



**Exclusion Inside of Inclusion: The Experiences and Perceptions of Eight  
Saudi Early Childhood Education Teachers of the Inclusion of Children  
With SEN**

**By:**

**Nada Zal AlWadaani**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Sheffield  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
School of Education**

**February 2019**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my darling niece Haya AlRuwaitea and my precious children Nourah and Sultan, who inspired me to pursue changes in the KSA's education system.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to Allah, The Almighty, for blessing me with the power, ability and patience to achieve my ambition and complete this study.

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## **Abstract**

Despite the international movement towards the implementation of inclusion and the commitment to inclusive educational policies, achieving inclusion remains a challenge in policy and practice. Inclusion in many countries, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), is still underdeveloped and needs further research. The aim of this study is to explore the implementation of inclusion in a kindergarten in the KSA, reveal the barriers and understand the experiences and perspectives of early childhood education (ECE) teachers with the inclusion of children special educational needs (SEN). Since teachers in the literature seemed to be held responsible for the implementation of inclusion and blamed for unsuccessful inclusion experiences, this study aims to gain a deep understanding of ECE teachers' experiences with inclusion; specifically, it aims to elicit teachers' voices and to bring their voices to the forefront of debates.

To achieve the aim of this study, this study explores the experiences of eight ECE teachers within one government inclusive kindergarten in the KSA by using a qualitative approach. Through case study, sociocultural approaches, observations and interviews, this research reveals how inclusion is implemented in the kindergarten, how ECE teachers experience the inclusion of children with SEN in their classrooms and the barriers teachers encounter. By presenting the data as a narrative, this study provides a holistic picture of teachers' beliefs, and insights into the way ECE teachers experience the improper implementation of inclusion and the intersected and interwoven barriers that impact their experiences.

The findings reveal that, despite the efforts and commitment to international inclusion policies, such as the Salamanca Statement, inclusion in the KSA is implemented improperly, is ingrained in conceptual incongruence and is challenged with sociocultural, structural and

relational barriers. Although structural and relational barriers are legitimate, the findings of this study reveal that there are social and cultural issues of shame about disability that significantly impact inclusion and generate intersected and interconnected barriers that not only influence the experiences of the teachers but also impact all children. In this study, both teachers and children experience exclusion inside of inclusion. Teachers are excluded from the process of inclusion, and children with SEN are found to be socially, emotionally and educationally excluded.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>CSIE</b>	<b>Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education</b>
<b>DKC</b>	<b>Developed Kindergarten Curriculum</b>
<b>ECE</b>	<b>Early Childhood Education</b>
<b>KSA</b>	<b>Kingdom of Saudi Arabia</b>
<b>MoE</b>	<b>Ministry of Education</b>
<b>SEN</b>	<b>Special Educational Needs</b>
<b>SPE</b>	<b>Special Education</b>
<b>UN</b>	<b>United Nations</b>
<b>UNESCO</b>	<b>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</b>
<b>WPA</b>	<b>World Program of Action</b>



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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Inclusive education has been the aim and the challenge for educational systems in many countries. Despite international commitments to establish inclusive educational programmes (Ainscow, 2005; UNESCO, 1994), movement toward inclusive education has been slow. Loreman (2007) argued that while some countries are concerned with how inclusion can be implemented successfully, some countries are still working to justify inclusion and why it should be implemented. Shifting from asking why inclusion is important to how inclusion can be implemented successfully requires, as McGowan (2014) argued, altering ‘the physical as well as the social structures of society’ (p. 38). Achieving inclusion necessitates societies to change and be accountable for fulfilling the needs and rights of all children. More, it requires altering the ways children are perceived, increasing their access to life learning opportunities and breaking down barriers for children with special educational needs (SEN). It is a challenging process that involves deep and broad societal and cultural changes (Pearson, 2015a). It must be grounded in an understanding of its philosophy, aims and principles. Inclusion must be acknowledged as a right, and disability must be viewed positively; as well as being a ‘problem’ of individuals, disability may be constructed and exacerbated as a social problem in societies that fail to acknowledge difference and diversities. Thus, achieving inclusion is a challenging process that requires more than commitment to international policies such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994).

## 1.1 Background of the Study

While some countries have already determined why inclusion is necessary, others including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) are still facing challenges in understanding the philosophy, aims and principles of inclusion. The KSA is one of 92 countries that signed the Salamanca Statement and committed to generating changes in the educational system and creating inclusive schools (UNESCO, 1994). Despite the KSA's commitment to inclusive education policies, achieving inclusion remains a challenge in policy and practice. Alharbi and Madhesh (2018) argued that inclusion in the KSA is incongruent with the philosophy, aims and policies of inclusion. Children are still segregated by their impairments. According to Ministry of Education (MoE), 96% of children with SEN in the KSA receive education in special institutes in which they are deprived from opportunities to interact with other children (as cited in Alquraini, 2011). Alquraini affirmed that in Saudi schools, there is an absence of inclusion. Alfaiz (2006) also affirmed that despite commitments to inclusive education, most Saudi schools are still inaccessible to children with SEN. More, Alajmi (2006) found that children with SEN are not genuinely included, and the majority are educated in special education institutes or segregated classrooms in public schools with minimal interaction with other children.

Inclusion cannot be detached from the social context. The way a society understands disability influences how the society thinks about inclusion (Ainscow, 2007). Many barriers challenge the implementation of inclusive education policies in the KSA. As argued by Alothman (2014) 'such policies cannot be effectively adopted or borrowed without adapting them to productively interact with the culture and systems of the country that wishes to gain from such an arrangement' (p. 97). Alrubiyea (2010) argued that a major barrier to fulfilling the needs and rights of children with SEN is social beliefs and views. According to Alhudaithi (2015),



social norms about autism created significant barriers to the inclusion of children with autism inside and outside schools. Further, these cultural beliefs are constructed around the children's impairment and are rooted in the medical model of disability, which focuses on deficiency and the weaknesses accompanying impairment. Alharbi and Madhesh (2018) found that social views in the KSA that perceive children with SEN as dependent and deficient have negatively impacted inclusion; thus, inclusive education has failed to recognise children as members of society and as possessing rights and capabilities.

Social and cultural views of disability in the KSA have also affected research about inclusion in the KSA. Alhudaithi (2015) argued that inclusion in the KSA is significantly understudied and requires further research. Further, inclusion in many academic studies has been viewed merely as the subject of Special Education (SPE) (Alahamdi, 2009; Aldabas, 2015; Alhudaithi, 2015; Alquraini, 2011, 2012, 2014). Nevertheless, Altamimi, Lee, Sayed-Ahmed and Kassem (2015) reported that most research in SPE is based on the medical model of disability and that there is gap in research that is based on the social model of disability in the KSA. Altamimi et al. (2015) further argued that most Saudi studies on inclusive education focus on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and on identifying the factors that influence their attitudes.

Teachers' attitudes appear to be vital to the success of inclusion (Cornoldi, Capodiece, Diago, Miranda, & Shepherd, 2018; Leatherman 1 & Niemeyer, 2005). The literature suggests that the success of early childhood inclusion relies on the knowledge, understanding and attitudes of teachers (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2014). It is believed that teachers' attitudes are the most influential factors that improve or hinder the implementation and development of inclusion programmes (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). As argued by Alahmadi (2009), the effectiveness of inclusion practices is enhanced when teachers have positive attitudes toward

inclusion. Teachers are responsible for implementing inclusion and facilitating inclusive practices with all children in inclusive classrooms; thus, they are considered key factors and their 'attitudes as a decisive component in ensuring successful inclusion of pupils with SN' (Cagran & Schmidt, 2011, p. 172; Kraska & Boyle, 2014).

Teachers seem to be held responsible for the implementation of inclusion and are blamed for unsuccessful inclusion experiences, regardless of the wider structural conditions under which they work, and any barriers they encounter. Consequently, research about inclusion has focussed mainly on teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with SEN in their classrooms. In the KSA, few studies such as (Aboalala, 2008; Alhabet, 2014) have examined inclusion in early childhood classrooms by focussing merely on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and the challenges they faced. Both studies relied on quantitative research approaches and utilised methods such as questionnaires and surveys to investigate early childhood education (ECE) teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and the challenges they faced. There is no research in the KSA and little research worldwide related to the experiences of ECE teachers with inclusion and, more specifically, research that explores how the implementation of inclusion and its barriers relate to and shape the experiences of teachers. Thus, research is needed to subjectively explore the experiences of ECE teachers by examining the implementation of inclusion and revealing the barriers that have shaped the experiences of teachers in this context.

## 1.2 Context of the Study

To understand inclusion and its implementation in the KSA, it is essential to understand the context and its culture. The KSA is the largest country in the Middle East. According to the General Authority for Statistics in the KSA (2018), the population in 2018 was 33,431,660 with 1,445,723 people or 7.1% of the population in 2017 considered as having a disability. The capital city Riyadh has the highest percentage of individuals with disabilities, with 25.13% of individuals with disabilities (General Authority of Statistics, 2017).

The KSA is highly influenced by Islamic values and Arabic culture (Altamimi et al., 2015). Thus, education is grounded in Islamic values and is based on gender segregation; students of each gender are taught in their own buildings by teachers of the same gender. Kindergarten is the sole stage where girls and boys are educated together by female teachers only (Alameen, Male, & Palaiologou, 2015; Aljabreen & Lash, 2016). Thus, this study involved only female participants.

The education system in the KSA has three formal stages: primary, intermediate and secondary schools. Kindergarten in the KSA is an optional programme that serves children from three to six years of age (Ministry of Education, 2016). Children in kindergarten attend three levels based on their age: KG1 serves children from three to four years, KG2 serves children from four to five years and KG3 serves children from five to six years (Alameen et al., 2015; Aljadidi, 2012). It is non-compulsory education; thus, many Saudi families enrol their children in KG3 solely to acquire knowledge and skills prior to attending primary school (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016; Aljadidi, 2012; UNESCO, 2010). However, enrolment rates are still low. UNESCO (2018) reported that 24.97% of children in the KSA were enrolled in kindergarten in 2016. This low rate of enrolment indicates the necessity of exploring beliefs about ECE.

According to the MoE in the KSA (2018a), the core aim of this phase is to enable and prepare children for enrolment in primary education according to their readiness and abilities. The education system in the KSA focuses mainly on cultivating students with Islamic values and beliefs; therefore, the mission of kindergarten is to achieve global leadership in the area of ECE in accordance with the values and beliefs derived from Islam (Ministry of Education, 2018a).

Additionally, the objectives of ECE in the KSA are to: 1) gently transfer children from self-centred life to social life by teaching them ‘to enjoy being with, collaborating with, and sharing with other children’ (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016, p. 315); 2) provide children with a wealth of fundamental and appropriate information and expressions that are age-appropriate; 3) nurture the mental, physical and moral growth of children; 4) encourage creativity and open opportunities for learning under guidance; 5) cultivate Islamic values; 6) ensure the needs of children are met and that they have a happy childhood; and 6) protect children from danger and childhood issues (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2016).

The historical development of kindergartens was commenced by private sector efforts (Aljadidi, 2012). In 1952, the first private kindergarten was opened to children in the western region of KSA in the city of Jeddah (Alshahi, 2004). In 1965, the MoE agreed to supervise private kindergartens, and in 1976, the MoE acknowledged the importance of kindergartens and began to launch government kindergartens. Since then, the number of private and government kindergartens in the KSA has increased. In the 1970s, 10 preschools were opened in Riyadh. A few years later, additional kindergartens were opened in key cities such as Jeddah, Taif, Hofuf, Medina and Dammam (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016).

According to the World Data on Education (UNESCO, 2010), between 1999 and 2000, ‘there were 962 kindergartens with 93,942 children enrolled’ (para. 26). By 2006, 872 kindergartens were located in major urban areas (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016). In 2009, the MoE reported that there were 1,512 kindergartens with 106,301 children enrolled (UNESCO, 2010). In 2014, the number of kindergartens reached 2,559 (Alqassem, Dashash, & Alzahrani, 2016). In 2019, the total number of kindergartens reached 3,853 and the enrolment rate is only 17% (Alsaleh, 2019).

The development of inclusive programmes in the KSA began with ECE. In 1989, the MoE acknowledged the importance of early years in laying the groundwork for future development and the appropriateness of kindergartens as the least restrictive environments to better serve children with SEN (Alkhashrami, 2010). Therefore, the first inclusive kindergarten in the KSA was opened. Children with minor disabilities were included in the kindergarten of King Saud University in Riyadh (Alkhashrami, 2010; Almousa, 2006, 2010). Two years later, another inclusive programme was launched in a second kindergarten. According to Alkhashrami (2010), from 1994 to 1999, there was no further development in the implementation of inclusive education in kindergartens, and the number of inclusive kindergartens did not begin to rise until after 2000.

From 2000 until 2008, the number of kindergartens that offered inclusive education in Riyadh and Jeddah increased from two to 28 kindergartens (Alkhashrami, 2010). In 2016, the number of kindergartens that provided inclusive education and services in the central region, which Riyadh is located in, reached 80 kindergartens; 74 are government kindergartens and six are private kindergartens (personal communication, December 25, 2016). Despite this development, there is a lack of data regarding inclusion, specifically data related to the

implementation of inclusion in kindergartens, the barriers it encountered and how ECE teachers experienced it (Alkhashrami, 2010).

### **1.3 Aim of the Study**

This case study research approach aims to explore ECE teachers' perceptions and experiences of inclusion. It attempts to understand the implementation of inclusion and reveal the barriers that teachers encounter within their experiences of inclusion. This research aims to provide an understanding of how ECE teachers experienced inclusion with a focus on its implementation and barriers in order to listen to teachers' voices. In the longer term, the study aims to generate changes and development in inclusion in ECE. Reaching and listening to teachers' voices is critical since they 'can and do make a difference' (Cropley & McLeod, 1986, p. 126) in the life paths of children with SEN. Thus, it is the aim of this research to shed light on teachers' experiences with inclusion and the importance of bringing their voices to the forefront. Also, since there is a lack of research exploring the implementation of inclusion and its barriers and influences on the inclusion experiences of ECE teachers, this study intends to fill this gap.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

To achieve the aims of this research, three main research questions are introduced:

- 1- How was inclusion implemented in the kindergarten, from the perspectives of the teachers?
- 2- What are the barriers to inclusion, from the perspectives of the teachers?
- 3- How did ECE teachers experience inclusion within the kindergarten?

The formulation of the research questions was informed by the literature review and the purpose of the study. By answering the research questions, this research will contribute to the development of inclusion in ECE, produce and inspire change and give a voice to teachers, who are often blamed for unsuccessful inclusion experiences.

## 1.5 Terminology

It is essential to clearly define the terms used in this research. First, it is important to clarify the meaning of 'inclusion', since it differs in different cultures. Studies in the KSA have used inclusion to describe integration and mainstreaming. Based on previous research on inclusion in the KSA (Alahamdi, 2009; Alhabet, 2014; Alhudaithi, 2015; Almousa, 2006; Nasif, 2015), the definition of inclusion is offering education and special services for children with SEN in regular schools. However, it is important to acknowledge that the term '*Damjj*' in Arabic represents inclusion, integration and mainstreaming, and it does not distinguish between them.

Barton (1997) defined inclusion as

Responding to diversity; it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being open, empowering all members and about celebrating 'difference' in dignified ways. From this perspective, the goal is not to leave anyone out of school. Inclusive experience is about learning to live with one another. (p. 233)

According to UNESCO (2005), inclusion is defined as 'a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning' (p. 12). Thus, in this research, the meaning of inclusion is adopted from both definitions, as they clearly represent the principles of inclusion.

Second, the term SEN is used in the KSA as an umbrella term for all kinds of disabilities. However, I personally do not prefer using the term SEN, as it has a contrary connotation to my position and there is a better-suggested term in Reggio Emilia's approach: 'children with special

educational rights' (Runswick-Cole & Hodge, 2009). In this research, I used the term SEN, which refers to children who are diagnosed with intellectual, physical, sensory, linguistic, social, learning and emotional special needs and thus require more care to foster their abilities and to meet their educational needs (Alkhashrami, 2010). I chose to adopt this term in my research because I recognise that there is tension between the understanding of inclusion and disability in Western contexts, in which I have done my PhD, and in Saudi contexts, which I will return to after the completion of my degree. There is a need for cultural sensitivity as well as recognising the different ways of interpreting inclusion and describing children; therefore, I chose to use SEN since it is the key term used in the KSA, and I hope that in the near future a shift in the understanding of inclusion and describing children will occur.

Third, the term 'kindergartens' refers to the educational programmes offered to children between three and six years old.

Fourth, 'inclusive kindergartens' refer to government educational programmes that provide inclusive services for children with SEN from the age of three to six years old with their peers.

Fifth, 'experiences' refer to the descriptions teachers provide of their feelings, views and perspectives of being teachers in inclusive kindergarten.

Finally, 'early childhood education teachers' in this study are those who teach children between the ages of three to six years in government kindergartens. It is important to point out that teachers in this study did not have the same teaching qualification. Their backgrounds and qualifications are provided in detail (in Section 3.4.)



## **1.6 Structure of the Study**

This thesis consists of six chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter one introduces the study and explains its background. It also provides a brief background of the context of the study and outlines the aims, questions and terminology of this research. Chapter two is the literature review, which outlines the relevant literature on inclusion, the development of inclusive policies, the barriers to inclusion and teachers' experiences of inclusion as well as outlines sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework of the research. Chapter three is the methodology, which presents the positionality of the researcher, the methodological approach, the ethical considerations, the process of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study, the process of analysing the data and the decision to present the experiences of the teachers as a narrative.

The fourth chapter presents the experiences of the teachers interwoven with the researcher's observations and responses to the teachers' narratives. Chapter five discusses the teachers' narratives in relation to the existing literature, the research questions and the theoretical framework. I chose to represent the experiences of the teachers in a separate chapter from the discussion because I did not want to break the teachers' narratives and I wanted to provide a clear and complete picture of the experiences of the teachers. Chapter six summarises the findings of the research and outlines its limitations as well as its implications for society, the Saudi MoE and policymakers. It also provides recommendations for future research, highlights the contribution to knowledge made by this research and offers a reflection of my journey as a researcher.

This chapter has provided an outline of the research, and the next chapter provides a review of the literature and explores inclusion, its implementation, barriers and the experiences of teachers in different cultural contexts.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to this study's main topics and is divided into four main sections. **Section 2.1** reviews inclusion, definitions of inclusion and the development and implementation of inclusive policies. **Section 2.2** reviews the literature about the barriers to inclusion. **Section 2.3** presents the literature about the experiences of teachers with inclusion, **Section 2.4** reviews Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which functions as this study's theoretical framework. First, in this chapter, 'inclusion' is defined, and its many synonyms are discussed. Following this, the history of the development and implementation of inclusive programmes in local and international contexts is elaborated. Next, it explores barriers to inclusion in global, regional, and Saudi Arabian contexts. Finally, teachers' experiences with inclusion are reviewed. Each topic addresses a factor that significantly affects how ECE teachers experience inclusion.

### 2.1 Inclusion

Underlying the concept of inclusion is the belief that all children have the rights to belong, to be seen, and to be acknowledged where they live. In other words, children 'do not have to "earn" their way' (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p. 6) into school or society; rather, from the beginning, they can participate as complete members. Accordingly, inclusion requires societies to change, particularly in how they perceive their own responsibilities to all children. These changes require modifying how children with and without SEN are viewed, breaking down the barriers that children with SEN face, and expanding the number of opportunities available to them. Inclusion is more than a movement that seeks to change schools and expand access

(Clough & Corbett, 2000); it also seeks to create inclusive societies that acknowledge, respect, and celebrate differences (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2005).

According to the philosophy of inclusion, education is a right, not merely a need. The literature broadly agrees that inclusion is based on the belief that it is human rights, social justice, and equal opportunities (Ainscow, 2005; Cagran & Schmidt, 2011; Odom, 2000; Vlachou, 1997). Inclusion is 'being interpreted as a broad, rights-based concept concerned with identifying and removing barriers to participation and achievement for all' (Ekins & Grimes, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, inclusion requires 'restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally' (Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education [CSIE], 2015, para. 2). At its core, inclusion asks people to respect, acknowledge, and value differences.

Inclusion is a social movement that necessitates structural and cultural changes (Slee & Allan, 2001). Since inclusion involves changing societies, it is a process, not a destination. As Ainscow (2005) described, it is 'a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to diversity' (p. 118). It seeks to guarantee justice for all and acknowledge and appreciate diversity by actively reforming societal beliefs about ability and disability (Runswick-Cole, 2011). Thus, inclusion is a difficult process, requiring people to acknowledge that inclusion is a right, to view disabilities positively, and to work together (Cameron, 2014). It also a process that requires extensive and broad changes (Pearson, 2015a).

### **2.1.1 Definition of inclusion.**

The literature offers no single definition of inclusion. In this study, I chose to adopt Barton's (1997) definition because it succinctly identifies the main concepts of inclusion. He defined 'inclusion' as:

Responding to diversity; it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being open, empowering all members and about celebrating 'difference' in dignified ways. From this perspective, the goal is not to leave anyone out of school. Inclusive experience is about learning to live with one another. (p. 233)

It is worth mentioning that many studies have used 'inclusion' and 'integration' interchangeably; both have been used to refer to the provision of educational services to children with SEN. However, inclusion's aims and theoretical framework differ from those of integration; thus, distinguishing between them is essential. While inclusion involves equality, acceptance, and allowing children to participate in all parts of life, integration is about 'a tolerance of disabled people, whose presence may be accepted though they will never be regarded as equals' (Cameron, 2014, p. 79). The theoretical framework of inclusion is based on the social model of disability, which views disability as socially constructed and created by environmental barriers (Oliver, 1990). As argued by Curran and Runswick-Cole (2014), 'disability is constructed as a social issue that must be tackled by removing the barriers to participation that people with impairments experience in the social world' (p.1622). In contrast, integration is based on the medical model of disability, which individuates disability and views it as intrinsically limiting/impairing (Cameron, 2014).

Despite these differences, 'inclusion' and 'integration' have been used synonymously. For example, Alahamdi (2009) used 'inclusion' as a synonym for 'integration', describing 'integration' as 'a service delivery model in which there is a commitment to meeting the educational needs of students with SEN within the regular classrooms to the maximum extent

appropriate' (Alahmadi, 2009, p. 39). Similarly, Bennett, Deluca, and Bruns (1997) described 'inclusion' as the process of placing children with SEN in regular classrooms but giving them special instruction in separate classrooms.

As described earlier, integration involves including children with SEN in regular schools for only part of the day; for the remainder of the day, they are taught in special classrooms. Integration involves the partial participation of children, which totally contrasts with inclusion. Under inclusion, society, policies, and schools are changed so that children are able to fully participate in education and in all aspects of life (Ainscow, 2005; Loreman. et al., 2005). As argued by Graham and Slee (2008), inclusion requires radical changes to the structure of schools and societies.

