (Naidoo, 2017). In response to this inflexible reading of Islamic teachings, in April 2017, King Salman ordered government agencies to conduct a review and to remove those rules ‘that lack a basis in Islamic law, as interpreted by the kingdom’s judicial establishment’ (Blanchard, 2017: 11). To date there has been no overt opposition amongst senior Saudi clerics, perhaps because women’s empowerment is ‘necessary due to austerity measures and other economic factors’ (Braude, 2017). The top commission of Islamic clerics used Twitter to say: ‘May God bless the king who looks out for the interest of his people and his country in accordance with Sharia law’ (Chulov and al-Faour, 2017).

Vision 2030 is redefining the social contract between Saudi citizens and the state. Within Saudi society everyone has an individual and collective obligation to maintain the patriarchal and hierarchical order based on the five pillars of Islam: faith in one God, prayer, fasting, charitable donations, *haj* and obedience to King, Clerics, family and tribe. Islamic morality and ethical values will remain important but under Vision 2030 they must go in tandem with a system of social relations that is more equal. Within Western societies everyone has an

individual and collective obligation to maintain a just society based on the protection and promotion of human rights and freedoms. Vision 2030 is moving closer to meeting its key goals and targets under the renewed Education for All (EFA) program by providing a mechanism for bringing these two models of education into closer alignment. The EFA program is dedicated to providing education that will ‘improve the quality of life of individuals and the social contexts in which learning occurs’ (ibid: 14). This move towards greater social liberalization will ensure equality of opportunity for all Saudi citizens by giving cultural legitimacy to child-centred education (Benavot, 2016: 14).

9.3 Figure 4: Saudi Vision 2030 Schematic Model of Education (developed by Rajab, 2019).

| ON THE SIDE OF THE INDIVIDUAL: THE PERSON | In intersubjective space and the medium of | ON THE SIDE OF THE SOCIAL: THE WORLD WE SHARE |
|--|---|---|
| Education is an initiation into | | Education fosters |
| 1 - Forms of understanding | In semantic space, realised in the medium of Arabic: the language of the Qur'an | 1 - Within an Islamic context, individual and collective religious expression is to secure a culture based on faith in and adherence to a moderate and tolerant Islam and Sha'ria law. To secure a culture based on reason through the development of 21 st century skills |
| 2 - Modes of action | In physical space time, realised in the medium of daily religious rituals and work | 2 - Within an Islamic context, individual and collective obedience is to maintain and preserve the <i>ideal</i> Islamic state. To develop a sustainable, prosperous knowledge-based economy. |
| 3 - Ways of relating to one another and the world | In social space, realised in the medium of Islamic toleration and moderation | 3 - Within Islamic context, individual and collective obligation is to secure a society based on the five pillars of Islam: faith in one God, prayer, fasting, charitable donations, haj and loyalty and obedience to the King, Clerics, family and tribe. To achieve greater social inclusion and equality of opportunity based on a moderate and tolerant Islamic tradition. |
| The project: Education and the good for each person Education for living well | | The project: Education and the good for humankind Education for a world worth living in |

Figure 3 shows the Vision 2030 practice architecture developed by Rajab 2019 which serves to illustrate how this reform agenda is providing a bridging mechanism for bringing these two educational paradigms into a more workable alignment.

9.3 Summary

In order to analyse how child-centred education is constructed and understood in the Saudi public sector preschool, the sayings, doings and relatings are presented separately, yet in practice they are inextricably intertwined. This research has contributed to existing knowledge by using the theory of practice architectures to grasp the complexities of educational development by revealing how Saudi child-centred practice is characterised by ways of speaking, acting and relating that are radically different from those espoused in the West. Through developing a Vision 2030 practice architecture the researcher has shown how there are possibilities for western-educated Saudis to contribute to the government's agenda for changes and development. The challenge for policy-makers and educators is to design a curriculum which maximizes the rights and freedoms of the child whilst simultaneously fulfilling societal goals. In 'political, cultural and social contexts which are not so free' (Hope and Montgomery, 2016, p: 316) this balancing act can present a major challenge. Nevertheless progress is already being made towards the realization of Strategic Objectives 3, 4 and 5:

- The creation of 'a learning environment that stimulates creativity and innovation'
- Improve student's values and core skills
- Enhance the educational system's capability to address national development requirements and to meet labour market demand

(National Transformation Program (NTP), 2016: 60).

On a recent visit to Saudi Arabia, Vice Chair of USCIRF James J Zogby observed that the changes taking place in Saudi Arabia were 'far-reaching' and 'encouraging' (USCIRF, 2017: 83). During discussions with 'officials, dissidents and individuals ... questions were

being asked with a frequency and urgency not heard before' (USCIRF, 2017: 83). Zogby stated 'it is of enormous consequence when religious leaders and officials say that they are struggling with separating out what is custom from what is religion' (ibid). In a cautionary note he added that it was important for those outside the country to remain 'partners in this process' who are 'open to constructive engagement. This year's report makes it clear that we are' (ibid).

According to Zogby:

the entire educational curriculum is being revamped emphasizing problem-solving over learning by rote; changes in how math, science and technology are taught; mandated inclusion for children with disabilities; and a sense of civic responsibility (ibid).

These comments provide evidence of how the Vision 2030 policy reforms are beginning to affect local practice architectures in the semantic, material and relational spaces. Whilst there is support from the international community, the real impetus for change is coming from within Saudi Arabia, as shown in Figure 3.

Using Practice Architecture as the critical lens to focus on what happens within practices and how these practices shape and are shaped by external conditions, this study reveals how Vision 2030 is making real change happen, not by forcing people to adopt a set of Western values and practices that have no compatibility with Islamic religion and culture. Rather, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is using the language of religion to shape a more tolerant approach to Islamic beliefs and practices. In this way Vision 2030 is providing a bridge between socially, conservative tribal Muslims and socially progressive Muslims. The progress that has already been made towards these interim objectives evidences Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's determination to establish the 'enquiry-based 21st century education' (Tayan, 2016: 63) that is so crucial to the successful delivery of Vision 2030. The benefits of this model are twofold. Firstly, it explains the changes that have already taken place; secondly

it provides policy-makers and educational stakeholders with an ideological framework to inform further changes.

Chapter 10, the Conclusion and Recommendations of this study will begin by discussing the main conclusions of the study in relation to the six sub-questions that were designed to answer the main research question. The chapter will discuss the study limitations, the recommendations of the study in light of Vision 2030, opportunities for further research and the contribution to existing knowledge.