The confusion around inclusion and integration could be the result of linguistic differences. For example, in Arabic, 'inclusion', 'integration', and 'mainstreaming' have the same definition and are captured by a single term '*Damjj*' (Alhudaithi, 2015). Similarly, in Korea, 'inclusion' and 'integration' are not clearly distinguished; in legislation, they have the same meaning (Kang, Kang & Plunkett, 2015). According to Hauerwas and Mahon (2018), differences in how 'inclusion' and 'disability' are defined across different languages have made it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about their meanings. For example, Hauerwas and Mahon (2018) found that there are differences in the variation between disabilities among participants from 20 countries. According to Ainscow (2000) cultural differences in terms and concepts have caused 'a failure to describe the way practice is to be understood within its local and national context' (p.16). This study seeks to explore how inclusion is implemented in the Saudi context when it is viewed (at least in principle) as a right and when children with SEN are assumed to be natural and rightful members of their schools.

### **2.1.2 The development of inclusive policies.**

Inclusive policies have arisen from various perspectives about people with SEN. Since the 1960s, researchers have been concerned with how children with SEN are educated (Clough & Corbett, 2000). Worldwide, educational policies were initially based on the medical model (Ekins & Grimes, 2009; Goodley, 2014). The medical model believes that, because disability is an individual problem, the person with the disability is responsible for adapting to his or her environment. This perspective, which viewed disabilities solely as deficiencies, led to policies that were focused on ‘sickness rather than health, aetiology of the problem rather than experience of the individual, subject-specific pathology rather than environmental factors, specific treatment rather than holistic support, and reactive measures rather than preventative measures’ (Clough & Corbett, 2000, p. 11). In this model, impairment is a disease and difference is an abnormality (Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). It focuses on ableism in which disability is constructed in terms of ‘bodies as impaired and positions these as others: different, lesser, undesirable, in need of repair or modification, and de-humanized’ (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013, p. 4). Accordingly, this perspective argues that education should focus on providing resources, professional treatment, and rehabilitation services to cure people with SEN so that they are able to fit in with ‘normal’ people (Cameron, 2014; Stone-MacDonald, 2012).

However, by the mid-1970s, a new view of disability was emerging. In 1976, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation published the *Fundamental Principles of Disability*, which introduced the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990, 2013). In the early 1980s, Michael Oliver introduced the social model to study disability (Oliver, 2013; Watson, 2012). Oliver (1990) argued that disabilities are produced by social barriers that challenge people with impairments. For example, people with impairments are disabled when they are excluded,

are unable to access their rights, and are unable to participate in their societies (Cameron, 2014). In contrast to the medical model, the social model views disability as a collective problem, not an individual problem (Oliver, 2013). In the social model, society is responsible for eradicating the social, cultural, and environmental barriers that disable people with impairments. According to Goodley and Roets (2008), the social model has shifted the attention away from the focus on impairment to the focus on the ways disability is socially, culturally, politically and relationally created.

The social model was critical to establishing the foundation of inclusion. In 1982, the World Program of Action (WPA) was established, and it restructured legislative policies related to disability. It emphasised the necessity of approaching disability from a human rights perspective and on its fundamental theme, which is about ‘equalizations of opportunities’ (U.N., n.d., para. 4). Thus, the WPA is an exemplar of the social model put into legislation. The WPA is:

A global strategy to enhance disability prevention, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities, which pertains to the full participation of persons with disabilities in social life and national development. The WPA also emphasizes the need to approach disability from a human rights perspective. (U.N., n.d., para. 2)

To implement the WPA, many countries were invited to collaborate with each other, private organisations, and the U.N. (U.N., n.d.).

Over the last two decades, there has been a significant shift in how disabilities are perceived, moving from a ‘caring perspective to a human rights and development perspective’ (Almoussa, 2010, p. 9). There is now a global trend to include people with SEN in society and education. More countries have acknowledged the right of people with SEN to access quality education (Nasif, 2005; UN, 2016). Using the social model of disability, organisations such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), the World Declaration

on Education for All (1990), the United Nations Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) have affirmed that people with SEN have the right to equal educational opportunities (UN, 2016).

The 1994 Salamanca Statement caused many countries to establish inclusive educational programmes (Ainscow, 2005; UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement was presented at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain, and was signed by 92 governments and 25 international organisations (UNESCO, 1994). The Statement addressed the need for inclusive education and providing education for all, and it proclaimed that education is a fundamental right for all children, regardless of their characteristics, needs, and abilities. The Statement concluded that educational systems must be designed to meet children's diverse needs.

According to the Statement:

Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system. (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix)

Pearson (2015b) argued the importance of international policies to consider the uniqueness of different cultural contexts. Since 1994, many countries, including the KSA, have made their educational policies more inclusive (Ainscow, 2005; Donohue & Bornman, 2015; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009). However, though the Salamanca Statement was influential (Kraska & Boyle, 2014), it failed to provide guidance about how to implement inclusion in the educational system of different cultural contexts (Miles & Singal, 2010). Hodge (2014) stated that in spite of the movements towards inclusion that emphasises a human rights perspective, many schools lacked experience on how to apply it in practice. This lack of clarity has produced many



divergent views and approaches to the implementation of inclusion.

Despite many organisations' efforts to create inclusive programmes, disabling barriers continue to exist, and the dominance of the medical model of disability has interfered with efforts to implement the social model in which the disabling barriers within society are removed (Oliver, 2013). The failure to successfully implement inclusion has been seen by many as the failure to look past disability. For example, Cameron (2014) argued that inclusion cannot be implemented fully as long as impairments are viewed in negative terms. Similarly, Ainscow (2007) argued that this deeply held, deficiency-based view of impairments prevents inclusion from being successfully implemented. This might be the case, supported by Runswick-Cole's (2011) argument that 'although there may have been an inclusive education policy rhetoric, this rhetoric is rooted in conceptual incongruities which, rather than promoting inclusion, undermine an inclusive approach to education' (p. 112).

Regardless, efforts against the individualisation and medicalisation of disability continue. Disability Studies, for example, arose in response to the medical model (Goodley, 2014). Disability Studies, 'an emerging theoretical framework for the study and analysis of disability issues' (Hosking, 2008, p. 1), maintain that disability is constructed mainly by social injustice, social inequities, and exclusion (Thomas, 2004). This approach attempts to provide practical aims for altering the social fabric of society.

Disability Studies derive from the perspective that 'disability is a sociological, economic and cultural thing rather than a psychological, embodied or medicalised problem' (Goodley, 2014, p. 1). It claims that disabilities are produced by inequalities in a normative culture (Clough & Corbett, 2000; Goodley, Liddiard & Runswick-Cole, 2018), and it responds to the exclusionary effects of the medical model and other issues that relate broadly to inclusion

(Clough & Corbett, 2000). It values the experiences of people with SEN and advocates for their rights. Disability Studies holds that inclusive education can transform how societies view disabilities (Goodley, 2014).

Reviewing the literature has helped me to gain a deep understanding of the different constructions of disability and their influences on inclusion. This research does not deny the effort of medicine in enhancing the lives of many children with SEN; however, it argues that impairment is more than an individual problem, and it requires more than the medical perspective can provide. It requires more than the provision of assessment, identification and special services. In this research, impairment is viewed as a biological condition that is enhanced by the social surroundings of individuals. Disability is the creation of the social milieu of individuals. Similar to the social model, disability in this research is seen as the creation of social deprivation and negative views of disability that, instead of enabling individuals, disable them and instead of embracing differences, reject them as deviations from the norm. This research aims to gain a deep understanding of inclusion in the KSA and its implementation, barriers and teachers' experiences. It is hoped that through this research deep issues that relate to the Saudi context and influence the inclusion of children with SEN will be explored and understood.

In many cases, the marginalisation of people with SEN affects them more than their impairments. As Goodley (2014) explained, 'disabled people often feel unwelcome in mainstream spaces, struggle with a sense of belonging, with subsequent impact on personal well-being' (p. 10). In this way, I found that Disability Studies shares much in common with Vygotsky's theories. To Vygotsky, a disability is created when there is 'incongruence between the child and its social conditions for development' (Böttcher & Dammeyer, 2012, p. 435). In his own words, 'handicapped children must not be socially cut-off or outcast from the mainstream of

society, but must be accepted as full productive members of society' (Vygotsky, Carton & Rieber, 1993, p. 22). Vygotsky's theories are important for my study because they show how ingrained social beliefs, especially when they are clustered around the medical perspective, can produce barriers to inclusion. I believe that it is essential to have a theoretical foundation that addresses the possible quandary of applying an international policy, such as the policy of inclusion, into a different cultural context. This theory helps to explain the incongruence between the policy and the practice within the Saudi's context. As Dixon and Verenikina (2007) suggested, the sociocultural theory by Vygotsky provides a paradigm that offers potential 'in filling this void' (p. 193). Thus, I have chosen to utilise his theories for my research. (The section on the study's theoretical framework will discuss Vygotsky's theories in more detail.)

### **2.1.3 The development of inclusive policies in the KSA.**

The Salamanca Statement is considered to be one of the most important drivers for inclusive education (Ainscow, 2005; Khochen & Radford, 2012; Kraska & Boyle, 2014). The KSA was one of the many countries that signed the Salamanca Statement and committed to making their educational policies more inclusive (Alhudaithi, 2015; UNESCO, 1994). Before the Salamanca Statement, there had been several attempts to establish an inclusive educational system in the KSA, such as King Saud University's kindergarten enrolling children with mild disabilities from 1989 (Alkhashrami, 2010; Almousa, 2006, 2010). In 1991, the KSA launched partial inclusion programmes that sought to include students with specific disabilities, including hearing and visual impairments, in regular schools for part-time basis (Almousa, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2018b), but it was not until 1996 that these programmes began including children with other types of disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2018b).

In the KSA, growing concerns about people with SEN resulted in the enactment of the Provision Code of Persons with Disabilities in 2000 (Alhudaithi, 2015), which ensured ‘the rights of persons with SEN in all aspects of life, including a free appropriate public education’ (Almoussa, 2010, p. 15). The code stresses that people with SEN must be socially integrated into society without prejudice.

By 2001, the government realised that they needed to create appropriate educational practices for students with SEN. To improve these services and to protect the students’ rights, the MoE enacted the Regulations of Special Education Programs and Institutes (RSEPI) (Alquraini, 2014). The RSEPI identified ten categories of disability that schools needed to account for: autism; giftedness; hearing, visual, intellectual, learning, physical, and multiple disabilities; and communication, emotional, and behavioural disorders. The regulations emphasised identifying students with SEN through formal assessments, such as IQ, behavioural, and/or achievement tests (Aldabas, 2015; Alquraini, 2014). In 2008, the KSA signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Almoussa, 2010).

Despite the KSA’s commitment to ensure that all students are served and are able to act upon their rights, services are still limited. It is common for students to receive educational services based on their disabilities. According to Aldabas (2015), the effectiveness of the RSEPI was limited because: (1) there was a shortage of professionals who could conduct assessments; (2) there was an absence of culturally appropriate assessment tools, and; (3) the regulations focused on providing special services to students either in special schools or in special classrooms in regular schools. The RSEPI did not account for full inclusion or early intervention services, and, consequently, the regulations reflected the philosophy and aims of integration (Aldabas, 2015; Alquraini, 2014).

However, Aldabas's (2015) views about the limitations of the RSEPI reflect how ingrained the medical model is in Saudi culture. For example, he mentioned that the efficacy of the RSEPI was limited because there was a shortage of professionals and appropriate assessment tools for evaluating and identifying children with SEN. However, with its focus on assessments, measurements, and professional treatment, it describes the medical model precisely. Altamimi et al. (2015) affirmed in their synthesis of Saudi literature that the dominant publications of Saudi researchers were based on, and oriented towards the medical views of disability. They concluded that there is a lack of research in the KSA that is based on the social model of disability, which explores the environmental and cultural barriers of disability and inclusion.

In the KSA, the philosophy of inclusion is still undefined, and there is no firm consensus among Saudi researchers about the distinctions between inclusion and integration. For example, in Almousa's (2010) study, which describes a successful example of mainstreaming in an unspecified stage of education in the KSA's public schools, 'mainstreaming' and 'inclusion' were not differentiated. Dedicated efforts to improve the development of inclusive education are needed. One of this study's objectives is to explore how beliefs about disability are embedded within Saudi culture and how these beliefs affect how inclusion is implemented.

The slow and fragmented implementation may be caused by confusion about the definition of inclusion (Alahmadi, 2009; Alhudaithi, 2015). In the KSA, 'integration' and 'mainstreaming' are considered to be synonyms of 'inclusion' (Alhudaithi, 2015). For example, Almousa (2006) defined 'inclusion' as the education of children with SEN in regular schools through SPE services in resource rooms or special classrooms. Thus, special classrooms—which reproduce patterns of segregation—still exist within regular schools. Teachers are required by the educational system to transfer children with SEN from regular classrooms to special

classrooms, where they are able to receive special services (Alhudaithi, 2015; Almousa, 2010). These practices are contrary to inclusion. More, the MoE defined inclusive education as ‘a comprehensive, modern approach to education that aims to meet the needs of all learners, regardless of their disabilities, within general education schools through consultation with a multidisciplinary team and the provision of adaptive measures and facilities for students according to personalised educational programmes’ (Ministry of Education, 2018c, para. 1). In both definitions, inclusion is understood as the placement of the children in regular schools with emphasising the provision of special services and assistance to meet children’s needs.

According to Alharbi and Madhesh (2018), the current form of inclusion in the KSA contradicts the philosophy, aims, and policies of actual inclusion. Despite the KSA’s commitment to providing an inclusive education, children are still segregated according to their impairments. Educational policies are constructed around the challenges that accompany the impairments. In other words, disabilities are viewed as intrinsic to the children, and they mainly serve to minimise the children’s opportunities to live normal lives.

This perspective is fundamentally rooted in the medical view of disability. Inclusive education in the KSA fails to recognise children as complete members of society and that the barriers are created by the environment, not by the children (Alharbi & Madhesh, 2018). Alrubiyea (2010) examined the rights and the needs of Saudi children with SEN from the perspectives of parents of children with SEN, childcare professionals and managers in children’s with SEN agencies. Alrubiyea found that the negative ways that disabilities are viewed in the KSA have created significant social barriers to including children with SEN and actualising their rights. Similarly, Alharbi and Madhesh (2018) examined the policy and the statutory frameworks of inclusive education in the KSA. They found that although the KSA’s policy and the statute are

consistent with the international inclusive education policies, the social attitudes and practices have prevented the achievement of inclusive education.

In the KSA, inclusive education was established based on an international perspective such as The United Nations Conventions and the Salamanca Statement (Alharbi & Madhesh, 2018). However, after many years of committing to the Salamanca Statement, the Provision Code of Persons with Disabilities, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, inclusive education has not yet been achieved. To reverse these failures, it is essential to research why inclusion has not yet been successfully implemented. Through a case study approach, this study looks at the experiences of ECE teachers in inclusive programmes. It is hoped that their experiences will shed light on the reality of inclusion and the barriers that interfere with its actualisation.

The implementation of inclusion and the barriers it faces influence the teachers who are required to practise it. There has been a growing interest in enhancing inclusion for the sake of all children. Across the world, qualitative and quantitative studies have studied inclusion in different contexts, but only a few studies have captured ECE teachers' experiences with inclusion. This study seeks to build on their work. In the next section, I review the studies that have explored the barriers to inclusion.

## **2.2 Barriers to Inclusion**

Despite the movement toward inclusive education, inclusion still faces many barriers. To involve children with SEN, it is necessary to overcome profound social and political barriers. Indeed, the concept of 'successful inclusion' is multidimensional and could be influenced by

many barriers (Galović, Brojčin, & Glumbić, 2014). The next section outlines the barriers to inclusion in global and local contexts, as described in the literature.

### **2.2.1 Attitudinal barriers.**

#### ***2.2.1.1 Societal attitudes.***

Negative attitudes about disability create a culture of disablism in which children with SEN are not treated equally. Thus, societal norms and beliefs can be major barriers to inclusion. As Ainscow (2007) highlighted, inclusion cannot be separated from social contexts. How society perceives disability influences how people think about inclusion. Significantly, certain beliefs can prevent children from receiving quality inclusive education.

One of the most significant challenges involved in implementing inclusion is changing how disabilities are understood, which is deeply rooted in societal beliefs (Fulton & Myers, 2014; Kang et al., 2015). How disabilities are understood includes factors that are ‘socially conditioned and culturally impregnated’ (Giese & Ruin, 2018, p. 156). As Šiška and Habib (2013) wrote, ‘disability is defined as a socially constructed barrier of the individual not a default by birth’ (p. 396). Therefore, it is critical to shed light on the ways that society views and responds to disability.

In an ethnographic study, Runswick-Cole (2011) examined the barriers to inclusive education in England’s educational system. Runswick-Cole’s participants included children with SEN from special and mainstream schools, their parents, and educational practitioners. The findings revealed that ableism, the attitude that children ought to fit in with ‘normal children’ and that the failure to fit in is a disability, impacted the experiences of the children and their parents. Facing deeply ingrained societal beliefs about disability, these children were frequently



excluded. Runswick-Cole (2011) argued that developing inclusive environments requires changing cultural assumptions about disability.

Similarly, Pivik, McComas and Laflamme (2002) found that attitudinal barriers were the most difficult kind of barrier that students with SEN faced at inclusive schools. Regardless of whether these attitudinal barriers were intentional (e.g. isolation and bullying) or unintentional (e.g. ignorance), they negatively affected the students. The students in this study were excluded, isolated, ignored, and physically and emotionally bullied by their peers and their teachers. The study concluded that negative attitudes can socially isolate children with SEN and that it is necessary to make social changes and increase awareness about disabilities to make education truly inclusive.

Inclusion is context-dependent (Stewart, 1998) and, as Gyarmathy (2014) explained, disability is an authentic reflection of a society's values and attitudes. Failing to meet social expectations for normality often results in the exclusion of people who cannot adapt enough to fit in with the majority (Gyarmathy, 2014). Consequently, prejudice about disabilities often results in discrimination.

Frankel, Gold, and Ajodhia-Andrews (2010) mentioned that prejudices in Guyana about disabilities were a major barrier to implementing inclusion. Successfully implementing inclusion in Guyana would require fundamentally changing the society's beliefs about disability. Similarly, Šiška and Habib (2013) wrote, in Bangladesh, cultural beliefs about disability impacted the implementation of inclusion. Disabilities were often seen as the consequence of the mothers' mistakes, and these negative views produced a culture of disablism and prevented children with SEN from equally participating in society.

Genova (2015) conducted a qualitative study with 58 young individuals with SEN from three countries Greece, Spain and Lithuania. Genova found that in Lithuania prejudices and stereotypes restricted access to inclusive programmes. The society there did not support inclusive education because disabilities were negatively viewed. The participants associated disability with sickness and stigma: ‘So, if you are sick, why do you need education?’ (Genova, 2015, p. 1049). When facing these kinds of attitudes, implementing inclusive education becomes even more challenging. Ignorance about disabilities and inclusion causes people to focus on the challenges accompanying children with SEN rather than on the challenges involved in changing educational systems.

According to Stone-McDonald (2012), how society conceives of disability impacts which educational services are provided to children with SEN. For example, in Tanzanian culture, which interprets disability using the medical model, it is believed that disabilities are caused by curses. This belief has prevented children with SEN from receiving educational services. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, autism is culturally understood to be the result of a curse or the ‘*evil eye*’ (Alqahtani, 2012). Furthermore, Alquraini (2011) stated that disability is viewed in the Saudi culture as a punishment from Allah or as a test of patience in which Paradise will be the reward. Cultural beliefs influence whether or not a society’s educational system can become more inclusive, which means that it is essential to understand these beliefs.

In England and Wales, Evans and Lunt (2002) found that the beliefs of local educational authorities inhibited efforts to make schools more inclusive. These authorities generally resisted inclusive education, attributing their resistance to the challenges of teaching children with SEN and meeting their more complex needs. The researchers found that the authorities did not want to be responsible for children with SEN. The hostile culture slowed down the implementation of

inclusive education.

Similarly, Paliokosta and Blandford (2010), while examining three case studies conducted with English secondary schools, found that the schools were not conceptually prepared for inclusion and that their unpreparedness made them practise integration instead of inclusion. Despite the schools' commitment to inclusive policies, they operated under the medical model, viewing children only as the sum of their deficiencies. These kinds of studies are important for my research because they show how societal attitudes and particular understandings of disability can influence how inclusion is implemented, adulterate its core concept (from inclusion to integration), and create incongruence between policies and the reality in which they were implemented.

### ***2.2.1.2 Teachers' attitudes.***

According to Tomlinson (1982), 'teachers are applied sociologists' (p. 23). Their teaching practices are based on inherited social beliefs about disabilities. Teachers are the key figures in inclusion (Vlachou, 1997), and they are expected to be the primary agents for implementing inclusion (Kraska & Boyle, 2014). As argued by Silverman (2007) teachers' beliefs and attitudes influence their behaviours and classroom practices with children with SEN. Since beliefs and practices are fundamentally connected (Alhudaithi, 2015; Stipek, Givvin, Salmon, & MacGyvers, 2001), teachers' attitudes are fundamental to the success of inclusion (Cornoldi et al., 2018; Leatherman 1 & Niemeyer, 2005).

Societal views about disability can affect teachers' attitudes about inclusion. Drawing on research conducted in general education elementary classrooms in Canada, Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond (2009) found that the effectiveness of particular teaching practices relied

considerably on the teachers' attitudes about disabilities and the nature of these disabilities. The teachers' beliefs about their responsibilities were influenced by society's broader attitudes about disability.

In India, Namrata (2011) conducted a qualitative study that explored the opinions of 35 primary school teachers about including marginalised children in their classrooms. Through structured interviews and observations of classroom practices, the researcher found that, in the classroom, children with SEN were marginalised. The teachers were prejudiced and, thus, expected nothing from them. These teachers lived out, implicitly and explicitly, deeply ingrained social beliefs about marginalised children (Namrata, 2011). In India, entrenched social factors, such as religious beliefs and the tendency to focus on testing, influenced high school teachers' perspectives about inclusive education (Tiwari, Das, & Sharma, 2015).

Hettiarachchi and Das (2014) conducted a mixed methods study to examine how Sri Lankan teachers understood inclusion. Though most of the participants said that they understood the rationale for inclusion, the interviews revealed rampant confusion. The participants talked about integration rather than inclusion. The researchers suggested that this uncertainty about the definition of inclusion could be because the teachers were using concepts borrowed from Western countries. Similarly, Kang et al. (2015) found that, in South Korea, integration and inclusion are not well defined; in practice, these terms are used interchangeably. Despite general agreement about the policy of inclusion, how the concept is understood varies across cultural contexts.

Alhudaithi (2015) conducted a mixed methods study to investigate how Saudi teachers who worked in elementary schools and special institutes for children with autism felt about including these children in regular schools. Alhudaithi (2015) stated that 'inclusion is not a clear-

cut policy but rather teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are profoundly affected by culture' (p. 151). These teachers believed that ignorance and the lack of awareness about autism in Saudi society limited the extent to which children with autism could be included. However, as Alhudaithi (2015) noted, the teachers thought that Islamic beliefs about the essential equality of all people enabled them to overcome negative and regressive cultural beliefs about autism.

Variations in social beliefs about disability produce variations in teachers' attitudes about inclusion. Cornoldi et al. (2018) conducted an exploratory quantitative study that examined the attitudes of 557 teachers across three countries (Italy, Spain, and the United States) about including children with learning disabilities. They found that teachers in different countries had varying beliefs about the cause of disabilities and the role of diagnoses. Teachers in the United States believed that learning disabilities were caused by biological factors, whereas Spanish teachers believed that environmental factors were the main causative factor. In addition, Spanish teachers were more concerned than Italian and American teachers about the negative emotional impact of labelling. The researchers found that attitudes about inclusion and disabilities as an individual or a social problem are intrinsically connected to cultural and political contexts.

Jordan, Glenn, and McGhie-Richmond (2010) reviewed many studies that explored the relationship between the beliefs of general elementary education teachers about disability and their classroom practices and found substantial variation. A quarter of the teachers viewed disability through a pathognomonic lens, seeing disabilities as the products of medical conditions. Consequently, they believed that children with SEN were incapable of learning, and they emphasised labelling, blaming the children and their families for the children's inability to progress. These teachers tended to spend less time with the children with SEN and did not want them in regular classrooms. The researchers attributed the source of these beliefs to the cultural

context rather than the teachers' idiosyncrasies. Social norms and beliefs influence how teachers view disability and ability, which consequently influence their practices.

In addition, the teachers had different attitudes about different types of disabilities. Some studies found that certain types of disabilities made teachers more likely to view inclusion negatively. Their attitudes and teaching practices varied according to the children's needs (Alhaby, 2014; Avramidis et al., 2000). Fayed, Dababneh and Jumiaan (2011) conducted a qualitative study to explore the attitudes of pre-service early childhood Jordanian teachers. Generally, the participants expressed positive attitudes and a willingness to include children with SEN in their classrooms; however, exclusion was suggested for specific types of disabilities. Children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities were explicitly excluded from inclusion. The participants ascribed their exclusions to their fear of people with intellectual disabilities. The culture portrays individuals with intellectual disabilities as hostile and harmful; thus, most participants described children with intellectual disabilities as potentially aggressive and harmful to other children.

Clough and Nutbrown (2004) studied the perspectives of 94 preschool teachers in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales and found that positive beliefs about inclusion were associated with the type and the severity of the disability. Nearly two-thirds of the participants indicated that children should be included 'in principle' (p.205), meaning that children with SEN should be accepted based on the nature of their abilities. They are more likely to accept inclusion if the disabilities were less severe. Soodak, Podell, and Lehman (1998) noted the teachers' attitudes relied on the type and severity of the disabilities, finding that the teachers were unwilling to include children with intellectual impairments or emotional/behavioural disorders. However, they were willing to include children with sensory impairments.

Cagran and Schmidt (2011) studied how inclusion affected primary education teachers in Slovenia and found that the teachers exhibited negative attitudes about including children with emotional or behavioural impairments, though they welcomed children with physical impairments. Alhabt (2014) and Rakap and Kaczmarek (2010) reported similar findings in different cultural contexts (KSA and Turkey). This indicates that the likelihood that a child with SEN will be accepted depends largely on what kind of disability she/he has. Both studies found that teachers favoured including children with physical disabilities more than they favoured including children with intellectual disabilities and/or behavioural disorders.

The findings of Gal, Schreur, and Engel-Yeger (2010) reinforce the results of the aforementioned studies. The researchers found that kindergarten teachers were more likely to favour including children with sensory and/or physical disabilities than children with learning disabilities, ADHD, and/or emotional disabilities. The likelihood that teachers will accept inclusion depends greatly on the type(s) of disabilities that they are expecting to include.

Even among inclusive schools in England, there is resistance to including students with emotional, behavioural, and/or learning disabilities (Evans & Lunt, 2002). This resistance emanates from the belief that these students would negatively affect the schools' scores on national tests. In Evans and Lunt's (2002) study, the participants divided disabilities into two categories: the 'easy to include' and the 'difficult to include'. The 'easy to include' category included physical, sensory, speech, and language disabilities, as well as autism spectrum disorders and moderate learning disabilities. The 'difficult to include' category included students with autism, severe learning difficulties, multiple disabilities, and/or emotional and behavioural problems.

In the UAE, Alghazo and Gaad (2004) found that teachers were less likely to include children with severe disabilities, e.g. intellectual or behavioural disabilities. The participants explained that these children required more work than children with less severe disabilities. Significantly, participants had negative attitudes about including children with hearing impairments, explaining that they felt unprepared because they did not know sign language and they did not know how to teach children with hearing impairments.

Robertson, Chamberlain, and Kasari (2003) studied the relationships between general education teachers and children with autism in two schools in the United States. They found that, though the teachers claimed to have positive relationships with the children, the children's behavioural problems impacted the quality of these relationships. Children with more challenging behavioural problems interacted less frequently with the teachers and had fewer opportunities to be socially included. The teachers expressed that their inability to interact with the children increased when autism was more severe. It seems that the teachers sort of blamed the children and regarded the inability to interact to the children's condition. This is a reflection of the medical model perspective in which the problem is seen within the children and not within their social surroundings.

Indeed, achieving complete inclusion requires major cultural changes (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011). The aforementioned studies suggest that, despite international commitment to the policy of inclusion, barriers to inclusion still exist. In every case, the studies identified society as the primary barrier to inclusion. This study seeks to explore how inclusion has been implemented in the KSA and the barriers that it has encountered.



### **2.2.2 Environmental barriers.**

Many studies have argued that environmental barriers play an important role in inhibiting inclusive efforts. However, it is important to acknowledge that attitudinal and environmental barriers are interwoven. An environment's structure reflects particular attitudes about disability and inclusion, and, simultaneously, it actively influences those attitudes (Jordan et al., 2010).

Social and physical environments can be barriers to inclusion and the cultivation of positive attitudes about disabilities. Inclusive efforts are more likely to be successful if the schools provide physical and human support (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Physical support consists of resource availability and the actual physical environment, whereas human support includes the availability of school staff, training, and professional development.

Studies from across the world have shown that environmental barriers influence attitudes about inclusion. For example, Abu-Hamour and Muhaidat (2014) found that Jordanian parents viewed inclusion negatively and were unwilling to enrol their children in inclusive schools because of the environmental barriers. Parents believed that regular schools with their unprepared physical environment, untrained and unqualified teachers, and the lack of specialised materials would affect their children. Consequently, parents were worried that with those barriers their children with autism would experience exclusion rather than inclusion and, as a result, would be harmed. Similarly, the findings of Aref (2011) who found that Saudi parents believed that the environmental barriers such as the unsuitable physical environment, lack of resources in Saudi's schools and the absence of qualified staff were great barriers that their children with SEN encounter in schools.

Donohue and Bornman (2015) studied the factors that influenced South African teachers' attitudes about inclusion and found the type of support services provided corresponded to particular attitudes. For example, they believed that providing staff assistance, materials, and training would help facilitate inclusion. Importantly, many teachers had negative attitudes about inclusion because they were not adequately supported. Similarly, Hamaidi, Homidi, and Reyes (2012) found that teachers from three countries (USA, UAE, and Jordan) believed that the success of inclusion was contingent on them being able to collaborate and access training, resources, and support services.

In Bangladesh, Ahmmed, Sharma, and Deppeler (2012) found that, among the variables that affected teachers' attitudes about inclusion, the most significant was the availability of support. They found that, when the teachers felt that their schools supported them, they were more likely to have positive feelings about including children with SEN. Leatherman 1 and Niemeyer (2005) found that the support that four early childhood teachers received from a school administrator was essential to the success of inclusion in their classrooms. With this support, the teachers were able to implement inclusive practices and let the children with SEN take part in class activities. The teachers emphasised that training and resources are necessary to successfully include children with SEN.

Kuyini and Desai (2007) conducted a quantitative study in Ghana with 20 primary school principals and 108 teachers to determine whether particular attitudes could predict the existence of effective teaching practices. This study's most significant finding was that the principals' expectations did not affect the teachers' inclusive teaching practices. The schools' authoritarian approaches and autocratic leadership styles did not influence teaching practices. The researchers attributed this outcome to the principals' ignorance about inclusive education, which made them

unable to assess or otherwise affect the teachers' inclusive practices.

Again, there are many factors involved in implementing inclusive education. The principals' ignorance about inclusion and their leadership styles can, under certain circumstances, interfere with the implementation of inclusive cultures and, consequently, impact how much support teachers need to practise inclusion. As Barton (1997) wrote, inclusion is about empowering and supporting all members and cultivating mutual relationships; inclusion 'is a learning process for all those involved and this should include all support staff. It entails discussion and debate among staff, learning to listen and respect one another' (p. 234).

Hofreiter (2017) conducted a qualitative study to see whether or not 18 school principals in the United States thought that they were prepared for inclusion. The study found that the principals who felt unprepared could not develop inclusive school cultures and did not understand how inclusion could benefit their students. Inclusion relies on a principal's ability to support the teachers and the children; the principal leads the process of inclusion (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). A school's culture influences how teachers perceive their work and, consequently, influences the school's practices.

McLeskey and Waldron (2015) reviewed case studies that explored effective leadership in inclusive schools in the United States and England. They found that developing and sustaining effective inclusive schools required powerful and vigorous principals who supported teachers and cultivated relationships built on respect. In addition, they found that effective principals let teachers participate in decision-making processes and actively listened to their suggestions and concerns. The researchers noted that 70% of the general education teachers surveyed did not know how to meet the needs of children with SEN or even how to identify those needs. They concluded that, in effective inclusive schools, principals support teachers and give them

opportunities for professional development. As Singer (2011) stated, ‘when school staff is not in agreement on policy or practice, and administrators do not connect vision to action, inclusion is designed inadequately and, ultimately, set up to fail’ (p. 181).

Another essential type of support comes from SPE teachers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Mulholland & O’Connor, 2016). The existence of mutual relationships founded on respect between general education teachers and SPE teachers is necessary to create a positive, inclusive environment (Allison, 2011). Unclear roles and responsibilities for general and SPE teachers create conflict and cause them to view inclusion more negatively. Hamaidi et al. (2012) found that, in the UAE and Jordan, special and general education teachers typically did not collaborate, which diminished the quality of the services that they were able to provide. In contrast, American teachers attributed their success with inclusion to collaboration between the regular and SPE teachers.

In Mulholland and O’Connor’s (2016) study, though the surveyed teachers believed that collaboration was important and benefited the children and the school, 66% of them said that they did not meet regularly to support each other. Instead, much of the collaboration was informal and done outside of regular meetings. Despite the teachers’ willingness to collaborate, they still practised the withdrawal model. Limited time prevented them from collaborating. One teacher said that the school administrators should have monthly formal meetings to plan how to act on the children’s best interests. Collaboration is a significant part of inclusive education. However, the authors noted that, in Ireland, schools did not provide many opportunities for collaboration.

Over a period of three years, Smith and Leonard (2005) examined the challenges that ten American schools faced while implementing inclusion. The participants included nine general and SPE teachers and three principals. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document searches, and participatory observations. The study found that general education teachers had negative attitudes about inclusion and were greatly distressed by it. The general education teachers believed that the SPE teachers were solely responsible for inclusion, and they expressed dissatisfaction about the SPE teachers who came to class without a pre-planned schedule. Both the general and SPE teachers said that their roles within the inclusive programmes were confusing and ambiguous. The researchers argued that collaboration between the special and general education teachers was necessary to achieve the goals of inclusion. Moreover, they wrote that it was the principals' responsibility to foster collaboration among the teachers and encourage them to participate in the process.

Wood's (1998) qualitative study examined the perceptions of general and SPE teachers and students about the teachers' roles in an elementary school's inclusive programme. She found that general education teachers were not involved in inclusive efforts and were not allowed to take on any responsibilities for the inclusive programme. Instead, the SPE teachers were thought to be solely accountable for the educational plans of children with severe disabilities. The participants implied that the general education teachers were lauded for their willingness to include children with SEN in their classrooms. However, the general education teachers thought that the SPE teachers were disruptive and were uneasy when they were in the classroom. As a result, Wood (1998) concluded that genuine collaboration between the teachers did not exist and emphasised that the teachers acted, for the most part, autonomously. According to Sapon-Shevin

(1996), 'inclusion will require that special educators reconceptualise their roles, acting more often as co-teachers or resources than as primary sources of instruction' (p.38).

Takala and Sume (2018) argued that, when teachers collaborate, they create the groundwork for inclusion. Their study found that collaboration made it possible for children with hearing impairments to receive educational and technological support.

Another significant barrier to inclusion is the presence of undefined roles and responsibilities. While examining an American high school, Keefe and Moore (2004) found that general and SPE teachers struggled to collaborate because their roles and responsibilities were undefined. The participants said that they had to figure out how they needed to work together. Though many acknowledged that collaboration and communication were necessary to meet their students' needs, most collaborated only infrequently and typically worked separately. The study found that the teachers did not feel prepared or qualified to work collaboratively in inclusive classrooms. How teachers interact is critical because they serve as models for behaviour for their students. Despite the many studies that have emphasised the importance of collaboration, assigned roles for special and general education teachers emphasise differences tending to result in deficit-oriented discussions (Naraian, 2010). This reflects the dominance of the medical model perspective, which focuses on differences.

Evans and Lunt (2002) indicated that among the difficulties in implementing inclusion was the existence of learning support assistance in the classroom. The participants in Evans and Lunt's (2002) study noted that learning support assistance tended to contradict the principles of inclusion. For example, the children who benefited from this assistance tended to be perceived as the sole responsibility of those who provided the assistance. Again, this implied that in spite of implementing inclusion, the medical model is conceptually and practically ingrained within those

inclusive schools. The researchers asserted that inclusion must involve the entire school community. Ultimately, divisions in responsibilities may be more exclusionary than inclusionary in nature (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016).

The literature about the barriers to inclusion offers conflicting findings. Some studies have argued that inadequate training interfered with the cultivation of positive attitudes and the practise of inclusion. However, other studies (Alquraini, 2012; Galović et al., 2014; Sharma, Shaukat, & Furlonger, 2015) have found that no relationship exists between training and the incidence of positive attitudes and inclusive practices. Buell, Hallam, Gamel-Mccormick, and Scheer (1999) surveyed general and SPE teachers in the United States to explore how they perceived inclusion, their ability to positively influence students, their self-efficacy, and the need to promote inclusive practices. They found that 78% of general education teachers believed that they were unprepared and unqualified to have students with SEN in their classrooms. The participants asserted that, to promote inclusive practices and meet their students' needs, in-service training and opportunities for professional development should be provided.

The general education teachers did not think that they were capable of promoting inclusive practices, managing resources and the curriculum, controlling the students' disruptive behaviours, and providing individual assistance. They reported that they received less support and training than the SPE teachers. Indeed, the SPE teachers were more confident, which the researchers attributed to their undergraduate education. Accordingly, to practise inclusion successfully and meet students' needs, general education teachers must be trained and empowered with resources.

In England, Avramidis et al. (2000) found that teachers who were trained and had opportunities for professional development at their universities were more likely to have positive attitudes about inclusion than those who were not trained. Moreover, teachers who had been trained were more confident about their teaching practices and their ability to achieve the requirements of the students' individualised educational plans. However, the teachers' confidence varied according to the kind of training they received. The teachers who received external training tended to be more confident than those who were trained in the school. The study's participants explained that it was necessary for them to undergo rigorous, continuous, and well-planned training with consultants who work in the field. This training would help them implement their inclusive programme, allow them to meet their students' needs, and manage their students' behaviours.

Kraska and Boyle's (2014) quantitative study measured the attitudes of 465 pre-service teachers at Australian preschools and primary schools about inclusion and found that their attitudes depended heavily on whether or not they were trained. The participants who had taken courses on inclusive education tended to have more positive attitudes about inclusion. Similarly, Aboalala (2008) conducted a quantitative study to examine the challenges 17 Saudi kindergarten teachers face with the inclusion of children with cognitive disabilities. The findings revealed that the lack of knowledge, training and preparation was a major challenge that affected the teachers' abilities to include the children in their classrooms.

Kang et al. (2015), while looking at the inclusion of young children with SEN in South Korea, found that inclusion was inhibited by the shortage of trained SPE professionals. There were too few qualified ECE teachers who could practise inclusion and meet the needs of children with SEN. The study also found that ECE teachers had too few opportunities for professional



development. Pre-service programmes in South Korea were focused narrowly on the basic development, the characteristics, and the deficiencies of children with SEN. Equally, the findings of Murry and Alqahtani (2015) who found that teachers' educational programs in the KSA did not prepare teachers for inclusion and did not provide them with knowledge and skills related to children with SEN and their educational rights. In both studies, researchers argued that educational programmes should be modified to ensure that teachers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to run high-quality inclusive programmes and provide positive experiences to young children with SEN.

Rakap and Kaczmarek (2010) studied the perspectives of 194 general education teachers from Turkish elementary schools about including children with SEN. They found that the teachers tended to view inclusion negatively. About 65% of the teachers did not want to include students with severe learning difficulties in regular classrooms. However, the study also found that the teachers who had taken at least one undergraduate course on SPE or underwent SPE training tended to have more positive attitudes. Despite their negative perceptions about inclusion, many teachers were willing to attend in-service training programmes. They believed that training would help them acquire the necessary skills and strategies to serve their students better. Similarly, Cagran and Schmidt's (2011) quantitative study found that training and education about special needs and inclusion improved the attitudes of 1,360 Slovenian primary education teachers about including children with SEN.

Hurt (2007) conducted a mixed methods case study that examined how professional development affected the attitudes of 67 general education teachers in three schools about including children with SEN and found that the teachers had more negative attitudes about inclusion when they did not receive adequate training and resources. The teachers said that, to

meet children's needs, they needed ongoing in-service professional development that would teach them how to make academic adjustments, accommodate differences, support students, and give them individualised attention.

Insufficient training and professional development opportunities greatly impact teachers' attitudes and how they experience inclusion. Nevertheless, studies such as Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Hills (2009) emphasised that the *quality* of the training is also important. Not every training programme enables teachers to practise and implement inclusion. Both studies showed that some programmes were reported to be detached from reality, providing only basic or theoretical information about disabilities and inclusion. In both studies, teachers explicitly said that training programmes and professional development must empower teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of their students.

However, several studies have found that the absence of formalised training is not a barrier to inclusion. Alquraini (2012) conducted a quantitative study to identify which factors affect Saudi elementary school teachers' attitudes about including students with intellectual disabilities; overall, 303 teachers answered the questionnaire and reported having negative attitudes about inclusion. Their attitudes were significantly affected by their experiences and their position. Surprisingly, the researchers found no relationship between training and the teachers' attitudes.

Sharma et al. (2015) examined the attitudes of 194 pre-service Pakistani teachers and found, unexpectedly, that pre-service teachers with no SPE training were more likely to have positive attitudes about inclusion than those with moderate to high levels of SPE training. Similarly, Galović et al. (2014), who investigated the attitudes of 322 teachers in Serbia, found that the teachers had, in general, neutral attitudes about inclusion. Though they believed that they

were not capable enough to include students with SEN, undergoing training did not produce any significant differences in their attitudes. Given the conflicting findings, it is essential to continue to explore this barrier in depth. This study seeks to provide insights into how inclusion is implemented, which barriers it faces, and how it is experienced by ECE teachers.

The literature also identified resource shortages and the lack of readiness of the physical environments as significant barriers to inclusion. In Mbwambo's (2015) study, teachers claimed that the shortage of teaching materials made including children with SEN too burdensome. In Hills' (2009) study, though many teachers viewed children with SEN positively, they did not feel prepared to teach them. In addition, they said that they did not have the learning materials and resources, such as technology and personnel; they needed to teach the children.

Cornoldi, Terreni, Scruggs, and Mastropieri (1998) surveyed Italian teachers about inclusion twenty years after its implementation. In general, teachers had positive attitudes about inclusion; however, they pointed out that shortages in support, time, and resources had hindered inclusive efforts. Despite wide-ranging agreement that the unavailability of resources interferes with inclusion, Slee (2013) suggested that the availability of resources can also interfere with inclusion, writing that many inclusive practices have exclusionary consequences. For example, focusing on differences can cause teachers to believe that they are not capable of teaching students with SEN and that they need more resources to meet their needs. In environments that emphasised differences in training and education, teachers tended to feel helpless if they were not supported by specialists.

As Nevin, Smith, and McNeil (2008) wrote, 'disability is as much a result of the environment as the impairment itself' (p. 1); in other words, a school's physical environment can interfere with inclusive efforts. As Dugger Wadsworth and Knight (1999) argued, it is important

to account for the specific features of a physical environment when implementing inclusion; they should be planned in ways that respect and meet the various needs of children with SEN. As Bucholz and Sheffler (2009) wrote:

The physical environment of a classroom plays a part in the ownership students feel about their school and more specifically their class. The classroom environment should do as much to foster cooperation and acceptance as the instructional method the teacher uses. Children are sensitive to the atmosphere created in the classroom. Is the classroom warm and inviting? Are all areas of the classroom accessible to all children? Are the walls bleak and lacking in colour or do the decorations help to make the students feel comfortable? (p. 2)

Koller, Le Pouesard and Rummens (2018) conducted a critical literature review of 54 studies and found that several factors have the potential to support or inhibit efforts to socially include children. For example, an obstructive physical environment and lack of adaptation can prevent children from being socially included. Thoughtful physical design and the provision of environmental resources and pedagogical assistance, on the other hand, are essential for creating inclusive experiences.

Similarly, Voltz, Brazil and Ford (2001) also found that it is essential to consider a classroom's physical environment when including children with SEN. For example, children in wheelchairs need adequate aisle space. Children who are easily distracted need to be placed away from doors and windows. Including children without accounting for the physical environment makes it more unlikely that children will become active participants. Active and meaningful participation means that all children feel like they belong in the classroom (Voltz et al., 2001).

Inclusion, ultimately, consists of more than simply including children in a space; rather, it is about creating an environment that encourages them to interact and engage with others. Therefore, inclusion frequently requires a school's physical environment to be substantially

altered. For instance, as Lindsay, Proulx, Scott and Thomson (2014) noted, a typical school environment, with crowds of students talking loudly, often stresses children with autism and affects their ability to interact with other children. Alhudaithi (2015), Alrubiyea (2010) and Evans and Lunt (2002) also found that unsuitable physical environments inhibit efforts to practise inclusion in schools.

Physical environments affect both teachers and students. Nasif (2005) found that Saudi teachers needed their schools to undergo changes before they could practise inclusion. In the KSA, there are widespread issues with school buildings (Alahamdi, 2009; Almousa, 2010; Nasif, 2005). Saudi schools 'often repurpose existent facilities, initially built as businesses, to serve as preschools, but often fail to make adjustments to ensure that the buildings are suitable for small children in terms of safety, evacuation exits, and bathroom design' (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016, p. 317). Alhudaithi (2015) also found that mainstream schools in the KSA were generally unprepared to include children with autism.

Inhospitable school environments limit the extent to which children can be included (Gal et al., 2010). Studying kindergartens in Haifa, they found environmental barriers and negative attitudes were the main factors that inhibited inclusion. They argued that it is often more important to correct flaws in the physical environment as it could be a potential barrier to inclusion.

However, Avramidis et al. (2000) found that differences in school and classroom sizes did not result in significant differences in teachers' attitudes. Nonetheless, it seems that both human and physical barriers influence whether or not inclusion is successful. As a result, it is essential to consider how environmental barriers can prevent children with SEN from fully participating at school and to discover how these barriers are created (Cameron, 2014).