Chapter 10 – Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Introduction

This was a small-scale qualitative study in three schools in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. The main question posed by this research was, ‘how does using Practice Architecture to explore child-centred education in public sector preschools in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030?’ The research explored the meaning of child-centred educational policy, theory and practice in the public preschool in Saudi Arabia. This chapter will begin by discussing the main conclusions of the study in relation the six sub-questions, which were formulated to provide a comprehensive answer to the main research question. The next section of this chapter will discuss the limitations of the study with reference to geographical considerations, the nature of the sample and the positionality of the researcher. The study recommendations will include discussion of Vision 2030 which is seen as the main strategy for implementing a child-centred approach. Opportunities for further research will also be considered. Finally the chapter will explain how this study has contributed to increased understanding in the area of early years care and education in the public preschool in Saudi Arabia.

10.2 Conclusions

The underlying assumption of this research was that the development of children can only be understood with a specific social and cultural context. The main research question was, ‘how does using Practice Architecture to explore child-centred education in public sector preschools in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030?’ Six sub-questions were devised to answer this question.

To address sub-question 1, ‘what is Practice Architecture and how can this facilitate the understanding of contrasting educational issues?’ Chapter 3 (Practice Architecture) began by explaining the theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis and Grootenboer, 2008) and went

on to explain how this concept provided a critical lens to uncover and make ‘explicit the beliefs and implicit theories of early childhood educators, as well as to examine the conditions out of which they have emerged’ (Salamon, Sumision, Press et al, 2016: 432). Practice Architectures are the ‘sedimented mediating preconditions’ (i.e. the sayings, doings and relatings) ‘that frame, enable and constrain practices’ (Kemmis, 2008: 20). These sayings, doings and relatings exist in three parallel dimensions: cultural-discursive, material-economic and social political.

To highlight the contrast between Western and Islamic approaches to child-centredness, a schematic model of education was created based on an Islamic Practice Architecture. When this model was used as a critical lens through which to view the data, it revealed major differences in the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social political-arrangements. A key area of divergence concerned the notion of praxis or ‘right conduct’ that is embedded in Practice Architectures (Kemmis, 2008: 1). From a Western or Aristotelian perspective ‘educational praxis’ is conceived as ‘human and collective action’ by which ‘good individuals and good societies are formed and transformed’ (Kemmis, 2010: 21). And from an Islamic perspective, Practice Architecture derived from a Western viewpoint does not work so a Practice Architecture model was devised to reflect and explain how the doings, sayings and relatings of educational theory and practice are understood in a Saudi context.

From a Marxist perspective, praxis is conceived as ‘action with moral, social and political consequences’ (Kemmis et al., 2014). So, ‘educational praxis’ has a double purpose, to help individuals to live good lives and to create good societies. In the West education is concerned with producing and maintaining a just and democratic society so teachers are necessarily focused on education for democracy. To secure a culture based on reason, society is constructed as a network of structures, practices and relationships ‘that enable and constrain people so that each and all have equal and achievable opportunities to self-

development, self-expression and self-determination’ (Kemmis, 2008, p: 3). For Kemmis and Smith (2008) the ‘right conduct’ or praxis is action that is also critically aware and self-reflexive: the ‘*moral agency* of educators’ depends on individuals not becoming ‘*operatives* of the system in which they work’ by simply following rules. Educators must be able to negotiate these ‘mediating preconditions’ or Practice Architectures ‘critically if their aim is to act as agents of the system rather than operatives’ (Salamon, Sumison, Press et al, 2016, p: 434). This view assumes that educational stakeholders have the skills, the capacities and the freedom to make professionally informed judgments and decisions, which are potentially transformative.

In Saudi Arabia ‘educational praxis’ also has a double purpose, to help individuals to live good lives and to create good societies. In Saudi Arabia, education is concerned with producing and maintaining the *ideal* Islamic state so teachers are necessarily focused on education for becoming a good Muslim. To secure a monological culture based on faith, society is constructed as a network of structures, practices and relationships ‘that enable and constrain people’ so that everyone is obedient to Wahhabi Islam and Shari’ah law. The most pervasive cultural-discursive arrangement (sayings) that prefigures and shapes early years practice is religious discourse (the Qur’an and the hadiths). The material-economic arrangements of practice are realized in the *doings* of the preschool which are based on individual and collective obedience and striving towards excellence (role modelling the Prophet Mohammed). The socio-political arrangements or *relatings* that prefigure early years practice are rooted in relationships of power and solidarity and realized in the medium of patriarchy and hierarchy (loyalty and obedience to King, clerics, family and tribe) and gender segregation in public space. Within an Islamic Practice Architecture, ‘educational praxis’ i.e. the right conduct is conceived in terms of becoming a good Muslim which is realized in the five pillars of Islam: faith in one God, prayer, fasting, charitable donations and hajj. Hence

‘the *moral agency* of educators’ depends on individuals being obedient by following the strict Islamic rules that apply not only in the classroom but in every area of life.

An Islamic Practice Architecture model does not reveal an educational theory and practice based on ‘self-reflection, exploring personal theories, beliefs and values, and publicly critiquing the ideas and practices of others’ (Clayton, et al., 2013: 176). The differences between these two models explains why the Saudi Government have not yet fully adopted but rather they have *adapted* elements of the Western High Scope curriculum to match the contents of an Islamic Practice Architecture. In Chapter 9, each section used data drawn from both the documentary analysis and the interviews to show how, taken together these understandings will facilitate the journey towards Vision 2030. In this way this discussion chapter used the concept of Practice Architecture as a means to interpret the data and to illuminate the emerging situation. The data exemplified some of the issues which arise when an education system is being changed from one where traditionally religion has been privileged over philosophy to one where equal attention is given to providing children with ‘creativity, imagination and critical thinking skills’ (Al-Issa, 2009: 39-40). A Practice Architecture model based on Vision 2030 was devised to show how this development plan is providing a bridging mechanism for bringing the two educational paradigms into a more workable alignment.

To address sub-question 2, ‘how does social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centred learning in the West?’, Chapter 4 presented a Literature Review tracing the historical, political, philosophical and theoretical development of child-centred education in the West, which exposed its underlying framework of democratic values and beliefs. This question takes on increased salience in the context of cross-cultural reforms where the concept of child-centredness might be completely alien to the culture in question and ideas about how to bring up children may be very different. From

a Western perspective the concept of child-centredness is understood in terms of a rights-based approach, which is aimed at maximizing autonomy and freedom of choice. The Literature Review also revealed how the idea of child development was intertwined with child-centredness. Within global programs of reform, child-centredness has become synonymous with high-quality early years care and education, as Alexander points out, it is crucial to acknowledge that a child-centred approach is ‘a pervasive attribute of teaching, not a specific method’ (2007: 17). This comment served to emphasize that answers to *what* children should be taught and *how* they should be taught will invariably reflect values and beliefs that are socio-culturally specific. There are cross-cultural differences in the aims and content of curricula nevertheless ‘*instruction, involvement and engagement*’ (ibid.) can be identified as the common pedagogic principles. However, the implementation of curricula based on these principles requires a commitment to ‘give centres, teachers and children the largest possible freedom’ whilst maintaining ‘the direction of overall common goals’ (OECD, 2004, p: 26). According to Hope and Montgomery (2016) the challenge for policy makers and educators is to design a curriculum which respects the choices of the child whilst simultaneously meeting societal goals. This balancing act can present a major challenge, in ‘political, cultural and social contexts which are not so free’ (Hope and Montgomery, 2016, p: 316).

To address sub-question 3, ‘how does social and cultural diversity influence the construction and understanding of child-centred learning in Saudi Arabia?’, Chapter 5 presented the second Literature Review tracing the philosophical and religious origins of Arabic ideas of child-centredness. This review examined the historical, political, philosophical and theoretical development of child-centred education in the Arab world, which exposed its underlying framework of religious values and beliefs. Ideas about child-centredness derive from the Qur’an and are rooted in the doctrines of early religious scholars such as Imam Ahmad

bin Hanbal (A.D. 780-855; 164-241 A.H.) and Al-Ghazali: (A.D. 1058-1111; A.H. 450-505). These thinkers explicitly rejected philosophy and reason in the belief that man cannot be the source of knowledge. Consequently, Islam is both a religion and a moral framework that directs every area of social and cultural life. The Western concept of child-centredness is absent from the Islamic literature.

The Islamic concept of rights is not a political concept concerned with maximizing rights and freedoms. In contrast, Islamic rights are rigidly constrained by the religious and moral framework of beliefs and values in Islamic Shari'ah. This issue has implications for how the children's rights agenda (which underpins the child-centred approach) is implemented in the Saudi preschool classroom. As ideas about child-centredness derive directly from the Qur'an, Saudi pedagogic principles are based on role modelling the Prophet Mohammed. As a result, the political and democratic ideals that advocate increasing autonomy and participation rights for children are not well understood in the Saudi government's reformed early years' curricula.

Until the advent of Vision 2030 Saudi Arabia's education system was firmly under the jurisdiction of the religious clerics. Today, this power balance is beginning to shift in response to the need for 'comprehensive modernization' of the curriculum in line with market needs (Kinninmont, 2017: 29). Crucially, this impetus for reform is coming from within the Kingdom, which will be instrumental in giving legitimacy to the children's rights agenda.

To address sub-question 4 'what is an appropriate way in which to research this topic?', Chapter 6 described the two main empirical data collection methods: documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. Information from the documentary analysis was used to answer sub-question 5, 'how is child-centred education constructed by the government in the public sector preschool in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?'

The researcher was able to access a range of documents that are not available publicly, including the existing Ministry of Education Executive Plans, Educational Policies,

Investment Plans, the structure of the kindergarten curriculum, health and safety requirements, job and person specifications, lesson plans, Government Reports on preschool provision and the *Teacher Guide Book* 2013.

NVivo was used to code the data and to identify the main themes, sub-themes and secondary sub-themes. Chapter 7 (Documentary Analysis) discussed how these documents provided a crucial source of information when they were filtered through the lens of Practice Architectures to reveal the explicit and implicit assumptions underlying the Saudi government's policy reforms. These documents can be understood as the *meta-practices*, external educational administration and policy-making activities that 'enable and constrain practitioners' actions and interactions' (Kemmis, 2008: 1). The 'elaborateness, the rigidity and the compulsions' associated with these meta-practices will determine the extent to which educators are either 'active *agents* of education' or 'operatives of the system in which they find themselves following rules and procedures...' (ibid)

To address sub-question 6, 'how is the concept of child-centred education perceived by a range of key educational stakeholders?' twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted by face-to-face interaction with female participants. These accounts and articulations provided another valuable source of data which provided information about how individuals involved in the supervision and implementation of child-centred education understand the concept. NVivo was used to code the data and to record the main themes and sub themes. When viewed through the critical lens of Practice Architectures in Chapter 8 (Interview Data) the narrators provided vital information about the extent to which they were able to navigate between two potentially opposing value frameworks and how this negotiation was manifested in classroom practice. For example, whilst the Government has followed international guidelines in its willingness to provide the Self-Learning Curriculum, at the time of the interviews in 2014/15 there were some teachers who continued to interpret

their roles within strict the doctrinal constraints of Wahhabi Islam which in turn, had a significant impact on guiding the pedagogical experiences of children. For these individuals there was a conflict between Islamic pedagogy and Western pedagogy. This was manifested as a continuing over-reliance on traditional teaching methods such and prompting, repeating and copying or role modelling.

For those teachers who had been educated outside Saudi Arabia, the challenge of bringing the two systems together constructively was seen not so much as a conflict but more as an opportunity to apply their professional knowledge and skills using their lesson plans accordingly. This attitude was more common amongst older, experienced teachers who were very creative in their teaching methods.

Taken together the answers to these six sub-questions provided a comprehensive answer to the main research question: ‘how does using Practice Architecture to explore child-centred education in public sector preschools in Saudi Arabia develop understanding of progress towards Vision 2030?’

The supranational frameworks that guide global programs of educational reform are governed by sets of rights and freedoms. Ultimately, the success of Vision 2030 rests largely on whether Saudi pedagogy can be re-designed to ‘take account of children’s own views and motivations’ (Kinos, Robertson, Barbour and Pukk, 2016: 346). The data gathered by this project suggests that there are grounds for optimism in seeking to follow a more moderate view of Islam as announced by the Crown Prince, Mohammad bin Salman. The educational reforms proposed under Vision 2030 are an attempt to make these ‘overall democratic values of participation and everyday practices’ compatible with an Islamic approach, in which basic rights and freedoms have previously been constrained within an overarching religious and moral framework (Kinos et al., 2016: 346). The current Saudi Education Minister Dr Al-Issa is determined to create an education system that provides space not only for twenty-first

century skills ‘creativity, imagination and critical thinking’ (Al-Issa, 2009: 39-40) but also for the widespread participation of all educational stakeholders. These reforms give cultural legitimacy to the children’s rights agenda which is central to the child-centred approach and make Vision 2030 the principle mechanism for bringing these two systems of education into closer alignment.