Reviewing studies from many different countries has highlighted how complex inclusion is and showed that it is a global concern (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018). Barriers to inclusion are interwoven and are fundamentally reflective of societal views about disability and inclusion. Consequently, researchers must revisit how the concepts of ‘disability’ and ‘inclusion’ are understood because these are frequently ignored by so many others, including policymakers (Goodley, 2014). The next section will review the studies that found that policies acted as barriers to inclusion.

### **2.2.3 Policies as barriers.**

Misguided policies and the unwillingness of policymakers to reconsider the ‘ableist education’ (Goodley, 2014) can interfere with efforts to implement inclusive policies. In South Korea, Kang et al. (2015) found the policymakers’ negative beliefs about inclusion and their unwillingness to support the laws of inclusion inhibited the development of inclusive education for young children. Political positions about inclusion are strongly associated with beliefs about educational outcomes (Lüke & Grosche, 2018). Thus, positive attitudes about inclusion generally produce inclusive policies, and vice versa. However, within contexts that privilege meeting or exceeding national standards and receiving high scores on examinations, schools face much more significant barriers to developing inclusive programmes (Ainscow & Kaplan, 2005).

Unclear and undefined policy guidelines tend to produce negative expectations about inclusion (Kuyini & Desai, 2007). Inclusive practices require a clear policy framework that addresses issues such as curricula, assessments, resources, responsibilities, professional development and training. Kuyini and Desai (2007) noted that, in Ghana, inclusive policies needed to be systematically reformed so that they supported all students. They argued that these

policies needed to focus on more than merely allowing students with SEN to participate and normalising them.

The nature of many educational systems compels them to focus on school performance and high-stakes assessments, and this causes many to reject differences and reproduce exclusionary patterns. Though these educational systems seem to be inclusive in many cases, they are, in fact, using the medical model. For example, in the UK, the policy of inclusion is grounded in the medical view of disability (Farr, 2018) in which differences are emphasised and concentrations on children's deficit and individual needs are reinforced (Davis & Watson, 2001). They argued that to reach complete inclusive schools, policy makers have to 'adopt a more nuanced multi-level approach to inclusion' (Davis & Watson, 2001, p. 684).

Authentic inclusive education requires creating policies that empower all children through improvements in evaluation methods, curricula, pedagogy, and school design (Slee, 2013). Regular schools need to be reconstructed so that they genuinely accept and respect differences and do not try to normalise these differences so that the students 'fit an ideal type' (p. 905). In many educational jurisdictions, ambiguity around the policy of inclusion has created schools that are hesitant to be inclusive. When students with SEN are pushed to meet regular school standards, the schools are focused on their differences. Support services and educational plans serve only to help students with SEN meet the demands of a regular education. With this kind of disposition, inclusion is likely to fail (Slee, 2013).

In a critical analysis of inclusive policies in the UK, Lloyd (2008) found that ostensibly inclusive policies failed to significantly expand access to regular schools. These policies failed to understand the multifaceted nature of inclusion and, hence, maintained exclusionary practices. In mainstream schools, inclusive practices were grounded in the concepts of normalisation and

deficiency. Under policies based on these concepts, children with SEN are included in regular schools and provided with learning support and individualised educational plans that allow them to meet assessment standards and achieve like their peers. Thus it can be argued that true inclusion requires reconstructing educational systems so that they acknowledge and respect differences.

However, according to Lloyd (2008), the current policy in the UK, where students with SEN are expected to meet the same standards as regular students, is the greatest barrier to inclusion:

There is no recognition of the inherent injustice of an education system where the curriculum continues to be exclusive and to emphasise narrow academic content, and where the measurement of success and achievement is concerned with attaining a set of norm-related standards. (Lloyd, 2008, p. 234)

On the basis of this evidence, it can be argued that as long as policies continue to require children with SEN to achieve normative standards, they re-disable children through normalisation practices, and creating genuinely equitable educational experiences for students with SEN will be nearly impossible.

In Saudi Arabia, Alahmadi (2009) found that the absence of a clearly articulated inventory of policies about inclusion caused extreme challenges for teachers when they tried to implement inclusive programmes. The researcher found that the policymakers' ignorance about inclusion and unwillingness to genuinely implement it were barriers to inclusion. In this case, educational policies were amended and implemented without thinking about how to execute this transformation. The teachers were made responsible for implementing inclusion even though they were never informed about the policies.



Alahmadi (2009) also found that misguided policies in KSA interfered with efforts to implement inclusion. Though the policies used the term ‘inclusion’, they were proposing to use the withdrawal model. As Goodley (2014) suggested, normative society reacts to the uncertainty towards disabilities often in some conflicting ways. Slee (2013) wrote that ‘many education jurisdictions around the world employ education resource allocation models that perversely increase the numbers of disabled children and lead to their separation from their peers’ (p. 904).

In the UAE, misguided policies amounted to the most significant barrier to inclusive education (Alborno, 2017). Alborno (2017) identified incongruence between the general education policy, which focused on high-stakes assessment, and the SPE policy; this confusion undermined efforts to provide an inclusive education. Glazzard (2011) found that the standard agenda of regular education in North of England was the most problematic barrier. The study found that the current policy focuses on achievement and assumes that all students are equally capable of meeting the standard agenda’s expectations. Hence, there was stress between the schema of inclusion and the standard schema, and these incongruities influenced the teachers’ attitudes about inclusion and prevented them from implementing it. Glazzard (2011) concluded that policymakers should create agendas that respect students’ differences and do not assume that all students have equal capabilities.

Drudy and Kinsella (2009) studied Ireland’s inclusive educational policies. Focusing on how recent policies affected inclusion, the researchers found that supportive policies are necessary to implement inclusion. The extent to which a country’s educational, social, and legislative systems are inclusive impacts the extent to which a country’s schools can be inclusive. Inclusive education requires the following:

The education system needs to be operating within a statutory framework of rights-based inclusive legislation, in order to ensure access to the requisite

resources and services for pupils with disabilities/SEN. It needs to operate within social and legislative systems which are inclusive in ethos and which reflect the social and human rights models of disability/SEN, rather than exclusively reflecting the medical model. (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009, p. 655)

The success of inclusive schools depends on how inclusive are a country's social, political, and economic systems. Making schools more inclusive is a social process in which policies, values, and practices are interconnected (Ainscow & Kaplan, 2005), and 'part of the challenge facing those concerned with the question of inclusion involves making connections between educational ideologies, policies and practices and the wider social and economic conditions and relations of a given society' (Barton, 1997, p. 232).

However, many policies ignore cultural contexts (Talley & Brintnell, 2016), and this creates incongruities between policy and reality. Conceptual discrepancies weaken inclusion (Runswick-Cole, 2011). Indeed, Mäkinen (2013) and Avramidis and Norwich (2002) found that, the greater the distance between a policy and its reality, the more substantial the barriers are between the current state and inclusive practices; 'historic, political, social and cultural features contribute to defining educational policies and generating barriers to equitable access to education' (Genova, 2015, p. 1051).

To summarise, the aforementioned studies suggest that inclusion is a global concern, and is reflected in the policies of many different countries. Though they come from various contexts and cultural backgrounds, there is agreement that inclusion has not yet been achieved and that it continues to face many barriers that are interwoven, overlapping, and intrinsically related (Cameron, 2014). These studies suggest that cultural views about disability influence whether or not inclusion is successful (or even possible). Despite wide-ranging agreement on the policy of inclusion, ingrained cultural and social beliefs create barriers to inclusion. In an acknowledgement of this, there has been growing interest in promoting inclusion as a right for

children with SEN and improving how it is implemented. This necessitates gaining understanding of inclusion within different cultural contexts; thus, this research aims to deeply explore the implementation of inclusion and understand the barriers it faces within Saudi culture.

Incongruities between a policy and its reality leave the teachers who are required to lead inclusive programmes confused and stressed. Indeed, some studies have found that inclusion makes teachers more anxious and stressed (Hills, 2009). The next section looks at how barriers to inclusion affect teachers' experiences in inclusive programmes.

### **2.3 Teachers' Experiences With Inclusion**

Closely examining how teachers experience inclusion can offer insights into how people are changed and challenged by inclusion. As Lindsey (2003) wrote, studying the experiences of the agents who implement inclusion may reveal new ways for appraising the efficacy of a particular programme. Furthermore, exploring teachers' experiences may shed light on the contextual intricacies of inclusive schools and show how teaching practices need to change to accommodate the needs of children with SEN (Carrington, Berthelsen, Nickerson, Nicholson, Walker & Meldrum, 2016).

Altieri (2001) explored the experiences of four primary education teachers with inclusion, seeking to understand how they perceived themselves within their inclusive school. Altieri (2001) found that the teachers lost their self-confidence in the early days of inclusion. They were afraid and concerned, doubting that they were capable of meeting the needs of children with SEN. They found it difficult, mentally and emotionally, to teach in inclusive classrooms. They worked tirelessly to change their negative views about their students and found positive ways to

understand their needs and differences. However, they needed constant support to overcome the challenges that accompanied their efforts.

For a period of three years, Carrington et al. (2016) tracked the experiences of early years teachers with including 143 children with SEN. The data were collected using a questionnaire with two open-ended questions. The study found that, although the teachers believed that regular classrooms were appropriate for children with SEN, they still believed that including them was challenging. The teachers were forced to take on greater workloads and additional responsibilities to improve the children's educational performance. In addition, they said that one of their greatest challenges was the children themselves. The teachers found it difficult to cope with the children's disruptive behaviours and their inability to act independently. To overcome these challenges, they required more resources and support.

The teachers' experiences with inclusion revealed the emotional and physical consequences of inadequate implementations. Ely (2013) found that general education teachers often felt stressed and powerless because they did not receive enough support, did not collaborate with each other, and were not trained. The teachers also felt that they were isolated within the inclusive school. Due to conflicting attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, they felt that they were segregating, rather than including, students.

However, though many teachers emphasised the physical and emotional toll of inclusion, they also pointed out that inclusion was rewarding. They felt accomplished when they completed the requirements. Nonetheless, they were challenged by the 'political, social, and occupational limitations that were placed on them as an inclusive educator in the public school system' (Ely, 2013, p. 161). Similarly, Mbwambo (2015) found that positive attitudes were less likely to form when inclusive policies were implemented without considering whether or not the teachers could

live up to these policies' expectations.

Mäkinen (2013), seeking to understand the experiences of teachers in Finland and the extent to which they were engaged with their work, collected data from written reflections. The teachers were asked to write a narrative ('Teaching, Learning, and Me') that described their inclusive teaching experiences. The analysis of the reflections revealed that the teachers believed that they were unprepared to teach in inclusive programmes and that inclusion was not what they expected it to be. In addition, the teachers were not committed to inclusive education. In their opinion, it was more challenging to be inclusive, and trying to be inclusive caused them anxiety. Inclusion was generally viewed undesirably because the teachers felt pressured to meet stringent requirements and take on increasingly greater work demands. Similarly, in England, Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) found that secondary school teachers suffered from constant anxiety and feelings of inadequacy while trying to meet the demands of inclusive policies.

Smith and Leonard (2005) studied ten public schools to investigate the challenges involved in implementing inclusion and found that general education teachers frequently suffered from stress, anxiety, and headaches when trying to implement inclusion. The teachers felt lost and did not have sufficient time to collaborate with the SPE teachers.

In contrast, Leatherman (2007), who explored the perceptions of eight ECE teachers about inclusion, found that they believed that inclusive classrooms were a suitable place for children with SEN. These teachers had positive attitudes because they had had positive experiences with children with SEN. In addition, many teachers pointed out that the principal's support enabled them to have positive experiences. In spite of this, they said that they still needed more training and more opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. The teachers were frustrated because they had not been given the ability to offer their input.

Allison (2011) found that, when teachers are supported, they generally have better experiences. In his study, all of the teachers said that they needed administrative support to promote inclusion. Inclusion was more likely to be successful when the teachers respected each other and were supported by the administrators. The principal's support was found to be critical to the success of inclusion (Sandfort, 2015).

Teachers are more likely to have positive experiences with inclusion when the school principal supported them (Sandfort, 2015). In Sandfort's (2015) study, the principal allowed the teachers to act independently, collaborate, and make decisions. The teachers felt more competent because they took part in decisions relating to including children with autism. This support allowed them to overcome the challenges that they faced. In inclusive programmes, school administrators and teachers should support each other. Several studies found that the authoritarian and demanding style of many school administrators made teachers feel powerless and left them with negative opinions about inclusion (Ely, 2013; Hettiarachchi & Das, 2014; Pather, 2007). This type of support affects how an inclusive culture in schools is implemented, which may eventually influence how inclusion is implemented.

Ruble and McGrew (2013) found that teachers had negative experiences with inclusion; subsequently, they were less likely to want to include children with autism. Lacking support from the school principals, these teachers were emotionally exhausted, powerless, and stressed, which impacted their ability to ensure that their students followed their individualised educational plans and achieve particular educational outcomes. Further, Robinson (2017) found that teachers were fearful and anxious about the impact of their lack of knowledge on children. Teachers reported feeling panic and pressure because they perceived themselves as professionally inadequate due to their lack of knowledge. This, again, implies the dominance of

the medical model in which the emphasis is on having special knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the children.

Even though teachers' experiences with inclusion are important, most studies have looked only at teachers' attitudes. Exploring these experiences may offer insights about the interconnected and contextual factors that influence how inclusion is implemented. This research aims to explore how barriers to inclusion affect the lived experiences of ECE teachers who are responsible for implementing inclusion in their classrooms.

Consequently, my study focuses on the experiences of Saudi ECE teachers with inclusion, a population that has not been broadly studied before. This study aims to offer insights about how inclusion is viewed in different cultural contexts, how it is affected by these contexts, and, finally, how that may influence these teachers' experiences. The study adds to existing knowledge about how inclusion is implemented in different cultural contexts.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

This section lays out this study's theoretical framework, covering Lev Vygotsky's (1896-1934) sociocultural theory and, in particular, his views about defectology. It is worthwhile to explain the term 'defectology' as it is not used nowadays. According to Gindis (1995), the term defectology means 'the study of defect' (p.77). It is a Russian word that has no synonyms in the English language. Vygotsky has used this term to cover several types of disabilities such as hearing, visual and mental impairments. Therefore, for many years this term has been used in Russia to refer to the study of disability and research about it (Kozulin & Gindis, 2007). Despite the medical connotations this term has and its contrast to the contemporary Western perspectives on disability and to my own personal position about viewing disability as deficiency, Vygotsky

used it to research disability and offer practices that are relevant to the contemporary views. Vygotsky used this term to reflect ways of approaching disability and to advocate against the deprivation of rights that disabled individuals encounter within their social environment. Indeed, this term, as suggested by Smagorinsky (2012), 'mischaracterizes Vygotsky's approach to differences' (p. 67). Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that the term 'defectology' while it reflects a different meaning that is commonly understood in Western countries, its meaning in Vygotsky's approach actually resembles the contemporary understanding of disability. He emphasised the importance of inclusive understandings of differences that allow full participations and appreciations for individuals with SEN in their society (Smagorinsky, 2012).

Grum (2012) wrote, 'Vygotsky is recognized as one of the founders of the psychology of disability and benefits of inclusive education' (p. 115). His sociocultural theory is a paradigm that has the potential to improve how inclusive education is implemented (Dixon & Verenikina, 2007). He examined how social interactions and social environments affect the overall development of children with SEN. As he wrote, their development is 'socially conditioned' (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p.36), which means that it is affected by cultural beliefs and practices.

I adopted Vygotsky's sociocultural theory because it perceives disability as a process that is significantly influenced by social contexts and norms. I am a member of a society that is highly responsive and sensitive to its traditions and social norms, which significantly influences how people act, and this personal background contributed greatly to my decision to adopt this theoretical perspective. I believe that the implementation of inclusion, barriers to inclusion, and teachers' experiences with inclusion are significantly influenced by societal beliefs about people with SEN. Ingrained societal norms about disability, as Vygotsky et al. (1993) asserted, are consciously or unconsciously communicated by society's representatives, including



policymakers, teachers, parents, and children.

My review of the literature revealed that cultural differences in how disabilities are perceived and understood could be the greatest barrier to inclusion. Consequently, this study aims to explore how inclusive policies have been implemented in the KSA and illuminate which barriers Saudi ECE teachers frequently encounter. Hence, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is a suitable framework for discovering the factors that underlie the success (or failure) of inclusion and for learning what teachers need to authentically implement inclusion (Dixon & Verenikina, 2007).

Vygotsky advocated for 'inclusion based on positive differentiation' (Rodina, 2006, p. 3). This refers to a paradigm in which children's differences are viewed positively, as strengths rather than deficiencies. Vygotsky's views are 'positive and forward-looking and dedicated to cultivating potentials' (Smagorinsky, 2012, p. 69). My philosophy as an early childhood educator resembles how Vygotsky approached disability. I believe that childhood lays the groundwork for the future and that children, from early on, need high quality early education so that they reach their full potential. Vygotsky's perspectives on childhood as the cornerstone of future development (Grum, 2012) and on ECE as the phase to lay the foundation for later education align with my beliefs in the importance of inclusion in early childhood classrooms.

#### **2.4.1 Sociocultural theory: An overview.**

The sociocultural approach emphasises the roles that social contexts and social interactions play in a child's intellectual, emotional and social development and in his/her acquisition of knowledge (Dixon & Verenikina, 2007; Vygotsky & Luria, 1993; Walker & Berthelsen, 2008). One's social environment is the source of development and learning. In the

sociocultural theory:

Human development is a socio-genetic process carried out in the social activities of children with adults: Education generates and leads development, which is the result of social learning through the internalization of culture and social relationships. Development is not a straight path of quantitative gains and accumulations, but a series of qualitative, dialectical transformation, a complex process of integration and disintegration. (Gindis, 1995, p. 78)

Vygotsky and Luria (1993) viewed learning and development as social processes caused by people interacting with their society. Thus, according to Yan-bin (2009), people acquire knowledge and skills on two levels:

- a) The real level of development.
- b) The potential level of development, which children can achieve when assisted by peers and adults.

Vygotsky (1978) identified a zone between these levels: the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In this zone, learning and development occurs. According to Vygotsky, children begin in the actual level of development, completing tasks independently; then, assisted by adults or their peers, children are able to reach higher levels and, thus, fulfill their potential (Yan-bin, 2009). The ZPD simultaneously conceives of the ‘yesterday of development’, the existing level of development, and the ‘tomorrow of development’, the potential that a child can achieve (Dixon & Verenikina, 2007, p. 200; Vygotsky et al., 1993; Yan-bin, 2009). Moving from the actual level of development toward higher levels reveals abilities that were heretofore concealed; it also assists with diagnosis and assessment (Gindis, 1999).

Vygotsky also developed a ‘dynamic assessment’, which assesses the ‘potential of change’ (Yan-bin, 2009, p. 101). He defined the ‘dynamic assessment’ as:

An interactive procedure that follows a test-intervene-retest format focusing on the cognitive processes and metacognitive characteristics of a child. Through an analysis of a child’s pretest and post-test performances following test-embedded

intervention, an evaluator can derive important information about the child's cognitive modifiability, his or her responsiveness to adult's mediation, and his or her amenability to instruction and guidance. (Gindis, 1999, p. 337)

This process begins by assessing children according to their strengths rather than their weaknesses (Vygotsky et al., 1993). Vygotsky believed that development is a process that includes both biological and cultural components. As a result, he argued that IQ tests and standardised tests are inappropriate for assessing children because they cannot distinguish between biological and cultural influences (Vygotsky et al., 1993).

Vygotsky's views about ZPD and dynamic assessment reflect his beliefs about the role of social interactions in learning and development. Knowledge, skills, and meanings are constructed dynamically within one's social environments. Negative social environments may negatively influence development, while positive social environments may positively influence development. Therefore, cultural norms and beliefs affect how people think about and behave toward other people. By interacting with one's social surroundings, one learns and acquires certain beliefs (Vygotsky et al, 1993).

#### **2.4.2 Sociocultural theory's contribution to inclusion.**

According to Rodina (2006) Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and defectology have provided the theoretical foundation for inclusive education. Vygotsky et al. (1993) believed that inclusion's main principle was to give children with SEN opportunities to fully, equally, and actively participate in their schools. For him, inclusive education occurs when there are effective interactions based on positive differentiation between children and adults in a supportive environment that allows children with SEN to participate fully (Smagorinsky, 2012).

Vygotsky et al. (1993) believed that all children are alike. The principles of their development are nearly the same; thus, children with SEN and children without SEN ought to be

educated together, under the same educational principles and ‘in connatural activities’ (Yan-bin, 2009, p. 102). Successfully including children depends on compensation. Inclusion should focus on their abilities and strengths rather than on their weaknesses (Smagorinsky, 2012). As Vygotsky wrote, people tend to ‘dwell on the “nuggets” of illness and not on the “mountains” of health’ (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 68). Inclusion based on positive differentiation perceives disability not as a deficiency. To him, ‘a child with a defect is not necessarily a defective child. The degree of his disability or normality depends on the outcome of his social adaptation’ (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 37). Therefore, for children to develop healthily, it is crucial that they fit in socially and are ‘included and accepted, in the midst of critical biological and developmental difference’ (Smagorinsky, 2012, p. 75).

According to Dixon and Verenikina (2007), Vygotsky believed that disability is a consequence of sociocultural experiences and that it includes a ‘primary’ disability and a ‘secondary’ disability. The ‘primary disability’ is the biological deficiency and the ‘second disability’ develops in response to social views about disability (Vygotsky et al., 1993). Social environments can rigorously constrain the development of children with SEN and cause delays and further differences.

Bøttcher and Dammeyer (2012) conducted a case study on how differences in biological and cultural development affected the development of a child with cerebral palsy and a visual disability. The child was observed through video recordings in two settings, i.e. at home with his mother and at school with his teacher. They found that the child’s social surroundings impacted on his behaviour. The reciprocated confidence between the child and his mother enabled him to communicate and participate, whereas with the teacher, who doubted the child’s abilities, he was limited in his ability to communicate. As Vygotsky et al. (1993) argued, the propensity toward

sympathy, benevolence, and sickliness in SPE has, ultimately, weakened it.

Disability is a social concept that is developed, reinforced, and nurtured by one's social surroundings (Vygotsky et al., 1993). The problem that children with SEN face is that they are embedded within societies that view them as different and as deficient. When children with SEN are looked at only through their weaknesses, society will find itself with limited options in how to approach them: 'between the world and a human being stands his social environment, which refracts and guides everything' (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 77). A child's social surroundings, expectations, and beliefs have the potential to significantly disable him/her and cause him/her to develop a secondary disability in addition to the biological impairments. In fact, 'the social aspect formerly diagnosed as secondary and derivative, in fact, turns out to be primary and major. One must boldly look at this problem as a social problem' (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 112).

#### **2.4.3 Teachers and sociocultural theory.**

According to Vygotsky, teachers are central players in the learning and development of children with SEN. They can provide alternatives, accommodations, and remediation for children's impairments. However, he also argued, that teachers need to understand differences in new ways to compensate for their students' weaknesses. Inclusion fundamentally requires educators to perceive differences positively (Vygotsky et al., 1993). Teachers should focus less on their students' impairments and more on the social barriers that have the potential to greatly impact how they develop (Vygotsky et al., 1993). From this perspective, Vygotsky's theories support the view that children must be given opportunities to fulfil their capabilities and potential. Ultimately, teachers need to learn that each child has a unique path to development and that it is their responsibility to construct the educational and pedagogical processes that respond

to each child's path (Vygotsky et al., 1993).