10.3 Limitations

10.3.1 Geographical Limitations

The study posed specific challenges in terms of the geographical limitation that was imposed by the Saudi government. As the researcher is a preschool teacher based in Makkah, the Saudi government stipulated that the research must be conducted in Makkah, site of the two holiest shrines in Islam. Makkah has huge religious and symbolic significance globally as a site of pilgrimage that is accessible only to Muslims. There is no airport and generally speaking people tend to be more conservative and deeply religious with a strong desire to defend and propagate the true or authentic Islam through Wahhabi teachings. By contrast, Jeddah is a busy port with a thriving industrial economy including the National Water Company and ARAMCO. This city is more open to international influences and is home to expatriate workers from all over the world. Riyadh is the capital city of Saudi Arabia and is the business and financial heart of the kingdom. This modern metropolis was designated the cultural capital of the Arab world by UNESCO in 2000 and contains numerous cultural centres including a National Museum and National Library. Al-Jinādiriyah, which is a festival celebrating Saudi national heritage and culture is an important event held annually close to Riyadh. No such event could take place in Makkah which is entirely reserved for religious events. These differences do serve to highlight that Saudi Arabia is more internally diverse in terms of its religious and socio-cultural norms than it often appears to outsiders.

For this reason, the researcher acknowledges that if this data had been collected in either Jeddah or Riyadh or any other Saudi Arabian city the results could be rather different.

The researcher acknowledges that the location of the study did limit her ability to give greater representation to this internal diversity. If the interviews had been conducted in public preschools across two different cities, then a wider range of practice architectures present within the practices of educational stakeholders would have been revealed. For example, the ways of talking, acting and relating that constitute child-centred practice in a public preschool in Jeddah may be significantly different from those in Makkah. The researcher believes that this type of comparison would have added considerably to the study findings by providing more in-depth information about the enabling and constraining factors that shape the distinctive project of child-centred education in Saudi Arabia.

10.3.2 Sample

Another limitation of this study was the process of selecting the samples. Three public sector preschools and The Ministry of Education in Makkah provided the contextual settings. 28 participants were involved and the data sample included a number of policy documents in Arabic. The decision on which schools were chosen and which policy documents would be available was taken by an official from the Ministry of Education. The researcher had no choice in the matter. In a male-dominated environment a female researcher experiences specific contextual challenges which inevitably impinge on the research practice. Another significant problem was the length of time taken to obtain permissions from the relevant authorities in Saudi Arabia. During the data collection period of this study women were not allowed to travel unaccompanied. As all public institutions are gender-segregated the researcher was forced to rely on her husband's willingness to take on responsibility for collecting the authorization documents via the men's section of the Ministry of Education in

Makkah. These requirements halted the progress of data collection, which had to be re-scheduled over a shortened time-scale of seven days.

Access to the sample presented a further challenge. In Saudi Arabia social relationships are governed by a strict hierarchy which means that the researcher was not allowed to make an initial contact with the potential interviewees. This duty fell to the Head Teachers at each school who were given the primary responsibility for providing access. As the direction to participate in the study was issued by the Ministry of Education everyone was under pressure to agree in principle to the interviews subject to approval from their husbands. At this point the question of how to record the data represented a technical problem. Some husbands refused their wives permission because the interviews were being recorded. This was more likely to occur with participants from a tribal (i.e. religious and socially conservative) background for whom sound recordings constitute a violation of religious and cultural (tribal and conservative) norms which dictate that women's voices should not be heard in the public domain. The need to observe these religious and socio-cultural norms meant that potential interviewees were already highly sensitised to the research context which created problems around obtaining ethical consent. During the pilot study, the researcher had been careful to eliminate any questions that could be perceived as inviting criticism of Islam or the government.

As the aim of the researcher is to gather trustworthy data, this situation needed to be carefully managed to avoid any loss of participants during the interview process. To establish and maintain trust the participants were given strong assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, for example, the researcher agreed to delete all sound recordings of the interviews immediately after the transcriptions were completed and checked. The decision about when and how to conduct the interviews was crucial. To facilitate access the researcher gave participants control over the process by negotiating separate meeting arrangements with those

individuals who were unwilling to be interviewed in their schools. These women were always accompanied by their husbands, whose approval and involvement proved crucial to the success of the data collection process.

10.3.3 Positionality

The researcher acknowledges that her position as insider /outsider to the culture being studied required her to negotiate a complex and shifting positionality in relation to the participants. These relational aspects of the research were important as the researcher needed to gain the trust of participants, which can be difficult when the research involves negotiating cultural sensitivities. On the negative side, although the researcher had a mandate to conduct the study, not everyone accepted the research as legitimate. This was more of a problem with tribal participants who tended to reject western-style reforms in favour of traditional (Islamic) methods of teaching. On the positive side, the researcher shared certain ethnic, cultural and linguistic identities with the participants, for example, that of a marginalized Saudi woman, who is Muslim and speaks Arabic and shares their assumptions and understandings about the effects of gender and social norms. In common with some of the participants the researcher had been educated outside Saudi Arabia. These factors placed the researcher as an insider in relation to these participants who were much more open and accepting of the need for research into how western-style reforms might be implemented. On the negative side, the researcher is of mixed heritage and therefore not 'pure' Arab which placed her at a social disadvantage. In a culture where tribal name is a marker of prestige, the researcher was automatically placed in a hierarchy which identified her as an outsider from an urban background. As higher ranking administrative positions are generally occupied by people from a tribal background, the researcher was effectively an outsider to the head teachers, administrators and supervisors from the Ministry of Education in Makkah. Therefore the researcher was constantly mindful of the need to accord due respect to the status of these

participants, which is an absolute prerequisite for any social interaction in Saudi Arabia. This hierarchy is reflected in the preschool classroom where traditional Islamic teaching methods base the teacher/child relationship on prestige rather than shared interests and interdependency.

Cross-cultural research highlights the fact that communication across language does not mean conveying information from one context to another but requires close attention to the ways in which meaning is always culturally and socially constructed. As both translator and interpreter the researcher had to make decisions about the cultural meanings embedded in the language. The Saudi government uses the term self-learning to mean child-centred as the latter term does not have any conceptual equivalent in Arabic. As an Arabic speaker with a shared common culture, the researcher was in an epistemologically advantageous position in terms of checking the validity of her interpretations. However, the researcher acknowledges that this process of reflexivity affects interpersonal relations in the field and has implications for how the voices of participants are represented and understood. For example, the researcher was particularly concerned to convey the intended meanings of the participants and to avoid imposing her own interpretations on the data. This issue is especially pertinent in a culture where pre-school classrooms are dominated by discursive arrangements (i.e. language and ideas) that emphasise one 'right way' of doing things. As noted, many tribal participants lacked the vocabulary and theoretical concepts that are integral to reflective and inquiry-based learning and teaching. As a result, they were not familiar with expressing their opinions or with taking personal responsibility for their practices. They tended to be critical of what they perceived as failings amongst other teachers rather than self-reflexive about their own teaching methods.

10.4 Recommendations

10.4.1 Implementation

The 2030 Vision Statement announced ‘our real wealth lies in the ambition of our people and the potential of our younger generation. They are our nation’s pride and architects of the future’ (Al-Saud, 2017:6). Vision 2030 is providing Saudi Arabia with a platform for the change and development needed to meet its obligations under the UNCRC. On 1 August, 2016 UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova praised Dr Al-Issa for his commitment to educational reform and his focus on ‘education quality, skills, and jobs’ (UNESCO, 2016). According to Bokova UNESCO ‘stands ready to reinforce support to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in its ambition to move towards a knowledge based economy that encourages innovation’ (UNESCO, 2016). Bokova pointed out that ‘This is the way of the future because education is key to economic prosperity and social advancement’ (UNESCO, 2016).

10.4.2 Further research

Both sets of data revealed that religious and cultural legitimacy remained a particular area of tension. Regarding the interview data, it was not surprising to find that some individuals held very strongly to their religious beliefs and felt a sense of duty to propagate the Islamic faith given the religious and symbolic significance of Makkah. For these participants the notion of self-learning was in direct contradiction with Qur’anic teachings, which stipulate the need for children to role model adults, and to exhibit unquestioning obedience and conformity. As a result, the idea of self-learning was viewed with suspicion because it was perceived to be reflecting a Western system of liberal values that did not bear any ethical or practical relevance to the lives of Muslim children. The data was inconclusive as to whether the curriculum constraints were due to government imposed restrictions, a lack

of knowledge amongst the educational stakeholders or the religious beliefs and social attitudes of some participants. There were comments from supervisors and head teachers indicating that lesson plans give the teachers flexibility in how they approach the subject matter of the curriculum.

This tension between the two different value frameworks is currently reflected in the policy documents which stipulate the religious and cultural adaptations that must be made to the self-learning curriculum to ensure that it does not conflict with Islam. The introduction of a more tolerant and moderate Islam under Vision 2030 will provide cultural legitimacy to the idea of child-centred learning, which is based on ‘overall democratic values of participation and everyday practices’ (Kinos et al., 2016: 346). This student-centred approach is a crucial factor in making Dr Al-Issa’s plans for a modern education system a reality.

The interview data revealed that conservative social attitudes and strictly held religious beliefs tended to predominate amongst tribal individuals. Whilst a more open-minded and socially liberal set of attitudes and beliefs tended to predominate amongst urban individuals i.e. those participants who had been educated outside Saudi Arabia. In light of these findings it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study based in a public preschool in Makkah and a public preschool in an urban centre such as Jeddah or Riyadh. The curriculum design and content will be the same but as both of these cities are more cosmopolitan than Makkah there may be differences in how the respondents understand their roles and responsibilities, how they respond to the prevailing power structures and how they use their professional skills and knowledge to maximize democratic rights and freedoms in the preschool classroom.

Another option would be to conduct a cross-cultural study that compares Saudi Arabian public preschools with preschools in England or another continent such as Asia. If these studies were designed to include an ethnographic approach such as classroom observations, this would provide the researcher with a first-hand account of what the participants actually

said, what they did and how they related to one another. In the current study this information is only available from the interview transcripts so it is filtered through the perceptions of the participants. The themes arising from this data could be cross-referenced with the themes arising from the interview transcripts and policy documents. The researcher believes that this approach would produce a more comprehensive view of what constitutes the distinctive project of child-centred teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia.

As Vision 2030 aims not only to equip children with 21st century skills but also to increase stakeholder participation, these reforms are increasingly aligning with the child-centred or rights-based approach. For this reason, it is vital for Saudi Arabia to continue supporting research that explicitly addresses the existing religious and socio-cultural constraints.

10.5 Contribution of the study to understanding in this area

As previously noted in Chapter 3, there is ‘a lack of shared understandings of taken for granted terms and assumptions, along with the potential for the voices of educational stakeholders to be silenced within professional hierarchies’ (Cummings and Wong, 2012: 131). Salamon et al (2016) note that to the best of their knowledge there has been only one other study on early childhood education using the concept of Practice Architectures in which Ronnerman and Olin (2014) examined leadership in ‘research circles’ in Sweden. The theory of Practice Architectures is particularly significant in the context of Saudi Arabia where early years practitioners are being called upon to work ‘within new policy and practice landscapes’ (Salamon, et al., 2016, p: 439) that are radically different from their own. A schematic model of education based on Islamic Practice Architecture was used to examine the educational practices that shape early years care and education in Saudi Arabia. This model brought to light the beliefs and implicit theories of early childhood educators and the conditions out of

which they arose (Salamon et al., 2016). In so doing, the model revealed major differences in the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social political-arrangements that enable and constrain early childhood practice in the Saudi public preschool. In Saudi Arabia, ideas about child-centredness and child development are derived directly from The Qur'an. As a result, Saudi pedagogy is radically different from Western pedagogy which has implications for the implementation of educational reforms in the direction of more child-centred approaches. Therefore, the main aim of this research project was to identify ways in which two systems of education could be merged together constructively, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Vision 2030 has made it imperative for widespread social, economic and educational reforms that explicitly address these existing cultural, social and religious constraints. The need for a modern education system will necessarily provide learning opportunities which are child/student centred in the sense that they recognize each child/student as a unique individual Muslim with different skills and capacities and learning styles. As the data revealed, in this way early childhood education in Saudi Arabia is already taking positive steps towards the implementation of Vision 2030.