Further, Vygotsky et al. (1993) believed that, to compensate for children's weaknesses, teachers need to focus on their strengths, support them, and prevent them from developing a secondary disability. Interactions between them and their more experienced teachers and peers will allow them to overcome their weaknesses. Therefore, he emphasised the concept of ZPD as a pedagogical and developmental space that can improve how children with SEN are included because it reveals their hidden capabilities and avoids focusing on their impairments (Dixon & Verenikina, 2007).

Vygotsky also believed that the typical methods of assessment are inappropriate for children with SEN, so he created a dynamic assessment, which assesses children with SEN holistically. Teachers assess children according to their current ability and their potential ability and on what they can achieve, not on what they cannot achieve (Yan-bin, 2009). This dynamic assessment allows teachers to learn about their students' needs, characteristics, and potentials, and it can be the first step for creating a detailed plan that charts where the children are currently and where they can be in the future, if given the proper support (Gindis, 1999).

Although Vygotsky supports the role of teachers in inclusive education and provides interpretations of their roles and different approaches to children, it seems that there are limitations to Vygotsky's theoretical ideas, such as in his views about the teachers' role. Vygotsky focused on the role of the teachers and emphasised being skilled and knowledgeable about the children's conditions. This suggests the teachers' role might be only to provide assistance to those children and also signifies having special knowledge. Under this role, children seem to need appropriate assistance and support to fully develop. This kind of view implies similarities with the concept of the medical model of disability in which having

knowledge to assist the children is essential. It is important that teachers have knowledge, believe in the ability children have, and have awareness of their roles in promoting the children's development. However, their roles are more than just using that knowledge to provide assistance and support. Their roles are about accepting, embracing and encouraging the overall development of all children rather than focusing on what needs to be assisted in each child. Therefore, I argue that some of Vygotsky's views about the teachers' roles, and his views about the teachers' ways of approaching children through the ZPD and the dynamic assessment, have some similarities to the medical model in which the focus is on children's perceived weaknesses and the teachers' provision of assistance; thus, this study has taken Disability Studies to disrupt that model even further.

Despite these limitations, it is important to acknowledge that Vygotsky's theoretical ideas have drawn attention to children with SEN as children. Even though his ideas were of a different time and place, at present we are still trying to work with his ideas to convey how children with SEN are viewed. His views provided the foundation of inclusive education in which inclusion is a right for all children. The limitations of his theories might be the result of Vygotsky's early death; according to Gindis (1999), Vygotsky did not have the chance to elaborate on his concepts.

#### **2.4.4 Summary of the sociocultural theory.**

In summary, Vygotsky offers an approach that views children with SEN positively. Vygotsky's approach emphasises children's natural abilities instead of their weaknesses. This approach runs counter to the medical view of disability, which views disabilities as solely the result of biological causes; this view focuses exclusively on treatment. In contrast, in the social

view, disability is solely the result of social environmental factors.

However, there are similarities between Vygotsky's approach and the approach of Disability Studies. Both view disability as a socially constructed condition. Both acknowledge that biological deficiencies have a not-inconsiderable impact; however, both believe that biological impairments do not disable people. Instead, what disables people are their social surroundings and commonly accepted notions of disability. In both views, disabilities are produced by incongruence between a person's biological impairment and his/her culture. Thus, Vygotsky's views have the potential to resolve issues that have plagued the field of Disability Studies (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2012). In relation to these views, this research aims to deeply understand the sociocultural issues that could potentially have influenced the implementation of inclusion in the KSA and could contribute towards generating barriers that affected the experiences of the teachers as well as the children.

## **2.5 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter discussed the definition of inclusion and the development and implementation of inclusion policies internationally and in the context of the KSA. Additionally, this chapter reviewed literature about the barriers that inclusion faces within different cultural contexts, and revealed many similarities in the challenges and barriers to inclusion. The literature provides evidence that inclusion and its implementation is a global concern as it involves challenges and many barriers that operate in national contexts. The emotional and physical influence of those barriers on how teachers experienced inclusion was also discussed. Finally, the last section of this chapter viewed Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework of this study. The next chapter will discuss the positionality of the researcher, the



methodology of this study and will provide a justification of the chosen method. Moreover, it will discuss the process of the research in detail, elaborating on the challenges encountered during the data collection. Finally, it will discuss the analysis of the data.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology of this research and is divided into nine main sections. **Section 3.1** discusses the methodological approach for this study; **Section 3.2** describes my positionality within this research. **Section 3.3** describes the methodological design for this study; **Section 3.4** presents the participants in this study and **Section 3.5** introduces the site. **Section 3.6** explains the research methods; **Section 3.7** presents the ethical consideration in this study. **Section 3.8** discusses the steps to ensure trustworthiness in this study; **Section 3.9** describes the process of data analysis from the beginning to reach the final decision to present the teachers' experiences as narratives. The aim is to examine ECE teachers' experiences with inclusion and to explore the implementation of and barriers to inclusion. The research questions are as follows.

1. How was inclusion implemented in the kindergarten, from the perspectives of the teachers?
2. What are the barriers to inclusion, from the perspectives of the teachers?
3. How did ECE teachers experience inclusion within the kindergarten?

By answering the research questions, I aim to contribute to the development of inclusion in ECE, generate and encourage change and bring the voices of the teachers, who are often blamed for unsuccessful inclusion experiences, to the forefront.

### **3.1 Methodological Approach**

The purpose of this research is to gain a deep understanding of teachers' experiences with inclusion and to bring their voices to the forefront. Therefore, I have selected a qualitative research design. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), 'qualitative research provides an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours' (p. 219). It also allows the participants' voices to be heard and explores hidden issues and factors that underlie action and behaviour (Cohen et al., 2011). In addition, qualitative research addresses questions of 'what' and 'how' and involves an understanding of the context and social milieu 'by allowing the researcher to enter the world of others and to attempt to achieve a holistic understanding' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 41).

According to Runswick-Cole (2007), experience is the foundation of qualitative research. As a consequence, a qualitative research design eased my understanding of the teachers' experiences and allowed me to examine those experiences in depth. It allowed me to study the experiences of the teachers in a holistic way. I view it as a value-laden inquiry in which 'the process of inquiry is influenced by the researcher and the context under study' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 43). Researchers cannot count experiences, but through qualitative research, they can provide understanding and insights of the social, cultural and historical settings that influence and shape those experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This research is a qualitative study that acknowledges the involvement of the researcher in the research process and in constructing knowledge and assumes that, through an interactive process between the researcher and the participants, rich data, deep understanding and meaning can be achieved. The aim is to provide a deep understanding and explanation of teachers' experiences of inclusion and explore its implementation.

I did not choose to conduct quantitative or mixed methods research for several reasons. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), the purpose of quantitative research is to seek the norm, examine an issue to quantify the result and examine causal effect relationships. The purpose of my research was to understand and explore the experiences of teachers; I neither aimed to quantify the findings nor find causal relationships. Qualitative research aids in understanding complex issues in more detail by interacting directly with participants in their natural environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, quantitative research often depends on instruments such as surveys or questionnaires that have been developed by other researchers, whereas qualitative research relies on direct interactions between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher is the main instrument to collect the data. Therefore, to understand teachers' experiences, I wanted to be in the same context under study, and I wanted to explore and observe the hidden issues rooted in the context. I also believed that face-to-face interaction would illuminate the complexity of the experiences and their meanings.

Quantitative researchers believe that 'research can be value-free' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 39) in that the researcher remains distant from the research and disengaged from the participants, whereas in qualitative research, the researcher collects data with the participants in the place where participants experience the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is extremely important because my aim is to understand the experiences of the teachers, and remaining distant from the participants would mean 'failing to gain access to people's social and cultural constructions of their "reality"' (Gray, 2014, p. 160). In qualitative research:

Data are socially situated, context-related, context-dependent and context-rich. To understand a situation researchers need to understand the context because situations affect behaviour and perspectives and vice versa. (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 219)

In order to understand the experiences of the teachers, their meanings and the particular social and cultural conditions that shape those experiences, it is essential for the researcher to be situated within the context.

Quantitative research relies on large samples and seeks a generalisation of results, while generalisability is not the aim of qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The focus is instead on the transferability of the findings to similar situations. This qualitative study concerned a small group of ECE teachers in Saudi Arabia and their experiences with inclusion within a specific kindergarten; therefore, my research does not attempt to represent Saudi ECE teachers in general, but it is hoped that the experiences of the teachers in this study will be shared among teachers with similar experiences and attract the attention of others such as academic researchers, policy makers and teachers.

I also chose to conduct a qualitative study because I wanted to bring the voices of the research participants to the forefront. I wanted to empower them to share their experiences with inclusion. Creswell and Poth (2018) said that qualitative research empowers people to ‘share their stories, hear their voices, and minimise the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants’ (p. 45). Quantitative research would not allow me to empower the participants or make their perspectives about the hidden and invisible issues in their reality heard. Through adopting a reflexive relational approach to the research and by prioritising the development of respectful relationships between the participants and myself, I was able to build trustful relationships with the teachers, which enabled them to share their experiences and enabled me to hear their experiences. This will be discussed in depth later on in the section on ethics.

Finally, while reviewing the literature, I found that many studies about inclusion were conducted quantitatively, and the variables that influence the attitudes of teachers were listed. However, there was little information about the deeply hidden issues such as social and cultural issues within inclusion that influenced teachers' experiences with inclusion. The quantitative studies, especially those conducted in the KSA, provided numbers of teachers who held positive, negative or neutral attitudes toward inclusion and included a list of structural barriers that are believed to have relationships with the attitudes of teachers. However, an understanding of what formed those attitudes, how teachers experienced inclusion and the types of social, cultural and historical barriers that shaped those attitudes are invisible in those studies. Consequently, because I believe that qualitative research has a lot to offer in regard to understanding the experiences and hidden and interconnected issues that underlie those experiences, I adopted this approach.

Despite the relevance of qualitative approaches to the purpose of my study and its nature, it is necessary to mention some critiques of this approach. In qualitative research, the researchers are part of the research process and are allowed to position themselves and their backgrounds and experiences within their research. This practise has been criticised for eliminating objectivity (Gray, 2014). Acknowledging my positionality and disclosing my values and personal experiences that relate to inclusion, and being aware of their influences on my selection of methods, participants and interpretations of the data, assists me in monitoring my interactions with participants and my interpretations of data that may affect the research (Cohen et al., 2011).

In addition, qualitative research has been criticised for lacking 'reproducibility—the research is so personal to the researcher that there is no guarantee that a different researcher would not come to radically different conclusions' (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 109). Therefore, I

acknowledged that this research is about the experiences of a small group of ECE teachers in one kindergarten. Finally, the generalisation of findings is considered an issue for qualitative research. According to Atieno (2009), the inability to extend the findings of qualitative research to a large population is the main disadvantage of this approach. As discussed previously, the aim of this study is not to generalise the results but to understand the experiences of ECE teachers and shed light on those experiences and on the hidden issues within those experiences, and to explore the implementation of inclusion. The aim is to provide a holistic understanding of the complexity of inclusion.

Qualitative inquiry is not a neutral activity, and researchers are not neutral; they have their own values, biases and world views, and these are lenses through which they look at and interpret the already-interpreted world of participants. (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 225)

### **3.2 Positionality**

In qualitative research, it is essential to acknowledge the position of the researchers and their influences on the choice of research topic, methods and data analysis. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that qualitative researchers transport and position themselves, their backgrounds and experiences within their research; it is impossible to separate the researcher from the research (Runswick-Cole, 2007). Recognising where the researcher stands in regard to the research subject is ‘a shifting endeavor’ (Mason, 2002, p. 22). This means that it is important for the research and for the readers to identify the researcher’s position in the research and the prior experiences and knowledge that contributed to forming the researcher’s position. To this end, this section aims to introduce myself by pointing out my academic background, professional experiences and personal experiences that may have influenced the research. The belief in the importance of accepting and educating all children regardless of their abilities and the desire to

contribute to transforming the educational system into a genuinely inclusive educational system has led me to discuss and research this topic.

I hold a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) Degree from King Saud University in the KSA and a Master's in ECE from the University of British Columbia in Canada. During my bachelor's education, I learned about children's development, their needs and how to prepare an educational atmosphere. I have developed a child-centred ideology that considers a child's needs and desires to be absolutely fundamental. I believe that every child has his/her own unique way to grow and develop; therefore, education must respect differences and use them to support each child. Between my bachelor's and master's degrees, I worked for a year as a teacher at the Disabled Children's Association in the KSA. While there, I had several influential experiences, such as meeting children who had potential but did not have opportunity. One example was a nine-year-old boy who was diagnosed with Congenital Hypothyroidism. Despite his condition, he was socially active and academically achieving. However, the sole opportunity he had was being educated at the association until the age of 12, then he had the option either to enrol in a vocational programme or to stay home. To me, it was unfair because he had potential but was deprived of the opportunity to flourish beyond his disabilities. Another incident was related to the parents of children with SEN. I saw parents striving for their children to be included in regular schools. I cannot forget the words of one parent who told me that she would not ask for more than social inclusion for her child in regular schools. She told me it was fine if her child was not able to achieve academically like others, but at least he would have the opportunity to interact with and meet others.



My teaching experience at the Disabled Children's Association greatly affected me, so I earned my master's degree in Inclusion in Early Childhood Classrooms in the KSA. The aim was to highlight the importance of inclusion in early childhood classrooms and the importance of understanding inclusion and its philosophy to genuinely implement it. Genuine implementation meant to me that children with SEN are authentically welcomed and provided with inclusive experiences and are socially active and involved rather than simply sharing the space. Through my master's study, I found that there is scarcity in the literature about inclusion in ECE, especially in the KSA. Most studies focused on middle and secondary schools. I also found that most studies were conducted quantitatively, and only a few were qualitative. In addition, most of the studies implied that teachers were essential to the success of inclusion and that barriers of inclusion were related mostly to teachers' willingness and structural and relational barriers such as lack of training and support. Those studies provided me with extensive understanding of what hindered the development of inclusion at the national and international levels. Therefore, I wanted to obtain a deeper and greater understanding of inclusion in early childhood classrooms and examine teachers' experiences with inclusion to understand what was really going on.

After earning my master's degree, I was given the opportunity to work as a lecturer in the department of Early Childhood Education. This was the opportunity I needed to further explore and gain an understanding of inclusion in early childhood and to gain an inside look at ECE teachers' educational programmes. I taught a course about exceptional children and required my students to visit inclusive kindergartens and write down their observations. I was very surprised by my students' notes. One student mentioned that from her observation, she thought a special institute for children with SEN would be better than inclusion. She further explained that one child with a hearing impairment was striving to participate during circle time, but the teacher

completely ignored him. When the student asked the teacher about it, she said it was not her responsibility to teach him; during playground time, the SPE teacher would take him to the resource room.

From the observations of my students, I became interested in visiting an inclusive kindergarten. I visited one in the city of Riyadh and had the opportunity to meet the principal. When I asked about inclusion and how teachers apply it, she said it was not easy, as the MoE required them to include children with SEN, but teachers refuse to have those children in their classrooms. She informed me that she had to offer privileges for teachers who accept to have children with SEN in their classrooms (personal communication, April 4, 2016). Those experiences reflected that teachers were one of the barriers to inclusion and seemed to be blamed for their inability to implement inclusion. Thus, I became interested in examining teachers' experiences with inclusion, and this interest has driven me to research inclusion and its implementation. I am keen to understand the teachers' experiences and discover why it is difficult to genuinely implement inclusion and why we are still discussing this basic human right.

Several personal experiences also spurred my research interest. At birth, my niece was diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which is 'a collection of genetic disorders that affect connective tissue'. (Arthritis Foundation, n.d., para. 1). This disease causes a delay in motor skills development, such as sitting, standing and walking (Arthritis Foundation, n.d.). It took my sister three years to find a kindergarten that was willing to accept her daughter. It was hard for me to see how my niece, with all her potential, was explicitly excluded from enrolling in kindergarten. I am also a mother of two children, so I understood how the parents I met during my work at the Disabled Children's Association and my sister felt. It is painful to watch others judge your child without providing them an opportunity to go beyond his/her visible disabilities.

My academic background, professional and personal experiences have triggered my interest and made me dedicated to the area of inclusion in ECE. Through my research, I hope to gain a deep understanding of how inclusion is implemented, to explore its barriers and understand how ECE teachers experience it. I also believe that my position at a university will contribute to inclusion in ECE.

### **3.2.1 Ontological and epistemological positions.**

Next, I will discuss my ontological and epistemological positions, as they affect how a researcher chooses to interpret information. According to Matthews and Ross (2010), ontology is ‘the science of what is, of the kinds and structures of objects, properties, events, processes and relations in every area of reality’ (p. 18); it is about ‘the nature of reality’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 19). It is about ‘our beliefs about the kind and nature of reality and the social world (what exists)’ (Alsaadi, 2014, p. 1). Epistemology is defined as ‘the theory of knowledge and how we know things’ (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 18). It is about ‘what counts as knowledge’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20) and how we find out about that knowledge.

These theories define what the researcher can know about social phenomena and how the researcher reaches the knowledge about social phenomena. Therefore, my ontological position acknowledges that inclusion is not a merely objective phenomenon that exists independently; rather, it is the outcome of dynamic processes of relations and sharing knowledge and meaning between individuals. This dynamic process is highly influenced by social milieu and individuals’ social circumstances that simultaneously influence the formation of individuals’ perceptions about inclusion and disability. I therefore believe that inclusion is challenged with social beliefs and attitudes, and those beliefs and attitudes are significant components of the social world. In

other words, social attitudes in the KSA toward disability have a significant influence on inclusion and its development.

I also recognise that there are multiple realities and perspectives, and those views generate various interpretations. Therefore, I chose to conduct qualitative research so I could acknowledge and report on the varied experiences and interpretations of the participants. Further, my epistemological position recognises that I can learn about inclusion, its implementation and the experiences of teachers by trying to understand the perceptions and interpretations of the participants. My aim is to explore the social reality of inclusion rather than discover this reality. I believe that these experiences are knowable. Using appropriate research methods, I believe that knowledge about teachers' experiences and understanding can be achieved (Mason, 2002; Matthews & Ross, 2010). These ontological and epistemological positions have influenced my research, as I am dedicated to exploring teachers' experiences with inclusion and explaining how those experiences are influenced and formed. However, this research does not attempt to represent Saudi ECE teachers in general.

Based on my ontological and epistemological positions, I adopt the interpretivism (social constructivism) paradigm. In the interpretivism paradigm, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers seek understanding, develop subjective meanings of experiences and depend on participants' interpretations of their social worlds. Matthews and Ross (2010) highlighted that in the interpretivism paradigm, the researcher studies 'the social phenomenon as through the eyes of the people being researched' (p. 28). It is about exploring meanings and developing 'empathic understandings' (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 28) of participants' experiences. At the same time, it acknowledges that the researchers' interpretations and understandings of others' experiences

will be influenced by the researchers' backgrounds (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Matthews & Ross, 2010).

I believe that the participants developed an understanding of inclusion and acquired meaning through their interactions with their social milieu and others, and I also recognise that my interpretations and meaning constructions of the participants' experiences were shaped by my experiences and reflections on inclusion and childhood. In this paradigm, I inductively generated patterns and themes of meaning and developed a theory from the participants' experiences while recognising my position within this research and its influence on shaping my interpretation. 'The subjective lenses that both the researcher and research participants together bring to a qualitative study form the context for the findings' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p .41). It is through the interactive process within a real context between the participants and I that have been able to capture rich data.

### **3.3 Case-Study Approach**

This section describes the methodological design that was chosen for this research. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), the methodology is the 'processes for studying knowledge' (p.42). Through the methodology, research can reach and construct knowledge of the studied phenomenon. It can be said that methodology is the essence of research in that it reflects the full picture of the research process. The aim of this study is to deeply understand the implementation of inclusion, explore its barriers and understand the experiences of the teachers. Through this research, I attempted to understand the implementation of inclusion from the experiences of the teachers 'from a context-specific perspective' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p.43). Therefore, the selected methodology for this research is a qualitative case study design.

‘Deep understanding about a subject matter is, in all its real world complexity, and an ability to describe, explain, and communicate that understanding lies at the core of qualitative research’ (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 38).

‘A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (Yin, 2009, p.18). Since I explored a real-life situation in which teachers experience a social phenomenon (inclusion), I believed that the case-study approach was the most appropriate approach for my research. According to Gray (2014), a case study approach allows for the generation of a rich, deep and detailed understanding of perspectives and contexts. It also helps to disclose the ‘relationships between a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring’ (Gray, 2014, p. 267). Additionally, since the case study approach helps to gain an understanding of complex social phenomena of which the researcher has no control and takes a holistic approach to the study (Gray, 2014; Yin, 2009), I believed that the case study approach is the most appropriate to fulfil my research objectives and answer the research questions.

A case study approach allows the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding and explore the issues of the case within a specific time and place (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Thus, by adopting the case study approach, I was able to look inside a real-life case, develop an understanding and explore the barriers that significantly influenced the experiences of the teachers with inclusion.

The case study approach was relevant to my research because my aim was not to study a large number of participants and seek generalisability from the findings; instead, my aim was to reveal the hidden experiences of teachers with inclusion and provide insights about those

experiences and what they involved. It aimed to understand the context and social milieu that shaped and contributed in the implementation of inclusion and, accordingly, the experiences of the teachers. The case that was the focus of my research is an inclusive government kindergarten in the city of Riyadh. The case involved eight female ECE teachers who had experienced inclusion of two kinds of disabilities (autism and hearing and speech disorders).

### **3.4 Participants**

To select participants for this research, I relied on purposive sampling, in which participants are chosen with purpose. This approach is generally used with small-scale and in-depth studies (Matthews & Ross, 2010). The purpose is not to produce generalisation or comparison but rather to present a unique case that has its own ‘intrinsic value’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 161). Participants were selected based on two criteria:

1. Working in an inclusive government kindergarten.
2. Working with children with more than one type of disability.

Participants for this study included eight female Saudi kindergarten teachers working in an inclusive government kindergarten. All of the participants in this study were female because in the KSA only female teachers are allowed to work in kindergartens. The table below introduces the teachers who shared their experiences with inclusion. All names used are pseudonyms. All teachers were observed and interviewed at the kindergarten.

Table 3.1

*Participants in This Research*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Details</b>
Njood	A kindergarten teacher for 26 years (17 years working with children with hearing and speech disorders and two years working with children with autism). Has a diploma in ECE.
Muna	A kindergarten teacher for seven years (two years working in an inclusive kindergarten). Has a diploma in Arabic Language.
Deem	A kindergarten teacher for five years (two years working in an inclusive kindergarten). Has a bachelor's degree in ECE.
Shahd	A kindergarten teacher for 23 years (17 years working with children with hearing and speech disorders and two years working with children with autism). Has a bachelor's degree in ECE.
Haifa	A kindergarten teacher for 26 years (17 years working with children with hearing and speech disorders and two years working with children with autism). Has a diploma in ECE.
Hibah	A kindergarten teacher for 25 years (17 years working with children with hearing and speech disorders and two years working with children with autism). Has a diploma in ECE.
Tala	A kindergarten teacher for nine years (six years working in an inclusive kindergarten). Has a bachelor's degree in ECE.
Malak	A kindergarten teacher for five years in an inclusive kindergarten. Has a bachelor's degree in ECE.

### 3.5 Site

The research was conducted in one inclusive government kindergarten. The kindergarten has three classrooms: two classrooms for children from five to six years old and one classroom for children from four to five years old. The kindergarten is open from 7:00 am to 12:30 pm. The kindergarten is located in the centre of the city of Riyadh (the capital of the KSA). This location



was chosen because, according to the MoE (personal communication, December 25, 2016), inclusion was first introduced to kindergartens in this area. This study was conducted in Riyadh for several reasons. First, it has the highest number of inclusive kindergartens and children with SEN (General Authority of Statistics, 2017). Most of the ministry's efforts to enhance educational services for children with SEN are located within the educational offices in Riyadh, which means that new regulations and services are first provided to schools located there. Second, Riyadh is my hometown and where I studied and encountered many of the experiences that shaped my positionality that has informed this research.

Several factors influenced my choice of kindergarten. First, the kindergarten I selected was highly recommended by the MoE's officer. I have been told that this kindergarten is under the supervision of the central educational office, which seeks and provides high-quality educational services. Second, I discovered that this kindergarten is the only one that provides inclusion for two types of disabilities (autism and hearing and speech disorders). Finally, this kindergarten has the highest number of children with SEN; it has nine children with autism and 10 children with hearing and speech disorders. Therefore, I believed that this kindergarten offered a suitable context in which to address the research questions and that it would allow me to explore and understand teachers' experiences of inclusion.

### **3.6 Research Methods**

To achieve the aims of this research, this study depended on two methods of data collection: interviews and observations. 'Using more than one method in a research is referred to as triangulation' (Grix, 2004, p. 135). This allows the researcher to view the study from multiple perspectives. According to Grix (2004) and Yin (2009), results based on multiple sources of

information are often more convincing. In addition, the rationale that underlies the usage of two methods to generate data for this research is that each method has its strengths and weaknesses, and using multiple methods would help to ‘balance out any of the potential weaknesses in each data collection method’ (Gray, 2014, p. 37) and ‘cross-check our findings’ (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 145). According to Yin (2009), case studies that used multiple sources of evidence were ‘rated more highly, in terms of their overall quality’ (p. 117).

Further, my ontological position acknowledges that participants’ views, perceptions, experiences, understandings and interactions are meaningful components of the social reality I aim to explore. Therefore, interviews and observations, where I can have conversations with participants, listen to their experiences, access to their social contexts and understand the ‘issues that lie beneath the surface of presenting behaviours and actions’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 219), were the most appropriate research methods to achieve the aims of this research and reach an understanding of the participants’ experiences within this context.

Before beginning the observations and conducting interviews, I conducted a pilot study with one teacher. This was essential to ensure that the interview questions were clear and that the questions were not misunderstood. It was also important because it allowed me to address the problems discovered in the pilot study. For example, the term ‘inclusion’ was not clear for the teacher in the pilot study. This allowed me to revise my question and provide a definition of ‘inclusion’. According to Matthews and Ross (2010), pilot studies are opportunities for the researcher to check questions, modify the wording and clarify definitions.

The data collection was supposed to be conducted in two phases from March to June 2017. I planned to conduct observations for 10 weeks, and during weeks 11 and 12, I would conduct the interviews with the teachers, but due to Royal orders announced in April 2017

ending the school year prior to the month of Ramadan, I had to collect my data from March to May. So, I had only nine weeks: eight weeks to conduct observations and one week to conduct the interviews.

In Phase 1, I conducted observations for eight weeks. During the first visit to the kindergarten, I allowed the teachers to choose when and for how long they would like me to attend their classrooms for observation. They told me that it was fine if I attend each classroom once a week to observe classrooms, and since playground time is the same for all three classrooms, I would be able to see all three classrooms each day. For the first three weeks, I visited the kindergarten three days a week from 7:30 am to 12:30 pm. After the third week, the teachers told me that I was welcome to attend every day, so during the remaining five weeks, I visited the kindergarten five days a week.

In Phase 2—on week 9 and after children had their summer break—I conducted interviews with the teachers. They were able to choose the place and time for the interviews. Six teachers chose their own classrooms, one chose the kindergarten library because she felt that she would have more privacy there and one teacher chose the break room where teachers gather during their break times. The interview was conducted when all teachers finished their breaks and returned to their classrooms. The only interview that was not interrupted by the principal was the interview conducted at the library, whereas the principal interrupted one or two times each asking for files or just checking in during the other interviews.

In addition to the two research methods (observations and interviews), I was able to learn more about the teachers' experiences and their personal stories through informal conversations during break time and before the end of the working day. Children finished school at 11:30 am and teachers finished at 12:30 pm, so every day I had the opportunity to spend one hour with the

teachers talking about their day. Having informal conversations and spending time together helped me to establish a good rapport with the teachers, meaning they were very willing and open to sharing their experiences and stories with me.

### **3.6.1 Observations.**

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), observation is one of the main methods for gathering data in qualitative research. It is ‘the act of watching social phenomena in the real world and recording events as they happen’ (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 255). Observational data are often beneficial in providing further information about the research topic (Yin, 2009) as well as providing the researcher the opportunity to collect ‘live’ data from naturally occurring social situations’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 456). Also, a strength of conducting observations is that ‘the researcher may learn sensitive information from being in the setting that informants may be reluctant to discuss in interviews’ (Hatch, 2002, p. 72). To capture the experiences of the teachers and understand the context they were in and build a rapport with the teachers, I decided to conduct observations first. I wanted to give them time to get to know me before they shared their experiences with me; I wanted them to be comfortable interacting with me. My focus during the observations was on how teachers experienced and practised inclusion inside and outside of their classrooms and on the interactions of teachers with the principal, SPE teachers and the children. My observation was of the specific context and setting that the teachers worked in and how that context influenced their experiences of inclusion.

‘We cannot study the world without being part of it’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 457); the richness of the data I collected draws in part from my role as a researcher. I chose to engage with the participants during observations; I actively communicated with them and that enabled me to gain insights into their experiences. My role as participant observer has, as suggested by

Creswell and Poth (2018) enabled me to ‘gain insider views and subjective data’ (p.167). Further, it enabled me to dive beneath the surface of behaviours and reach detailed information about what was happening in the kindergarten. Consequently, I collected detailed and thick descriptions of the experiences of the teachers and that, according to Cohen et al. (2011), enables the researcher to provide true explication and interpretation rather than depending on the researcher’s own deductions.

For the first three weeks, I observed each classroom for one day once a week. For the remaining five weeks, I came five days a week and divided the observations between the classrooms so that each classroom was observed for eight hours a week. I had to observe the teachers from the beginning to the end of their day. Each teacher was observed during different times such as circle time, corner time, outdoor playing time and mealtime. The aim was to capture teachers’ behaviours and practices in their natural environment and to gain an understanding of visible and hidden issues in the context that influenced the teachers’ experiences of inclusion (Grix, 2004).

During outdoor play, which was from 9:00 am to 10:00 am every day, I had the opportunity to observe all three classes together. By observing each classroom, I was able to see and understand each classroom’s experiences with inclusion and the influences of the special circumstances of each class, such as the number of children and adults in the classroom. Observing the three classrooms together helped me to see and understand the common and shared understanding and practice of inclusion.

During and after each observation, I wrote field notes about the observed behaviours and incidents. I tried to capture the daily experiences of the teachers and included descriptions of the emotions they displayed and their body language during specific events. The observations

focused on the teachers, how they experienced inclusion and what barriers they faced.

### **3.6.2 Interviews.**

Interviews are considered the most significant source of information in a case study (Yin, 2009). I chose to conduct interviews because they are the best strategy to understand and explore teachers' experiences. It is a data collection method in which the researcher facilitates direct communication with participants and elicits participants' feelings, opinions and information through interactive dialogue (Matthews & Ross, 2010) which produces knowledge through enabling 'multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 409). Therefore, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews, as they offer important and valuable data via their flexibility as an open discussion.

As mentioned earlier, each participant chose the time and place for the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I introduced the aims of the study. I then reminded them that the interviews would be audio-recorded and confirmed their approval. Finally, I asked for permission to take notes during the interviews. The interviews began by asking the participants to tell me about their experiences with inclusion. I wanted to enable the teachers to discuss their experiences and their interpretations of those experiences.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), research interview questions are formulated based 'on the purpose for the study and research questions guiding the study' (p. 164). Therefore, the interviews questions were derived from the literature review, the research's purpose and questions and the researcher's insider knowledge of inclusion in the KSA.

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that ‘the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in real-life settings’ (p. 24). As the interviews evolved, I asked further questions to understand their experiences, the relational, structural and social cultural barriers they encountered and their views on the implementation of inclusion. The interviews varied in duration, with most lasting approximately 45 minutes and two lasting 35 minutes. Most participants were open and willing to share their experiences; they truly wanted their voices to be heard. Thus, they described their experiences to the extent that they covered several of the prepared interview questions. In some interviews, new questions emerged as a part of the dialogue between the participants and myself. As Cohen et al. (2011) explained, an interview is an exchange of opinions and interpretations between individuals on a matter of reciprocal interest.

The interviews were ‘flexible and adaptable to the needs of participants’ (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 226). Participants could discuss the topic in their own way. During the interviews, teachers not only shared their experiences verbally but also expressed their emotions through pauses and facial and bodily expressions such as crying and hand movements; this non-verbal communication was also recorded as an important part of their embodied communication.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic because it is the mother language of the participants. However, when preparing for the data collection, I wrote all the questions in English and checked them with a colleague to ensure they were clear and comprehensive. I used the English version of the interview questions in the pilot study. After the amendments, I translated the questions into Arabic and checked them again. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

All teachers were asked for permission to audio-record the interviews, and none of the participants refused. The participants were provided the opportunity to comment on their interview transcripts. A few added more explanation, and only one asked to omit part of the content. Most teachers were happy with the transcripts and did not ask to add or edit them. Before leaving the field, I asked the teachers' permission to contact them while I was in the UK. I contacted the teachers several times through WhatsApp, either to confirm the accuracy of some of my interpretations or to ask for further details.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues were taken into careful consideration in this study. According to Matthews and Ross (2010), research ethics are 'moral principles guiding a research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond' (p. 71). Ethics are about being aware and sensitive to the rights of the participants (Cohen et al., 2011). Establishing and sustaining respectful, understanding and trusting relationships with the teachers is a great of importance to me. Therefore, I considered ethics as ongoing and negotiated processes rather than a research procedural. It is about generating a reciprocal respectful as well as win-win relationship with participants (Matthews & Ross, 2010). It is more than procedural issue; it is about carrying out a research in 'a responsible and morally defensible way' (Gray, 2014, p. 68). According to Matthews and Ross (2010):

Social research is about human beings and because most social research involves human beings, their experiences, their attitudes and their ideas directly, and because participation in social research is itself a social activity which will have an impact on both the researcher and the research participants, ethical issues are important considerations. (p. 84)

Considering this, I ensured that this research would be conducted ethically to prevent



harm to the participants and to protect their rights.

### **3.7.1 Permissions.**

Prior to conducting the research, an ethical review of the research and its purpose, aims, questions and methods was completed at the University of Sheffield and from the MoE in the KSA. After obtaining official permission, I began to contact inclusive kindergartens in the city of Riyadh to obtain permission to conduct the study from the kindergartens' principals. A list of the inclusive kindergartens was provided by the MoE. The permissions can be found in Appendix B and C.

### **3.7.2 Informed consent.**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) affirmed that informed consent is principal to research ethics, so I went through several steps to gain consent for this study. When I received approval for my research from the University of Sheffield and the MoE in the KSA, I first contacted the kindergarten principal. I was still in the UK, so I called her by phone, introduced myself and told her about my study. She immediately welcomed me and scheduled the first visit. At the first visit, I met with the principal at her office, where I thoroughly explained my study and provided her with the approval letters, information sheet and informed consents (see Appendix D & E). I had two copies of the information sheet: one for the teachers and one for the parents of the children, just to inform them that a study would be conducted in their kindergarten. The principal decided not to give the parents the information sheet and not to inform them about the study. The principal believed that since children were not going to participate in the study, the parental information sheet was not required.

After our meeting, the principal showed me the kindergarten's surroundings and told me that the teachers were already gathered for a meeting with me in the break room.

I went into the break room and introduced myself as a previous teacher of children with SEN, a lecturer at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University and a PhD student interested in the experiences of ECE teachers with inclusion. I explained my study, its purpose, questions and methods directly to them. During the meeting, I provided the teachers with the information sheet about the study. The teachers were slightly hesitant and asked me several times if I had been sent by the MoE to evaluate their practices. I affirmed to them that I was at the kindergarten to conduct a study for my PhD degree that was planned and chosen based on my personal interest in gaining understanding and insights about the experiences of teachers with inclusion.

I provided the teachers with the informed consent and asked them to take their time and read the information sheet carefully. I provided them with my contact information and told them that I would be in the kindergarten for any further explanation about the study and its procedure and to answer any questions or concerns they might have. I also explained and assured them that their participation was totally voluntary, their privacy would be protected and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without reason. Five teachers signed the informed consent immediately, two signed it the next day and one sent me a text message saying that she agreed to participate but could not sign the informed consent before the third day because she was in training.

### **3.7.3 Confidentiality and anonymity.**

At the first meeting and before each phase (observations and interviews), I cautiously and clearly clarify to the teachers the purpose of this research and assured them that all collected data would be saved and protected in a file in my personal computer which can only be accessed using a password that no one knows except myself. Moreover, I informed and assured them that all collected data such as observations, field notes, audio recordings and interview transcripts would afterward be destroyed by completely erasing all the soft copy files from my computer, and hard copies would be destroyed with a paper shredder.

In addition, I assured the teachers that their identities and information would remain anonymous. Therefore, I used pseudonyms for the participants. To protect the privacy of the participants and ensure their anonymity, I decided not to include pictures of the kindergarten, as it might be easy to identify the kindergarten and, thus, the teachers.

### **3.7.4 Specific cultural considerations.**

Matthews and Ross (2010) asserted the importance of accounting for the cultural backgrounds of participants and acknowledged that some cultures do not hold the same understanding of privacy as others. Consequently, because the KSA is a very conservative society and there are specific cultural beliefs and values, I assured the participants that no one except the researcher would listen to the audio-recorded interviews and that the recordings would be destroyed after the research is completed. Further, I informed them that the purpose of this study is to advance academic research in the area of inclusion in ECE; their inputs would solely be used in this research.

### **3.7.5 Power relations.**

Creswell and Poth (2018) affirmed the importance of considering ‘potential power imbalances’ (p. 55) between the researcher and participants. To this end, I introduced myself as a PhD student interested in gaining knowledge about the topic of the research. I also informed the participants that their participation would add to the research field, meaning that their contributions would be greatly appreciated. To further balance the power, I provided teachers the freedom to choose how many days per week they would allow me to conduct observations, and I also provided them with space when they needed it.

Although I clearly explained to the teachers from the first meeting that I was there for my PhD study and not to evaluate or report their teaching practices to the MoE, a few incidents in the first few weeks revealed that there were some doubts among the teachers regarding my classroom observations. Seven of the teachers asked my opinion regarding their teaching practices. They asked if I had evaluated them and written some notes about their teaching skills. Each time I was asked, I clearly explained to them that I was not there to scrutinize or evaluate them, either on my behalf or that of the MoE. I also explained to them that I had been working as a teacher for young children with SEN. I clearly affirmed that I was collecting data for my own study and not to evaluate nor report it to either the principal or the MoE. To reassure them, I shared my field notes daily and had conversations about various incidents. That was helpful to show them that I was not evaluating their practices and to verify my observations and interpretations with the participants as we built our knowledge together.

### **3.7.6 Ethical dilemma.**

During the data collection, I encountered a few ethical dilemmas. The first was ongoing throughout the data collection. Although the principal was very collaborative, she seemed to believe that I was there to evaluate the teachers. On several occasions she called me to her office to ask about the teachers' practices. She even interrupted my observations during playground time to ask my opinion about what I was observing. She interrupted all interviews except for the one conducted in the library. This caused me great pressure because she insisted to know about the teachers' practices and I truly wanted to protect the participants' privacy. I clearly explained to her that I was not there to scrutinize the teachers or to evaluate them and that I was only there to collect data for my own research.

Another ethical dilemma I encountered concerned incidents of children with SEN being treated unfairly. I witnessed some incidents where children with SEN were ignored and physically and emotionally harmed by SPE teachers. It was very difficult for me not to do anything, especially as I did not want to influence my research, and speaking in the classroom in front of the ECE teachers would have an influence, as there was already tension between the ECE teachers and SPE teachers. I also wanted to minimise disruptions in the classroom as much as I could. Therefore, for some incidents, I withdrew from the classroom and waited for the SPE teachers outside. Since the SPE teachers were not participants in my study and talking to them would not affect the honesty of my data, I decided to intervene by having friendly conversations with them about the incidents I witnessed. I reminded them that the students were only children who needed to be protected and loved. I told them that I wanted to remind them that the way they treated the children, whether intentional or unintentional, could be considered abuse, even if there was no apparent or immediate damage.

Another dilemma related to the participants of this research. Although the teachers were my focus it is important to acknowledge that several times I witnessed the teachers experiencing a great amount of stress and being overwhelmed, so I withdrew from the classroom. I wanted to give them the emotional and physical space they needed. Although they agreed to participate in my study, I felt that they still had the right to have space. To me, it was ethical to respect and understand the needs of the participants. The classrooms were already crowded, so I thought that my withdrawal might help to reduce stress in the classroom. When I withdrew, I visited the other classrooms. Through these strategies I considered that my research practices were ethical in emotional and relational sensitivity.

### **3.8 Ensuring Trustworthiness**

While quantitative research uses the terms ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’, those terms are challenged in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011). In qualitative research, those terms are replaced with ‘trustworthiness’, which covers four main criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Thus, the term ‘trustworthiness’ is used in this research as ‘a means for reassuring the reader that a study was of significance and value’ (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 162). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness describes how a researcher can ‘persuade his or her audience (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of’ (p. 290).

Therefore, to enhance and ensure the trustworthiness of this research, I have employed several strategies based on the four criteria. First, before collecting data, I spent time with the participants to build a relationship and trust, and to understand the context they worked in.

Second, the use of multiple research methods enhances trustworthiness and corroborates the researcher's findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). I collected the data using observations that included many informal conversations and interviews. Those various methods helped to triangulate my findings and view them from different angles (Grix, 2004). Triangulation provided a deep understanding of the experiences of the teachers so that I could dive beneath the surface of the presented behaviours and practices, and understand the social surroundings that shaped those experiences.

Third, I frequently discussed my study—including my methods approach and interpretations of data—with my supervisors and colleagues. Those discussions provided different views and allowed me to check my own ideas and interpretations, which assisted me in recognising my own preferences. Those discussions occurred throughout all stages of the research. 'Through discussion, the vision of the investigator may be widened as others bring to bear their experiences and perceptions' (Shenton, 2004, p. 67).

Fourth, I provided rich descriptions of contexts and participants. 'Thick description is the vehicle for communicating to the reader a holistic and realistic picture' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 164). During observations, I took notes of the settings, participants and activities. I also took notes during interviews to record non-verbal data and pauses. To ensure accurate and rich descriptions of the participants' experiences, I also audio-recorded the interviews. I aimed to convey the actual context and to share a holistic and rich picture of the experiences of the teachers within their contexts.

Fifth, to ensure the trustworthiness of my research, I clarified my positionality, expressed my personal values and acknowledged its potential influence on the interpretation of data. To avoid the influence of my positionality and subjectivity, I continually monitored myself by

writing down my own reflections and emotions during the research process. I recorded my impressions and patterns that emerged during the data collection immediately after I left the site each day. I also shared my field notes and interpretations with the participants, and we had daily conversations about those notes.

Sixth, to verify the accuracy of the data, I shared my field notes and interview transcripts with the participants to ensure that their intended meanings were preserved, as suggested by Matthews and Ross (2010). Because the interviews were conducted in Arabic, I had to translate the transcripts into English. To ensure that the translations were accurate and no meaning had been lost during the translations, I ran them by a fellow PhD researcher in education who also spoke Arabic.

Seventh, according to Shenton (2004), another element to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research is ensuring the honesty of the participants when providing data. To avoid dishonesty in the contributed data, I informed the participants and reassured them that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time during the study without obligation. I also explained to them prior to conducting the interviews and during informal conversations that the purpose of this study was to understand their experiences with inclusion; thus, their inputs would provide an understanding of their situations. The interviews were conducted privately and individually; however, the shared stories of the teachers reflected common experiences.

Finally, Shenton (2004) highlighted the importance of examining the findings of previous research 'to assess the degree to which the project's results are congruent with those of past studies' (p. 69). I therefore discussed and reported my findings in light of findings from past studies that covered similar issues.



### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is defined as the ‘process of working with the data to describe, discuss, interpret, evaluate and explain the data in terms of research questions’ (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 317). It consists of several phases: preparing, organising, ‘reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes; and finally representing the data’ (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 183).

#### **3.9.1 Preparing for analysis.**

In preparation for the data analysis, I read several books about analysing qualitative data, including Creswell and Poth (2018), Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), Cohen et al. (2011) and Matthews and Ross (2010). These references helped me to understand the process of analysis in qualitative research. I began to prepare for the analysis process by creating transcriptions. I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews for each participant immediately after each interview. For field notes, after I finished the data collection, I copied all observations into a Word file. I wrote and organised all details such as date, place, surroundings, participants and my own reflections on some of the field notes. I also included written text of informal conversations between the participants and myself. This process provoked my initial thoughts of patterns emerging in the data. Cohen et al. (2011) highlighted that the process of analysis may begin during data collection and during preparation for the analysis.

My preparation also included choosing NVivo to organise and analyse the data, as it was highly recommended by my peers in the department. I decided to learn about it before beginning the analysis process, dedicating time to learn about NVivo by watching online videos, reading

books, asking friends and attending university workshops. Although this consumed a lot of my time, I thought it would be worth it since it would organise the majority of my data.

### **3.9.2 Organising the data.**

After transcribing all the data in Word files, I saved them in different files in my own computer. I placed the interview transcriptions including documents describing the setting during each interview, significant events that occurred during each interview and my notes about non-verbal data in one file. Observations and field notes were in another file, and my own reflections were in a separate file. Participants in these files were already given pseudonyms. After preparing the documents, I imported them into the NVivo software programme to store, organise and begin the analysis.

### **3.9.3 Choosing the method of analysis.**

This section will document the process that I have been through in terms of analysing the data to reach the final decision to present the teachers' experiences as narratives. For both interviews and observations, thematic analysis and coding were used to identify and interpret themes and to find relationships between different aspects of the data and differences and similarities. Thematic analysis, according to Matthews and Ross (2010), is the 'process of working with raw data to identify and interpret key ideas or themes' (p. 373). Thematic analysis helps to interpret and gain an understanding of the words and experiences of the participants. 'It is not for purposes of generalizing beyond the case but rather for rich description of the case in order to understand the complexity thereof' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 46).