10.6 Summary

The educational reforms proposed under Vision 2030 are an attempt to make the values of toleration and moderation compatible with an Islamic approach in which basic rights and freedoms have previously been constrained within an overarching Wahhabi religious and moral framework. The current Saudi Education Minister Dr Al-Issa is determined to reshape the education system to provide space not only for the development of twenty-first century skills but also for the inclusion of all educational stakeholders.

Crucially Prince Mohammed bin Salman is spearheading real change in Saudi Arabia, not by forcing Saudis to adopt a set of Western principles and practices that appear to have no

compatibility with Islamic religion and culture. Rather, he is using the language of religion to shape the more tolerant and moderate approach to Islamic beliefs and practices that is at the heart of his vision for Saudi Arabia. Hence, Vision 2030 is providing a bridge between socially conservative, tribal Muslims and those who believe ‘the true Islam of the Prophet is a kinder, gentler religion that loves learning and life’ (Elliott House, 2013: 56). Within the public preschool, educational stakeholders are similarly engaged in using their knowledge of this diverse Islamic tradition to give cultural legitimacy to child-centred education. In this way they are already contributing to realizing the aims of Vision 2030.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

الرقم: ٣٥١٨٧٣٤٦٧
التاريخ: ١٣٠ / ١٠ / ١٤٣٥ هـ
المشرف على: أدوات بحثية

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الجمهورية العربية السعودية
وزارة التربية والتعليم
٢٨٠
الإدارة العامة
للتربية والتعليم بمنطقة مكة المكرمة
إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

وزارة التربية والتعليم
Ministry of Education

الموضوع / الموافقة على إجراء دراسة

المكرمة مديرة الروضة الثالثة
المكرمة مديرة الروضة السابعة
المكرمة مديرة الروضة الثامنة

وفقها الله
وفقها الله
وفقها الله

السلام عليكم ورحمه الله وبركاته وبعد

فبناءً على الاستدعاء المقدم من الباحثة / عديلة عبدالحميد رجب ذي الرقم (بدون)
وتاريخ ١٤٣٥/١٠/٢٨ هـ والمبتعثة من جامعة أم القرى بمكة إلى جامعة هال ببريطانيا
لدراسة الدكتوراه بعنوان :

((البحث في مفهوم تمحور الطفل في فصول الروضة في المملكة العربية السعودية))

وحيث إن الدراسة تتطلب الحوار وإجراء المقابلات الشخصية مع مديرة الروضة وإحدى
المساعدات ومع سبع معلمات وتتضمن المقابلة :

١. الإجابة على الأسئلة المرفقة
٢. التسجيل الصوتي للمقابلة
٣. حضور حصص مع المعلمات المستهدفات في المقابلة وتسجيل الملاحظات المرفقة مع
الخطاب ولدة خمسة عشر دقيقة .

وبناء على الموافقة الهاتفية معكم فلا مانع من تطبيق أدوات البحث مع أخذ الموافقة
الخطية من قبل المعلمات للتسجيل الصوتي وحضور الحصص . ولقناعتنا بأهمية البحث فإنه
لامانع من السماح لها بتطبيق أدوات بحثها وتسهيل مهمتها في ذلك . شاكرين لكن كريم
تعاونكم خدمة للبحث العلمي .

وتقبلوا تحياتي ،،،،

مدير عام
التربية والتعليم بمنطقة مكة المكرمة
محمد بن مهدي الحارثي

مديرة الروضة الثامنة
مديرة الروضة السابعة
مديرة الروضة الثالثة

وزارة التربية والتعليم
للمنطقة الثالثة
الروضة ٧ مكة المكرمة

وزارة التربية والتعليم
للمنطقة الثالثة
الروضة ٧ مكة المكرمة

وزارة التربية والتعليم
للمنطقة الثالثة
الروضة ٧ مكة المكرمة

Letter from the Minister of Education which provides the schools with information about:

- 1) The number of schools involved (3)
- 2) How many people the researcher should interview (15)
- 3) Permission to record the interviews from the Ministry of Education
- 4) Specifications about the materials, resources and documents that will be available to the researcher
- 5) The researcher must agree to these conditions before the research data can be collected

Appendix 2

الرقم: ١٧١٣ /
التاريخ: ٢٠٢٥/١٠/٢٨
المشروعات: **فهم ملاحظة (ك)**
مرحلة رياض الأطفال



المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التربية والتعليم
(٢٨٠)
إدارة العامة للتربية والتعليم بمنطقة مكة المكرمة

المساعدة للشؤون التعليمية - إدارة رياض الأطفال

الموضوع: بشأن الإفادة عن مدى ملائمة دراسة

المحترم

المكرمة مديرة إدارة التخطيط والتطوير....

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،،

إشارة إلى خطابكم رقم (٣٥١٨٥٢٦٩٧) بتاريخ ٢٨/١٠/١٤٣٥هـ بشأن الإفادة عن مدى ملائمة الدراسة

بعد الدراسة نفيديكم :

١- البيانات الواردة في استمارة خطة الملاحظة تتلاءم مع مرحلة رياض الأطفال .

٢- أسئلة المقابلة الشخصية المرفقة وعددها ١١ سؤال تتناسب مع متطلبات منهج التعلم الذاتي

هذا للتكرم بالإطلاع، وإجراء ما ترونه مناسب .

وتقبلوا فائق التحية والتقدير ،،،

١٤٣٥
فلوه سكر اللحياني
إدارة العامة للتربية والتعليم
بمنطقة مكة المكرمة
إدارة رياض الأطفال

تفهم نهائي النقية ٢٨ / ١٠ / ١٤٣٥هـ

This is a document from the Ministry of Education entitled 'Executive Plan' which confirms the following:

1. The correct number of interview questions has been provided. The questions are appropriate and designed to address the research topic
2. The questions have been checked by the Ministry of Education to ensure they do not conflict with Shari'ah law and the norms and values of Saudi culture and society.
3. The questions follow the instructions of the government and clerics. They provide clear information about the research which does not contravene Islamic law or Saudi cultural norms and values.