The first phase of the analysis process was familiarising myself with the data (Matthews

& Ross, 2010). Although I had completed the data collection and interview transcriptions by myself, it seemed helpful to immerse myself in the data to gain a complete sense of it before breaking it into segments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through reading and re-reading transcriptions, field notes and my own notes as well as through listening and re-listening to the audio recordings of the interviews, the initial analysis emerged. Through re-reading transcriptions and field notes, I was able to identify frequent patterns and themes and find similarities and contradictions between patterns in the data of each method. Listening and re-listening to the audio recordings allowed me to note more than the verbal data, and I was able to capture the pauses and levels of teachers' voices, which helped me to consider potential subliminal meanings and messages. Overall, this phase genuinely helped me to understand the data.

The second phase included creating the initial codes of the data. It is 'the process of noting what is of interest or significance, identifying different segments of the data, and labelling them to organise the information contained in the data' (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 198). It represents the 'heart of qualitative data analysis' (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 189) in which the researcher constructs meaningful, thorough explanations, applies codes to those explanations and develops themes and provides interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This phase was a challenge. I collected an enormous amount of data, and working through all the written data was exhausting. However, I thought that using a computer-assisted tool such as NVivo in the coding process and analysis would help me in 'coding and categorizing large amounts of data' (Yin, 2009, p. 128). Indeed, NVivo organised my data, so I was able to easily import my interview transcripts and field notes and have them organised for analysis, but the analysis itself was complicated. 'Software does not enable the range and richness of analytic

techniques that are associated with qualitative research' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 544). I had long transcriptions written in Arabic, but NVivo was in English. This was a challenge because I planned to interpret and analyse my data in Arabic to retain the originality of the data and avoid any loss of meaning during translation. I was also uncomfortable analysing the data in the software, as I felt more comfortable seeing the transcriptions in front of me to read and interpret; therefore, I decided to manually analyse the data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that they 'have not found these computerised programs particularly useful in inquiries with massive amounts of field texts' (p. 131).

I printed out the interview transcriptions (written in Arabic) and written field notes. I read them, re-read them carefully, organised them into meaningful groups and applied named coding for each group using a different colour for each code. Some excerpts were under only one code, others were under many codes. This reflects the interconnected and rich nature of the data. The coding was undertaken and divided based on the research questions.

By manually analysing the data, I was able to deeply think about the data, view them from different perspectives and make connections. Although I ended up with a vast amount of paper and colouring pencils, I believe I was able to capture the richness that the data presented.

The third phase occurred after I identified the initial codes. I was then able to categorise the data into themes and chart them to find sub-themes and understand the relationship between each theme. It was a difficult task because the data were interwoven to the extent that I did not feel that dividing them into small segments would accurately represent the richness of the data. I struggled to divide them as I felt it broke the teachers' experiences into small fragments that did not represent the complexity and the intersected barriers that impacted the implementation of inclusion and the teachers' experiences.

I had to write them down several times in tables and further explore them to answer the research questions. This process resulted in deciding to present the data in a narrative writing style. The teachers presented their experiences narratively. They shared their past events that have shaped their present lives that contributed in their future decision. Thus, I combined the teachers' narratives with my own narrative and experience of being a researcher and observing within the settings.

I continued rewriting themes and rereading the excerpt under each theme, which helped to group the themes and consider their relation to others. Reviewing and refining the themes enabled me to discover similarities and differences across the case and across the different research methods. I found that writing the themes several times was beneficial to analysing the data and to construct the narratives because I was able to explore them by asking questions such as 'What?', 'Why?' and 'How?' (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

After establishing the themes, I reviewed, read and re-read the themes and began to construct the narratives in reciprocal way, where my responses to their narratives and my observations all became interwoven. Finally, I related the narratives to the literature. Then, I translated them into English to report them in the findings and discussion chapters.

#### **3.9.4 Interpreting and reporting the data.**

Once I finished analysing the data, I prepared them to view and discuss with my supervisors. They provided valuable feedback about the nature of my findings and about how to report them. Since there is 'no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 537), I decided to report the findings in a narrative style. According to Zeller (1995), narrative reporting is a 'discourse that answers the question, 'what happened?' It

tells a story, which... is what a case study should be' (p. 75). The narrative writing style allowed me to represent the experiences of the teachers, including their voices and the complexity of the issue within their context, and it also allowed for my own reflexivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued, 'experience happens narratively' (p. 18). The teachers' experiences with inclusion were silenced. Therefore, writing their experiences in a narrative writing style allowed me to make their voices loud and to highlight the social and cultural milieu that shaped their experiences and the implementation of inclusion (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I was also able to capture the embodied nature of their communication, as recorded during our various meetings.

I constructed the narratives based on themes that emerged from the case study of eight teachers. The teachers shared their experiences as stories. They discussed their emotions as well as past and present events that shaped those experiences and their views of the implementation of inclusion. They also talked about their future as a consequence of past and present events. Their experiences were reflected in a narrative way; indeed, Riessman (2008) said 'narrative is everywhere' (p. 4); it is presented in 'every age, in every place, in every society' (Barthes, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 57). Therefore, I wrote the narratives for this case study by relating the themes to the research question and providing a detailed description of the context and the individuals in that context. I then told the stories of each teacher organised from their past events, through their present and ending with future events that relate to their experiences.

### **3.10 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter discussed the research methodology and the methods used in the present research. It also presented my positionality within this research. Then, descriptions of the

procedures before and during the data collection and ethical considerations were provided. Steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the research were explained, and the process of data analysis was discussed. The next chapter presents the experiences and perceptions of eight ECE teachers who participated in this study in a narrative writing style. I chose to represent the experiences and perceptions of the teachers in a separate chapter to ensure providing complete and clear picture of the teachers' experiences. In Chapter Five I discuss their experiences and perceptions in light of the literature and KSA policy frameworks.

## Chapter Four: Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of Inclusion

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from observations and interviews that I collected during the data collection at the kindergarten. I will describe the observations and interviews by introducing, first, the process of getting access to the kindergarten, and the kindergarten's context, followed by introducing each teacher within the three classrooms at the kindergarten. As mentioned previously in the methodology chapter, the findings were organised purposively as a series of narratives to reflect the way inclusion was implemented at the kindergarten, to shed the light on the barriers teachers encountered and to reflect an image of how the teachers experienced inclusion. **Section 4.1** describes the process of getting access to the kindergarten. **Section 4.2** presents the beginning of observation and the researcher's first impression. **Section 4.3** provides descriptions of the context. **Section 4.4** presents the teachers' experiences and perceptions of inclusion in kindergarten.

### 4.1 Getting Access to the Kindergarten

In December 2016, I visited the MoE in Riyadh and asked for a list of inclusive kindergartens in the city. The ministry employee was forthcoming and, when she gave me the list, she told me:

*If I were you, I would choose one of the kindergartens in the centre. The central educational supervision office oversees them. They are always the first to provide new and good quality services. Specifically, I would recommend that you to contact those two kindergartens because they have been working on inclusion for a long time and the number of children with SEN is higher there than in other inclusive kindergartens. (personal communication, December 25, 2016)*



In Riyadh, there were 18 inclusive kindergartens, but most of them did not have children with SEN. Others had only a maximum of two or three children with one type of disability. I contacted the principal for the first kindergarten and immediately she informed me that her kindergarten has only two classrooms with two children with SEN in each classroom and all of them are children with hearing impairments. She recommended me to contact another kindergarten that has more children with SEN and more teachers.

She suggested the same kindergarten recommended by the ministry employee. I was thrilled to visit the kindergarten. Early Monday morning, I called the kindergarten, and, after being transferred, I reached the principal. I introduced myself and told her about my study and about why I chose her kindergarten. She welcomed me and gave me her approval to conduct the study and confirmed the starting date.

I went to our appointment with all the required documents, including the ministry's permission, the information sheet, and the teachers' informed consent. Near the school's entrance was a large board that said, '*Inclusion is my right, discover me, my difference is what makes me unique*'. I was very impressed. Inside the kindergarten were two wall paintings about autism. One of them had the quote:

*To my teacher, I did not choose to have autism, remember I am the one who suffered from it not you. Without your support and encouragement, I do not have any opportunities to reach successful and independent life. With your support and guidance the possibilities for me to succeed are more than what you can imagine. I promise you I deserved it.*

On the hallway walls were posters about inclusion and sign language. I was happy. It was clear, from my very first steps into the school, that this was an inclusive kindergarten dedicated to educating children with SEN and promoting inclusion.

I went to the principal's office. She welcomed me, and we talked about my study. During the conversation, I could hear children screaming; they were running in the hallways. After our meeting, the principal took me in a walk around the kindergarten.

She showed me the classrooms. There were three classrooms for children between four and six years old and one classroom for children with autism. The kindergarten did not have enough classes and had had to close the KG1 class, which had been for children from three to four years old. That classroom now served as a space for special sessions for the children with autism.

Each classroom was 6x8 meters with six corners and a circle carpet. Each classroom had three to four ECE teachers, two or three SPE teachers, and a psychologist with a bachelor's degree in psychology. The psychologist's job was to visit the three classes and have sessions with the 'most disruptive' children. These were usually children with autism.

After visiting the classrooms, we went to meet the teachers in their break room, as explained in (Section 3.7.2), to introduce myself, provide information about the study and obtain their consent. After informal conversations and spending few days with them, eight of the teachers agreed to participate.

## **4.2 Observations Begin**

On the first day of my observations, I arrived during circle time. The children were sitting together in the circle but, at the same time, they were separated. The three children with autism were sitting next to each other, and the SPE teacher was sitting behind them with her hands widely opened to hold all of her students' hands. She was holding them to prevent them from touching the other children. Even the children with hearing and speech disorders were sitting

next to each other. The SPE teacher sat opposite them and was translating what ECE teacher was saying into sign language.

Initially, I thought that this setup was for the good of the children, but, after observing them, I realised that, if the SPE teachers were not there, the children with SEN would not understand what was happening during circle time. The ECE teachers asked questions and engaged in great conversations with the other children, but nothing happened for the children with SEN. The children with hearing and speech disorders had to commit their whole attentions to the SPE teachers just to understand. The children with autism were trying to escape from the SPE teacher and leave the classroom or to lay down and scream in the centre of the circle. This scene repeated itself during all my observations. I came to realise that this was not inclusion. It had the appearance of inclusion, but was actually exclusion. Segregation dominated the classroom. In everything, children were segregated. Teachers called them the children of the SPE teachers' and explicitly said, '*they are not our children and we are not their teachers*'.

I walked around the kindergarten and asked myself, '*Who is responsible? What is going on here? Why do these teachers exclude the children? Why do teachers feel that children with SEN do not belong to their classrooms?*' It was a very emotional experience. I felt sorry for those children who walked aimlessly around the kindergarten undiagnosed in terms of their needs and capabilities because no one at the kindergarten thought they were their responsibility.

I even cried when I saw one of the SPE teachers trying to talk to a child who did not have any formal diagnosis except for having an older brother who had a cognitive impairment. His teachers attributed his behaviours to him mimicking his brother. The child was playing at the bricks corner, and a worker came into the classroom and changed his diaper. When the child came back, he went to another corner. The SPE teacher sat in her chair away from the child and

started to call for him. *'Hey, you come here and finish up your building'*. The child did not understand. He stared at her without responding. She loudly called for him again and said, *'If you do not want to finish it up, then, come here and take off the corner bracelet'*. The child looked at her, scared and unable to move. It seemed that he did not understand what she was saying to him. She told him, come here, come here. Finally, he came over and she took off the bracelet. He went back to the discovery corner and, sat there, curled up and started to cry. Very calmly, the teacher said, *'Aaaah, here we go again. Every time we talk to him, he cries'*. Witnessing this scene, I was heartbroken. Regardless of his abilities, he was a child. He needed to be loved, accepted, and nurtured. I wanted to hug him, but I didn't know if I was allowed to. Instead, I left the classroom, crying and feeling very angry. I felt sorry for the ECE teachers, too. I could tell that they were experiencing internal conflict. They felt empathy, guilt, fear, anxiety, and confusion. It was clear to me that they did not know how to work with the children, especially children with autism.

While collecting field notes, I witnessed an incident. A child with autism was playing in the discovery corner by himself. Suddenly, he went to the bricks corner, picked up bricks, and started to throw them at the other children. One of the teachers (Tala) asked him, *'Why Mohammed? Why?'* She tried to stop him, but he continued throwing bricks. She held him by his shoulders and asked him, *'Why Mohammed? Why? I love you. I love you. Why do you destroy?'* After she walked away, he started to throw bricks again, and she came back, grabbed his hands, pulled him out of the classroom, and called a worker to take him away. She looked sad. She walked around the classroom, talking to herself: *'I do not, I do not know'*.

Working at the kindergarten was emotionally and physically difficult for the teachers, as well as for me. The climate of kindergartens was uncomfortable. Children screamed and ran

around, and the teachers were overwhelmed by the children's behaviours. To make it worse, the administration was far from collaborative. They refused to help teachers observe the children on the playground or during mealtime. They did not intervene when a child was in need.

The principal had a top-to-bottom relationship with the teachers. Teachers could not close classroom doors because the principal wanted to monitor them. I felt that we were constantly under surveillance. The principal would suddenly come into the classroom and interrupt circle time. She even interrupted us during interviews. Half of my recordings have her in the background asking for a picture or a file or asking for another teacher. With this kind of pressure, not knowing what to do, and feeling alone and unsupported, I genuinely empathised with the teachers.

On my final day of data collection, the teachers and I had a goodbye party. It was a very cosy, friendly, and joyful gathering. The principal was invited to join, and she came with the MoE's supervisor. They looked at us, and the supervisor asked about what was the party about. The principal informed the supervisor that it was the last day for the teachers so they decided to hold a goodbye party. The supervisor stared at us and then walked away. It was terrifying. It felt like we had done something wrong. It was no wonder why the teachers were always afraid and worried. This was an authoritarian relationship: following and obeying whatever directives came from above.

When I left the kindergarten, I was puzzled by the experience. I kept saying to myself that everything I witnessed was in a highly-recommended kindergarten under the supervision of the best active educational supervision office. The divergence between the descriptions I received before visiting the kindergarten and what I witnessed after visiting revealed the gap between policy and practice. It revealed that misleading impressions about the status of inclusion

were being passed to the policy maker. Additionally, it revealed that misleading impressions also given by the statements I read on the entry to the kindergarten. The kindergarten is already claiming to do something that it is clearly not doing and not able to do with its current resources. The statements are not statements of reality.

I left the kindergarten carrying images of isolated and undiagnosed children, and confused and overwhelmed teachers conflicted by what they believed in and what they were required to do in the absence of previous knowledge, training, and preparation. I also started to question the structural barriers to inclusion at the level of the school and the MoE. These teachers are not '*superheros*'. They were powerless in their own classrooms but at the same time, they are expected to meet the KSA policy aspirations for inclusion. Therefore, it is my intention to tell their stories and bring their voices to the forefront.

#### **4.3 Describing the Context**

There were three classrooms at the kindergarten. Two classrooms were for children aged from five to six years (KG3) and one classroom was for children aged from four to five years (KG2). Njood, Muna and Deem were the teachers for the first KG3, Shahd, Haifa and Hibah were the teachers for the second KG3, and Tala and Malak were the teachers for KG2 classrooms. The organisation of the classrooms was the same as every other classroom at the kindergarten. The only difference was the number of teachers, children and SPE teachers in each classroom. Below is a table that illustrates the difference between each classroom.

Table 4.1

*Classrooms in This Research*

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Classroom</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Classroom</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Classroom</b>
Total of 22 children 3 children with autism 1 child without diagnosis 1 child with ADHD (suspected and without formal diagnosis) 3 children with hearing and speech disorders 14 children without SEN	Total of 22 children 3 children with autism 3 children with hearing and speech disorders 16 children without SEN.	Total of 26 children 3 children with autism 4 children with hearing and speech disorders 1 child without diagnosis 18 children without SEN.
3 ECE teachers	4 ECE teachers	4 ECE teachers
2 SPE teachers.	2 SPE teachers	3 SPE teachers
1 fresh bachelor graduate in Psychology working with children with SEN in all 3 classrooms.		

All of the three classrooms were set up in the same way to reflect a general central policy. Children’s storage cabinets were outside of the classrooms, beside the door. Children’s pictures and names were attached to the classroom door. After entering each classroom, one could feel the crowdedness inside. Two desks stood on both sides of the door, narrowing the entrance. The art corner, with its four chairs and table, was in front of the door with display boards and storage

cabinets around it. There was a window, but just under it was a large cabinet for the teachers' personal items and, above it, a bunch of files and the teachers' bags.

All classrooms had six 'learning corners': discovery, art, cognitive, reading and writing, family, and bricks. According to the teachers, the organisation of the classrooms is based on the Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC) and is according to the rules of the supervisors in the MoE. Thus, all ECE classrooms are organised in the same manner throughout KSA. The DKC is the Saudi kindergarten curriculum that consists of units and themes that are replicable to all children and that guides teachers' practices. All children are expected to follow the same learning goals within the DKC themes. The teachers mentioned that there is no guidance, no differentiation, and no provision of practical strategies in the DKC on how to include children with SEN and how space should be organised to take account of children with SEN.

Storing cabinets separated each corner. In the middle of each classroom there was a dark red circular carpet, and in front of it was the board and the place where the teachers stood and taught during circle time. Children sat on the circle for half of the day, during circle time, mealtime, and the final meeting time. All children had to sit on the carpet together, as well as teachers. The diameter of the carpet was around 1.70 meters, meaning children sat next to each other very close together. However, they were divided into groups. Children without SEN were allowed to sit wherever and with whomever they wanted to, but children with autism sat next to each other. Behind them sat the SPE teacher, who opened her hands widely to hold them. Children with hearing and speech disorders also had to sit next to each other, and they faced the SPE teacher, who was sitting in front of them on the other side of the carpet. The SPE teacher illustrated and translated whatever the classroom teacher said.



## **4.4 Teachers' Experiences With Inclusion**

Eight ECE teachers shared their experiences with inclusion at the kindergarten. They talked about their views of inclusion and about the reality of how it was implemented. They shared their emotions, hopes and disappointments; as well as how they perceived their teaching practices. Their narratives were a combination of what they shared during interviews and informal conversations, and of the observational field notes. The next section will share the experiences of eight ECE teachers with inclusion in their kindergarten. The section is divided into three sections to present the experiences of each classroom's teachers.

### **4.4.1 First classroom teachers' experiences.**

#### ***4.4.1.1 Njood's experience.***

Njood has a diploma in teaching kindergarten from a college in the KSA and she was in her forties. Njood has been working as a kindergarten teacher for more than 26 years. She has spent 17 years working with the inclusion of children with hearing and speech disorders and the last two years started to work with the inclusion of children with autism. Njood has worked at the same kindergarten since it opened in the late 1980s. She said that she has been at this kindergarten before the inclusion was implemented. Although she had been there since the school was founded, she felt that her voice was not heard and her suggestions were not given any opportunities. She and the other teachers were excluded from any decision-making processes in the school, starting from the decisions related to the classroom to the decisions related to the kindergarten.

Njood's feelings towards inclusion differed upon the types of disability. She felt that working with children with hearing and speech disorders was much easier and more enjoyable

than working with children with autism. She felt that there was no difference between children without SEN and children with hearing and speech disorders. She said that she easily communicated with them and discussed her previous experience and knowledge with a relative.

She said:

*I used to live with a cousin who was not talking or listening. She became one of us, and we knew how to deal with her, everyone in the house accepted her, and acceptance was the overall house climate. I came to this kindergarten with my experience with my cousin. She was not a problem at all, and she helped me to be more sensitive and aware of the needs of the children at the kindergarten.*

Her feelings towards the inclusion of children with autism differed. She explicitly said that she did not like the inclusion of children with autism and that she could not communicate with them. She attributed her feelings towards the inclusion of children with autism to her lack of background and training in teaching children with autism. She felt that even after she had children with autism in her classroom for two years, she was still struggling to deal with them.

*Until today I did not know how to deal with them [children with autism]. I did not have prior experience working with them. I must have at least few years of experience before the inclusion of the children. It was assumed that before those children were included, we [teachers] were provided training. We should know about autism, and they should come [the MoE's supervisors] and meet with us for two or three days until we know what autism means.*

As a result of how the inclusion of children with autism was applied, Njood felt frustrated about her lack of knowledge about children with autism. She believed that her weak understanding of autism was the most difficult challenge she encountered in inclusion. She explained:

*I did not understand autism, I just did not understand it. They said there are many types of autism but I did not know any type, any type. I did not know how to deal with children with autism. Neither I knew the things they needed nor the materials they liked and I did not even know the teaching methods that were appropriate for them!*

During corner time, Njood wandered around children and joined in the children's play, but when she walked by children with autism, she avoided them. She felt that because she did not know about them, she did not want to communicate with them. The ambiguity around autism affected Njood's classroom practices. She said that she did not understand autism and that she did not know how to deal with them or how to include them in the classroom activities. She expressed her feelings of ambiguity and confusion:

*Autism is not one kind, not like hearing, he does not hear and that is it! You know what he has. He does not talk, and you know what to provide him, but in autism each time I discovered something new in the child, something new in the child like when he first arrived, I thought that the issue was only food, but the SPE teacher said he does not even have senses. He does not touch nor feel. That means I learn about autism from the children and this is not right.*

Njood continued to express her feelings about her lack of knowledge and understanding and explained how this gap has impacted her classroom practices. She sadly acknowledged that her classroom was unprepared for children with autism. In her view, children with autism were only physically included in the classroom. Classroom activities, lesson plans and materials were unprepared to meet the needs of children with autism. She noted:

*Currently in this classroom, I provided things that were age appropriate to my children because I knew the things I had and I knew when to introduce them to my children. When I organised the classroom I did not consider them [children with autism], honestly, because I did not know what they needed.*

Njood's feelings mainly resulted from the way the inclusion of children with autism was implemented. She felt that the supervisors from the MoE imposed the inclusion of children with autism on teachers without helping the teachers understand the children's needs and preparing them for inclusion. She stated:

*The supervisor did not provide us workshops about autism and did not even tell us what to do or to read. The knowledge I have is only from reading on the Internet.*

Njood's experience of the inclusion of children with autism felt as though she had to negotiate her practice, seek knowledge and face the challenge alone and without any support.

#### *4.4.1.1.1 False promises.*

Njood strongly believed that in addition to not providing her with knowledge and understanding about autism prior to the inclusion of the children, the supervisors of the MoE manipulated her and the other teachers about their responsibilities in inclusion. She recalled the teachers' first meeting with the MoE's supervisor:

*They first came to us and organised a meeting with all teachers. The supervisor told us we are going to include children with autism in the kindergarten. We told her we do not know about that, and she said, you do not have to do anything that relates to them. She told us they [children with autism] are not our business. She told us they would have their own teacher, their own supervisor, and that they will have everything. They made us feel that children with autism were separate from us.*

However, the reality Njood experienced at the kindergarten contradicted the promises she was given. She said that she and the other teachers were told that they were not responsible for the children with autism, but when inclusion was implemented, she was required to do everything. She was obligated to teach them during circle time and to provide learning activities like she does for the other children. Even on the playground, she was required to observe the children with autism and take care of them. The divergence between what she was told to do and what she was required to do made Njood feel puzzled and disappointed. As she expressed:

*I could not deal with children with autism because I did not know how! I had not been provided [with] training or anyone to explain to me and to make me understand autism. I had not been given any information about the children or what they needed. Could that happen? I discovered everything through practice!*

It was not only Njood's feelings of a lack of understanding that saddened and puzzled her but, also, the ambiguity around the responsibility of the children with SEN and the lack of

communication. She expressed that both have unfortunately led to not meeting the children's needs:

*I do not know! I never had a discussion with the SPE teacher about the children's needs. What do they need, I organise the classroom based on what my children's needs and those children are neglected [children with autism]. It is unfair that they are lost now, and the SPE teacher never came and said let us do that or that. Maybe she does not know either!*

Njood's confusion continued; she said that she was unsure if she can blame the SPE teacher. There was no form of collaboration between Njood and the SPE teacher, and she felt that it was neither her mistake nor the mistake of the SPE teacher, but that it was the result of the MoE's supervisors' false promises and their ambiguous way of implementing inclusion.