Appendix 3

الرقم: ٣٥١٨٦١١٨٤
التاريخ: ١٤٣٥ / ١٠ / ٢٨
المشروعات:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

وزارة التربية والتعليم
Ministry of Education

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التربية والتعليم
٢٨٠
الإدارة العامة
للتربية والتعليم بمنطقة مكة المكرمة
إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

الموضوع / الافادة عن مدى ملائمة دراسة

وفقها الله

المكرمة مديرة إدارة رياض الأطفال

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد

فبناءً على الاستدعاء المقدم من الباحثة / عديلة عبدالحميد رجب ذي الرقم (بدون)
وتاريخ ١٤٣٥/١٠/٢٨ هـ والمبتعثة من جامعة أم القرى بمكة إلى جامعة هال ببريطانيا
لدراسة الدكتوراه بعنوان :

((البحث في مفهوم محور الطفل في فصول الروضة في المملكة العربية السعودية))

عليه نأمل تزويد الباحثة بصورة من المقررات والخطط الوزارية والوكالة التوجيهية
والخطابات الوزارية والتعاميم . وحسب تعاونكم المعهود عليه نأمل منكم تزويدها بالبيانات
المطلوبة . شاكرين لكن كريم تعاونكن خدمة للبحث العلمي.

وتقبلوا تحياتي ،،،

مدير إدارة التخطيط والتطوير
تركي صالح الغامدي



من. للتخطيط والتطوير
من. للاتصالات الادارية

Letter from the Ministry of Early Years Education in Makkah, Saudi Arabia which confirms that the researcher has been granted permission to conduct the research and has been supplied with the relevant resources and materials. This letter also states that the researcher has been provided with the Executive Plan which sets out the obligations, rules and length of data collection period for the research.

Appendix 4

Interview questions:-

- 1-Please give me a brief explanation of the term 'child-centered education' (self-learning) as you would to someone who knew nothing about it.
2. Do you think this is important in early years education?
3. If you do, please tell me two or three reasons why it is important.
4. Do you think it has any disadvantages in early years education?
5. If you think it has disadvantages, please tell me two or three examples.
6. Please tell me three examples of what a teacher could do that was child centered (self-learning).
7. Please give me an example of a situation in which it would be wrong for a teacher to be child-centered. (For example if a child was going to hit another child.). Could you give other examples?
8. The Ministry of Education curriculum says there are certain things which teachers must teach, both directly and by example. Would you agree that teacher-centered practice is appropriate and necessary in these subjects?
9. Child-centered education (self-learning) means giving the child choices. Which activities in the curriculum do you think allow the teacher to give the children choices?
10. Please give me some examples of choices which the children could be allowed to make within each of the activities you have mentioned.
11. Is there anything more that you would like to say about using child centered (self-learning) ideas within your own teaching practice?

Appendix 5

أسئلة المقابلة الشخصية

١. فضلا قدم شرحا موجزا لمصطلح "التعليم المعتمد على الطفل (التعلم الذاتي) كما لو كنت تشرح ذلك لشخص لا يعرف شيئا عن هذا الأمر.

٢. هل نعتقد من وجهة نظرك أن هذا الأمر هام في السنوات المبكرة من التعليم؟

٣. إذا اعتقدت ذلك، من فضلك اذكر لي سببين أو ثلاثة اسباب توضح أهميته؟

٤. هل تعتقد أن لهذا الأسلوب من التعليم له أي عيوب في السنوات المبكرة من التعليم؟

٥. إذا اعتقدت أن لهذا الأسلوب عيوب، من فضلك اذكر عيبين أو ثلاثة عيوب كامثلة.

٦. من فضلك اذكر ثلاثة أمثلة على ما يمكن أن يفعله المعلم حول التعليم المعتمد على الطفل
(التعلم الذاتي)

٧. من فضلك أعطني مثالا على حالة يخطئ فيها المعلم بالنسبة لمعلم بالإسلوب المعتمد على
الطفل (على سبيل المثال إذا أوشك طفل على ضرب طفل آخر) هل يمكنك ضرب أمثلة
أخرى؟

٨. تؤكد مناهج وزارة التعليم ان المناهج الدراسية للمعلمين على وجود أمرين يجب أن يعلمهم
المعلم وهما التعليم بطريقه مباشرة أو عن طريق ضرب الأمثلة. هل توافق على أن أسلوب
التعليم المعتمد على المعلم مناسب وضروري في هذه المواضيع؟

٩. يهتم التعليم المعتمد على الطفل (التعلم الذاتي) بإعطاء الخيارات للطفل. من وجهة نظرك ما
هي الأنشطة داخل المناهج التي تسمح للمعلم بإعطاء الأطفال خيارات لها؟

١٠. من فضلك اذكر بعض أمثلة الخيارات المسموح بقيام الأطفال بها خلال كل نشاط من الأنشطة التي ذكرتها.

١١. هل تود اضافة اي أمر اخر حول استخدام التعليم المعتمد على الطفل (التعلم الذاتي) او اي افكار ضمن طريقه تدريسيك؟

The initial letter provided by the researcher which gives an in-depth explanation of the interview questions. The 11 questions have been translated from English into Arabic to ensure that they conform to Islamic law and Saudi norms and cultural values.

Appendix 6

The FACULTY OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE CONSENT
ON BEHALF OF A MINOR OR DEPENDENT PERSON
(please amend to suit participants)(delete italics before use)

I, _____ of _____
Hereby give consent for my son / daughter / dependent

to be a participant in the study to be undertaken by

Adaylah Rajab

I understand that the purpose of the research is to find out how the concept of child-centered education is practiced in the preschool classroom in Saudi Arabia.

I understand that

1. the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible hazards/risks of the research study, have been explained to me.
2. I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my child's/dependant's participation in such research study.
3. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
4. Individual results will not be released to any person including medical practitioners.
5. I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, during the study in which event my child's/dependant's participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained will not be used.

Signature:

Date:

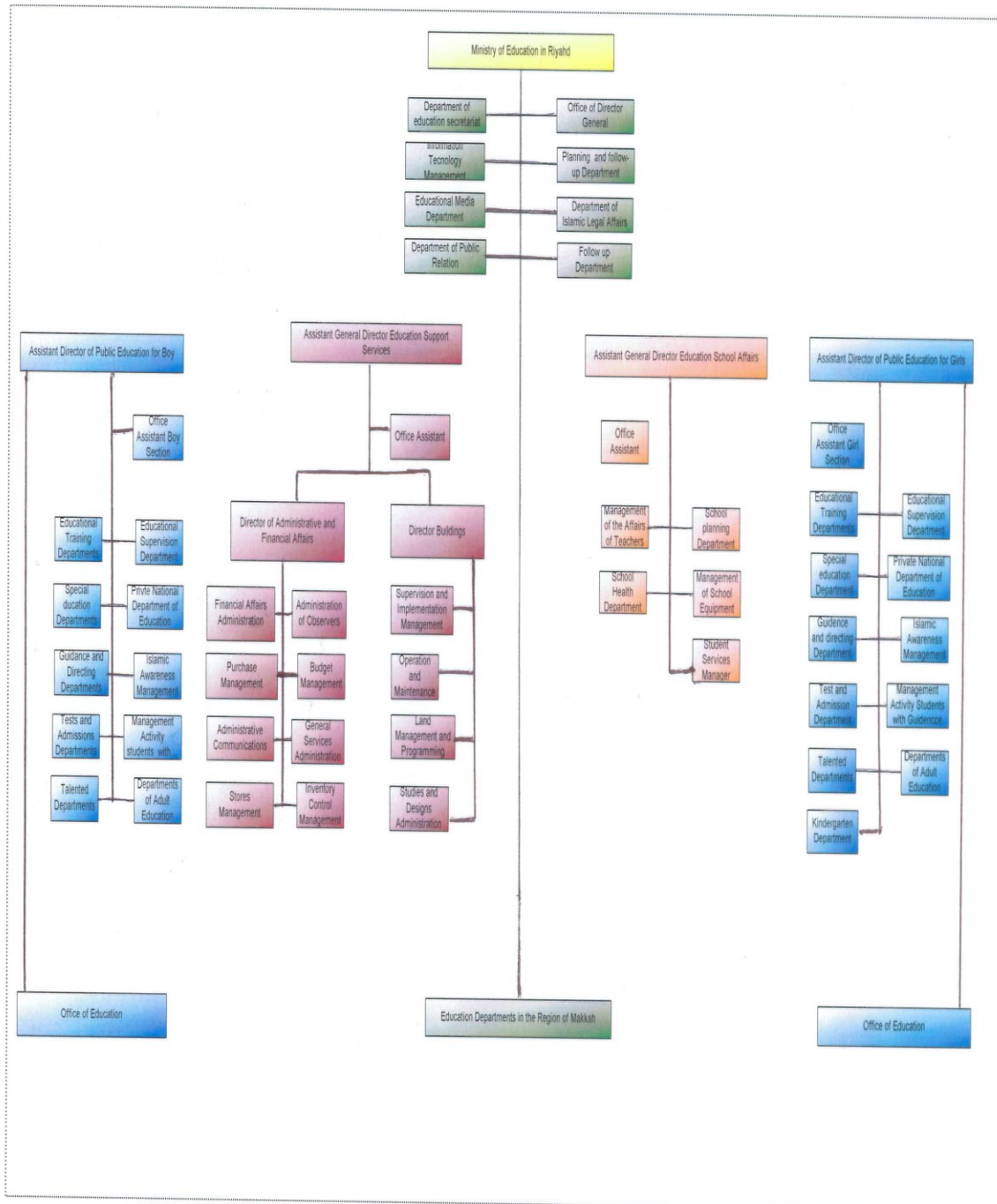
The contact details of the researcher are: Adaylah Rajab, c/o the Faculty of Education, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX.

The contact details of the secretary to the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee are Mrs J Lison, Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX.
Email: J.Lison@hull.ac.uk tel. 01482-465988.

In some cases, consent will need to be witnessed eg. where the subject is blind/intellectually disabled. A witness must be independent of the project and may only sign a certification to the level of his/her involvement. A suggested format for witness certification is included with the sample consent forms. The form should also record the witnesses' signature, printed name and occupation. For particularly sensitive or exceptional research, further information can be obtained from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee Secretary, eg. absence of parental consent, use of pseudonyms, etc)

NOTE: The parent or parents, or person(s) having guardianship of the child must sign the consent form

Appendix 7



Organizational hierarchy of Education system in Makkah, Saudi Arabia

Appendix 8

Profiles of Respondents

| Name | Age | Influence | Qualification | Tribal or urban | Religion | Nationality |
|---------|-----|--------------------------|---|-----------------|--------------|-------------|
| SSMO | 56 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Religious Studies, Riyadh (KSU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| MSV1 | 38 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Religious Studies/ Islamic History, Riyadh (KAU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| MSV2 | 45 | Wahhabi Islamic/ Western | Bachelor Early Years, Riyadh (KAU). Master Early Years (Dubai and Egypt) | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| MSV3 | 35 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Religious Studies (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| MSV4 | 44 | Wahhabi Islamic/ Western | Bachelor Early Years, Jeddah (KAU) Master Early Years (UK University) | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| MSV5 | 38 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S1 HT | 40 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Religious Studies/History (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S2 HT | 43 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S3 HT 1 | 55 | Wahhabi Islamic/ Western | Bachelor Early Years, Jeddah (KAU) Master Early Years Education (American University) | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S3 HT 2 | 44 | Wahhabi Islamic/ Western | Bachelor Early Years, Jeddah (KAU) Master Early Childhood Studies | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|----|-------------------------|---|--------|--------------|-------|
| | | | (Australian University) | | | |
| S1 AD | 45 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Computer Science (UMU) Early Years Training (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S2 AD | 42 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Computer Science (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S3 AD | 44 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Computer Science (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S1 T1 | 33 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S1 T2 | 35 | Wahhabi Islamic/Western | Bachelor Early Childhood Studies, (Alexandrian University) Master Early Years (UK University) | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S1 T3 | 37 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Religious Studies, Makkah (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S1 T4 | 35 | Wahhabi Islamic/Western | Bachelor Early Childhood Studies (Dubai University) | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S1 T5 | 39 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years, Makkah (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S2 T1 | 40 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years, Makkah (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S2 T2 | 38 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years, Makkah (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S2 T3 | 36 | Wahhabi Islamic/Western | Bachelor Early Years (KSU) Master Early Childhood Education (Canadian University) | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S2 T4 | 37 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years, Makkah (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |

| | | | | | | |
|-------|----|--------------------------------|--|--------|-----------------|-------|
| S2 T5 | 39 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years, Makkah (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S3 T1 | 32 | Wahhabi Islamic/ Western | Bachelor Early Years (KAU) Master Early Years Education (UK University). | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S3 T2 | 33 | Wahhabi Islamic/ Western | Bachelor Early Years (KAU) Master Psychology of Early Childhood (Jordanian University) | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S3 T3 | 42 | Wahhabi Islam | Bachelor Early Years (UMU) | Tribal | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S3 T4 | 44 | Wahhabi Islamic/ Western | Bachelor Early Years (KAU) Master Early Years Education (Australia). | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |
| S3 T5 | 38 | Wahhabi Islamic/ Western | Bachelor Early Years (KSU) Master Early Years Education (UK University) | Urban | Sunni Muslim | Saudi |