*We do not blame her nor blame the other teachers we blame the ministry who just said, 'Seize ye him, and bind ye him' (a quote from the Holy Quran). We were given no training no supervisor, and they did not bother to explain what to do nor did they provide us the material to read.*

The rest of the quote Njood used is 'seize ye him, and bind ye him. And burn ye him in the Blazing Fire. Further, make him march in a chain, whereof the length is seventy cubits' (Khan & Alhilali, 2007, p. 669). She used this quote to emphasise the way teachers were suddenly forced to deal with the inclusion of children with autism and the way inclusion was implemented. Njood was struggling in her daily routines. From morning until the afternoon, she seemed confused, worried, exhausted and walked around aimlessly. The lack of knowledge, training and preparation turned inclusion into a negative and excluding experience for Njood, and she said:

*A separation has occurred between children with autism and us. [Deep breath] Poor them! They need time and the right way to be included.*

Njood further emphasised that there were unclear mechanisms and false promises from the supervisors. 'They told us we are not responsible for children with autism and now after inclusion is applied we are obligated to do everything'. To Njood, that was a fundamental issue.

The concept of inclusion was inaccurately applied and introduced to the teachers. She felt that the way the supervisors introduced the concept of inclusion to the teachers promoted physical inclusion rather than genuine inclusion and explicit exclusion inside of the kindergarten. Njood recalled an instance where she felt that the MoE's supervisors neither understood inclusion nor genuinely intended to implement it. She felt the supervisors' words and actions were incongruent.

*Once we had the 'typical lesson'. The supervisor came in and said, 'get them out' [children with autism]. I asked her why we should get them out when you said to include them? What does that mean? That means you are doing something wrong. She wanted the external teachers to benefit from circle time, which means that they knew that the children do not benefit because what is right always stays right and what is wrong does not last. The entire year, we were trying to convince them to withdraw children with autism from the classroom during the circle time; not all day, mind you, we just asked to pull them out during activities and circle time.*

From that stance, Njood confirmed her thoughts and feelings about the inclusion that they had at the kindergarten was inaccurate. She felt that what they had was just a way to say that inclusion was implemented, and that was it!

*To me, that stance meant that what we are doing is inaccurate and that they are unsatisfied with it. To them the issue is only about the action of inclusion.*

Njood continued that the inclusion that they have in the kindergarten was a form of exclusion. Even in the formal way of assessing the children, Njood said that there were contradictions between words and actions. The children were included in the classroom and the teachers were obligated to include them in their lessons; however, the teachers did not write or participate in the children's final and formal reports. She explained:

*We never saw children's reports nor participated in their educational plan. We even assessed our children, the normal children through a program called Noor. SPE children have their teachers; for example, when I opened Noor for KG3, the names of my normal children appeared to me, but I think special children have a different way or system. Only my children's names appeared for evaluation. We never participated in assessing the children with the SPE teachers.*

Exclusion was practised within the system. Teachers were excluded from the process of inclusion. They did not participate in writing reports, educational plans, evaluations or acceptance procedures. Inclusion at the kindergarten was indeed a form of exclusion. The kindergarten physically included the children, but neither the practices, climate, teachers nor children were practising inclusion. Moreover, Njood's description of 'normal' children serves to abnormalise children with SEN, which is another aspect of exclusion.

Njood's description in her story resembled a stance I witnessed when collecting field notes. I was once in a KG2 classroom, which is the classroom of children aged four to five years. It was corner time, and the children without SEN were playing. Two of the children with SEN went home early, and the other two were pulled out for a session with the SPE teacher. One of the administrators came to the class and asked for the children's attendance. She asked the classroom teacher to give her the attendance names of children without SEN; after that, she asked about the SPE teacher, and the teacher told her she was in her classroom. I asked the teacher about the other children. She said that they were not responsible for them. Each teacher must only provide the names of her children. I felt shocked and confused. It seemed that the exclusion was promoted by the system itself. All the practices I witnessed were based on segregation.

#### *4.4.1.1.2 Our school was ill-prepared, and so were we.*

Njood believed that the poor inclusion preparation has made the implementation of inclusion in the classroom much harder and more challenging for the teachers. She felt that inclusion requires preparation at all levels. Njood first considered preparing the children for inclusion. She noted:

*At the beginning of the year and when the children come in for their first time, we do not let them in for the whole day. The first two days, we have them for two hours and then each day we extend their stay for half an hour until they are adapted to us and to the school. We do that for the normal and healthy children. For children [with SEN] it is supposed to be the same. We include them gradually, they have to be prepared before coming into the classroom and be forced to sit with us the whole day.*

The year before, when the inclusion of children with autism was first introduced, the supervisors did not force the teachers to fully include the children in the classroom during the first semester. Children with SEN were partially included in the daily routine. Njood found that it worked and felt that partial inclusion, especially at the beginning, was very helpful for the children and for inclusion in general. She stated:

*At the beginning of last year, children with autism were partially included during the first semester. They were included during corner and playground time, and later on, they brought them into the classroom to attend circle time. They sometimes acted like normal children. They were trained, but now with immediate and full inclusion, I can see how we and our children and children with autism did not benefit.*

Njood appreciated that method and found it to be beneficial for all children. Children with autism were brought into the classroom after they spent a period learning independence skills in the classroom and with the SEP teacher. Currently, Njood feels that due to the lack of preparation for the children, the inclusion that they were experiencing was not successful. She said:

*The children did not take their full rights from the beginning. They were not prepared, inclusion was imposed on them, and the place for them was not prepared.*

Njood felt that the readiness of the school building has to be considered as well prior to implementing inclusion. She expressed that creating an appropriate place with specific considerations for those children is important to the success of inclusion. Without an appropriate



and prepared learning environment, Njood would not be able to include those children. She explained:

*The ministry is supposed to prepare the space for the children, the playground and their meal space. They must have their own space and their own playground, I do not know sometimes, like, with some of the playground equipment, (the name of child with autism) does not estimate the space. She climbed the slide and stood on the edge of it. She was trying to jump from 2 meters high. I do not know if I feel that they should have their own playground that is appropriate for their conditions.*

Njood spent the playground time running around and observing all the children. The playground was neither safe nor appropriate for the children, so she felt that she needed to be very attentive. Njood struggled during mealtime, where the carpet was crowded with both the children and adults. She struggled in preventing children with autism from taking the other children's meals. Some of the children with autism were prohibited from eating some kinds of food, so they spent the mealtime trying to get that food from the other children. Njood expressed that mealtime was a very exhausting part of the day:

*Even during mealtime, I feel that children with autism are oppressed. They cannot eat the same food as the other children, so why do we keep them there? To observe and see the other children eat their favourite food! It is hard even for adults let alone those children. Sometimes they attack the other children. I feel that they must have their own mealtime separately and have a chef in the school to provide them the food that is appropriate for their condition. It is hard to deprive them the food they like but at least we can try to make it up for them with other kinds of food.*

Njood took a deep breath and then continued to express her thoughts about the lack of preparation at the kindergarten:

*I do not know, I just feel that this kindergarten is not prepared; for example, the size of the classroom. Sometimes the classroom feels like a festival. We used to have no more than 18 children, including those with autism and SPE children. This year, we reached 22 children.*

She stated that her classroom needs a balance between its space and the number of children, but she felt that this balance would not be found due to the lack of understanding that the school's principal has about kindergarten and inclusion. She said:

*If the principal understood, appreciated and knew what kindergarten is, she would not squish children together, even if that means accepting only one child with autism in the classroom rather than three.*

Along with the principals' lack of preparation and knowledge about kindergarten and inclusion, Njood felt that the lack of preparation was affecting everyone. She believed that teachers were also affected. She stated, 'The ministry applied inclusion without providing us with training about inclusion and autism'. Njood expressed her acknowledgement that the teachers were also ill prepared.

*The teachers too! We need to be prepared so we can know how to deal with the children. Once the teacher who teaches children with autism was absent because she had a workshop to attend. We could not take care of the children with autism and we could not do anything for them because we do not know what to give them.*

Njood understood the value of knowledge. She felt that if she and the other teachers were provided workshops and training courses, they would not be challenged with the inclusion of those children into their classrooms. The problem Njood and the other teachers encountered was that in addition to their lack of knowledge about autism and inclusion, the teachers were not provided information about each individual child. Njood described it as:

*Children were just brought into the classroom. They brought them in without giving us any background about the child. We did not know if the child had allergies or anything. Once we had a party in the classroom, and children were eating croissants. One of the children with autism got really sick and we found out that he has Coeliac disease! Something serious could have happened to that child because we were not provided information about his condition. We are facing a serious issue because we do not have any background nor training, and no one came to us and said that this child has autism spectrum or this one has mild autism, never! They just let them in, and that is it! Only through classroom practices do we get to learn about the child.*

Njood found that the poor preparation was linked to the teaching programme she graduated from. She did not feel that her programme equipped her with the needed knowledge about SPE or inclusion. Njood was also frustrated because she felt incongruent between what she studied and what she practised as a teacher. She noted:

*What I studied differed from what I practised. I studied something, and I practised something else. The reality differs differs differs. I only studied the normal children; I did not study SPE or anything about it.*

For Njood, preparing preservice teachers and providing them knowledge was about empowering and giving them choices. She stated:

*I think teachers have to be prepared in their educational programmes. I think it prepares them emotionally; she comes to the kindergarten with the readiness and the knowledge about SPE and autism. They must be taught about the meaning of SPE and its categories so when teachers come in, they can deal with the children. Teachers have to know that children with autism and with other special needs are going to be brought into the school. [Deep breath] If they just could provide a course to prepare teachers emotionally before they come to the kindergarten so they are aware and they have the willingness to accept children with autism, then they can enrol at kindergarten. If not they can choose another field.*

Without that knowledge and preparation, Njood felt that she was not providing children what they needed, but that she was instead experimenting on them. She reflected:

*The child in my classroom turned into experimental laboratory, I experimented on him until I figured it out.*

#### *4.4.1.1.3 No one benefited from inclusion.*

Through her experiences, Njood developed the belief that inclusion was not beneficial. She believed that the disadvantages of inclusion outweighed its advantages. Observing the absence of communication between children without SEN and children with autism has led Njood to develop doubts about the benefits of inclusion. She specifically said:

*No one benefited from inclusion. Our children did not benefit. They played alone, and our children played alone. They never played together. Even when the SPE*

*teacher tried, it did not work. The children never entered the corners and worked with the other children. Some children are the opposite; they relapsed more and more. It is just unfair; this group of children was oppressed. They neither put them in an appropriate place nor prepared for them a suitable place.*

She attributed the absence of interaction between the children to a lack of preparation the children had before inclusion was implemented. Reflecting a rights-based perspective, she believed that the children would benefit and that inclusion would be achieved if everyone were sufficiently prepared.

*The children did not have their rights from the beginning. When you give children their rights and prepare a place for them, inclusion would succeed, but those children did not have the appropriate place [silence] AAA they just brought them in. Some children might not like all of this hustle; it might make them more nervous, and that is it. No one benefited, and the programme did not succeed. Inclusion was not achieved.*

Depending on each child's condition, Njood believed that inclusion must be applied. In her classroom, there were children who she felt needed time and training before they were included in the classroom, but there was also a child with autism who she felt only needed a month of preparation before the child would benefit from inclusion. She recalled:

*Children with autism behave differently. During circle time, one child with autism would sit quietly and sometimes give us a response, but the other two children with autism, oooh, poor them. They did not know anything about circle time and what I was saying to them. They just produced noisy voices and moved around. What could I do? Some conditions could be included, and we told the supervisor that not every child could be included in the kindergarten. Sometimes we can include them, and sometimes we cannot. In some cases, we can include them from the first day, and some children need a year of preparation to be included.*

*4.4.1.1.4 There was no life to those you were calling: No one listened.*

Njood felt that if the supervisors and the school principal listened and took her notes seriously, the benefits of inclusion would be achieved. She felt that there was a misunderstanding between the teachers and the supervisors and that the link between them was missing. She did

not feel supported at all, both on things related to the children and on the things that were related to her. She explained,

*The supervisors do not understand... They refuse to understand this point. They think we are against inclusion, that we do not want it. No one here listens to us [silence]. What can we do? It is just unfair. This year we did not give attention, care and knowledge [silence]. It is not like this every year.*

Two years ago, the kindergarten's principal changed. A new principal was put in charge at the same time as the inclusion of children with autism was implemented. Njood felt that the new principal did not support her and that she was not as supported as she was before. She described her current situation:

*There is no support for the teachers, not even financially! Teachers prepare and pay for circle time, open days and ceremonies—all of them! We prepare and pay for all of them. Not only that, there is no emotional support for teachers. It does not matter if you work or you do not work, all of it is the same. You are either accomplished or you are not.*

Njood recalled her time with the previous principal, back when she felt appreciated and supported. She said:

*[Deep breath] Before, I felt different because the principal said thank you. The new principal only sometimes thanks you. We prepared the end of the year party for all children using our own money. The principal did not like it; she called me, and she was upset about it. Until today, she has not thanked me or the other teachers. [Silence] There is no emotional or financial support for teachers, especially during these last two years. No one listens.*

#### *4.4.1.1.5 I am unsatisfied.*

Njood expressed the impact of the way that inclusion was implemented and the lack of preparation and support on her feelings towards herself and her performances. She felt that she has not been satisfied with her performances since children with autism were included. She noted:

*Inclusion affected me and affected my children. I am unsatisfied with myself. We lost a lot this year, a lot, a lot. We and our children and our effort were lost. It did not matter if you worked; you did not feel accomplishment with the children. My complaint is only to Allah; may they be forgiven.*

Njood was disappointed when she did not feel that she was successful in including children with autism in her classroom. She decided that she could not continue doing what she believed to be far from genuine inclusion. She said:

*I applied for retirement because of the inclusion of children with autism. There is a clear absence of the mechanism needed, and there is a lack of inclusion policy and too many false promises from the supervisors. It is unfair; I swear they committed a sin on those children. We said that to our supervisor: you oppressed our children and those children. It is not about just including them. We have to include them, and we want inclusion. Autism is a category, and autistic children have the same right as the others, but we have to prepare an appropriate place in which to teach them. If we want true inclusion, parents, the school, the ministry and society should collaborate, all of us have to collaborate.*

#### **4.4.1.2 Muna's experience.**

Muna joined Njood's classroom two years ago. Muna was happily working as an administrator at one of the KSA's ministries for three and a half years. In 2011, she learned that the office, which she was working in, was closing down and that she was being sent to work as a kindergarten teacher. She did not want to teach children, but she did not have a choice, and she had to move out. She worked at a kindergarten for five years before being transferred to Njood's inclusive kindergarten. She did not believe in inclusion in the kindergarten. In her mind, the implementation was a failure because inclusion was imposed randomly, without planning or preparation. As she explained:

*Inclusion was complicated. It could not randomly be implemented like it in our situation. There were not any plans nor studies, just random decisions. We need plan for and to make a report about each child's condition. Children, also, need to be prepared before inclusion. They should be gradually included, starting with short classroom visits to attending part of the day, and then, finally, be fully*

*included. But the problem was the lack of preparation. The school was not prepared and the children were not prepared.*

As she reflected on her experiences, she said that she had not been prepared for inclusion.

Nobody took into account her lack of readiness and qualifications. As she explained:

*I was unprepared; they did not give me the option. I graduated from high school with a low grade, and my dad told me that I would have to wait until the second semester to enrol at a university. But I did not want to wait. I chose to study for a diploma in Arabic language in a college at a village.*

She had not been taught about inclusion and did not know how to work with children with or without SEN. Consequently, whenever Muna struggled, she blamed herself for not making different decisions about her college education. She believed that, if she continued her education and learned more about teaching kindergarten and inclusion, she would be able to overcome some of these challenges. Unfortunately, she was not able to go back to school:

*College was the mistake of my life! I wanted to finish my education after that, but I could not. I got home tired every day from work. Working with children and inclusion was very exhausting.*

Although she was exhausted by her work, her relationships with her fellow teachers helped her overcome some of the challenges. They served as sources of knowledge and helped her become accustomed to a kindergarten teacher's responsibilities. However, she still struggled with inclusion, believing that she needed to learn more about the children's different, unique needs.

*I am used to kindergarten, and I learned from the other teachers. But, with inclusion, I needed training; I needed to know what inclusion was, especially for autism! I heard that it was a very wide, wide, endless world and that children with autism are not alike!*

#### 4.4.1.2.1 Different worlds in one classroom.

Nevertheless, Muna was worried that simply gaining knowledge would not change her beliefs about inclusion. She was not convinced that inclusion could benefit every child, given the children's vastly different needs. Her classroom seemed to be divided into two separate worlds. She and her students without SEN did not interact with the children with autism. There was exclusion within her inclusive classroom. The children with autism did not seem to belong, and whenever they needed support, Muna called, as she said, 'their teacher'. Her feelings of non-affiliation with the children with autism were obvious; she never thought of them as 'her children', referring to them as the 'SPE teacher's children'. Consequently, she believed that inclusion was nothing more than an exhausting, valueless experience. She said:

*The children did not benefit at all. The normal children were in their world, and the other children were in their world. The children with autism did not like to make friendships; they loved harming other children more than making friendships. It was just exhausting, exhausting experience.*

Additionally, in her opinion, inclusion was not beneficial. The disruptive behaviours of children with autism have prevented her from including them. They hit and touched the other children and talked in loud voices during circle time, which interrupted her lessons. She broke into tears during circle time because, whenever she tried to read the Holy Quran with her students, one of the children with autism screamed. She recalled:

*It was difficult. I got very tired because of the children with autism. It was hard to begin circle time while a child with autism made loud voices and moved around. I struggled with them. Another child with autism liked to sit in very narrow place and to be held and feel pressure on his sides. These were his characteristics, so he squashed himself between any two children. But the normal children did not want that. They were harmed, and they did not want to be touched because children with autism bite their hands. I spent all of circle time changing their places. Even while children and I read the Holy Quran, they [the children with autism] made loud sounds like aaaaaaa. I did not like their presence at the circle time at all!*



Muna's feelings differed according to the type of disability. To her, the children with hearing and speech disorders were almost 'normal'. She included them in her lessons and encouraged them to participate in reciting songs and dancing. Like the children without SEN, one of them was allowed to be the classroom leader each week. They interacted physically and emotionally with Muna and their peers. Usually, Muna was able to communicate with them using simple sign language. She believed that she and the children without SEN could easily include the children with hearing and speech disorders. Unlike the children with autism, they seemed to belong in her world. As she expressed:

*The children with hearing benefited emotionally and academically from inclusion. Even the normal children became acclimatised to them. They played and learned from each other. Children with hearing difficulties did not even want to attend the SPE sessions. They wanted to spend their time with us in the classroom.*

She said, ultimately, she believed in inclusion and thought that it benefited children with hearing and speech disorders and, perhaps, even other types of disabilities. However, including children with autism was very difficult in practice.

#### *4.4.1.2.2 Prayed for patience.*

For Muna, including children with autism was emotionally and physically burdensome. Since she did not know how to communicate with them, she avoided them. In most cases, she relied on the SPE teacher and the worker. She recalled:

*At the beginning of the inclusion of children with autism, I went home every day crying because of one particular child. He was spoiled! He hit us and screamed all of the time. When I first came to this school, which of course was not a choice, I was emotionally exhausted because I had been transferred and I had to deal with that boy. Every day I went home crying and tired. I told my family and friends that I wouldn't stay at this school. I just couldn't handle it.*

Every year, her situation seemed to worsen. More children with autism were enrolled, and she still was not provided with any training. The children with autism drained her energy and affected her health. She broke into tears while recalling her experience, saying:

*They told me it would be different the next year. I would change! But no, it was much worse. I am always tired; they consume all of my energy. I always pray for patience and strength. I asked Allah to provide me patience and strength. It was hard, I always got headaches in the back of my head, and I always wanted to cry [cries during interview]. It was hard to endure all of these things. Sometimes I felt that I was about to lose my temper, but then I remembered their circumstances [continues crying]. I knew that they had something inside. They wanted to get it out but they could not. I blamed myself a lot because I lost my temper. I wish I could make them happy but... [continues crying]...*

Her experience was a combination of disappointment and exhaustion. She informed the MoE's supervisor and the school's principal about her feelings and her (and other teachers') difficulties. However, she was ignored, and the school's administration continued to insist on full and immediate inclusion. All she was advised to do was ask Allah for rewards.

#### *4.4.1.2.3 It felt nice to be thanked and supported.*

Although she absolutely wanted rewards from Allah, she also needed to feel supported. She wanted to be appreciated, trusted, and treated as an adult and a professional. She recalled a situation when she felt the opposite. Once, she was watching the children on the playground, and she had her cell phone because her two-year-old daughter was at home sick and she wanted to be able to check on her. The principal came over and informed her that she was not allowed to carry her phone. Muna told her that she knew and that she was sorry, but she had to check on her daughter. The principal ignored Muna and walked away, and Muna was filled with anger. She thought that the principal should have been more cooperative and understanding. The principal must stand for the teachers, not against them.

Muna felt that she was not encouraged enough to endure the difficulties of including the children with autism. For her, emotional support was extremely important, saying, ‘*We need to be thanked. We need to feel appreciated*’. She recalled:

*Once the principal attended one of my classes to observe my performance during circle time. She saw how I dealt with a child with autism during the lesson. She told me that she loved how I dealt with that child. I was positively affected by her words. Her words made me very happy because I felt that I was doing something good. It was really nice to hear her thank me; it encouraged me.*

In addition, she was not supported financially. Teachers do not receive allowances for including children with autism, even though the SPE teachers receive a 30% monthly allowance for teaching children with SEN. Muna’s opinion was that she should receive a similar allowance, saying:

*The SPE teachers received an allowance for teaching children with autism. We [the kindergarten teachers] did not get any allowance even though we taught them too. They were included in our classrooms. The SPE teachers received more support than us. The principal even changed the rules for them. They were allowed to finish their work and went home half an hour early because the principal thought that they were tired. We, too—we got tired exactly like them!*

Muna not only lacked emotional and financial support from the principal and the ministry; she felt that her efforts were not appreciated or recognised, not even by the parents of the children with autism. She was never given the opportunity to cultivate relationships with the parents, and she was never consulted about the children with autism. The parents came into the classroom merely to pick up their children. Muna said that sometimes, when in the classroom, she felt like a chandelier—looking good but doing nothing. She said:

*Even the parents made me feel unsupported and unappreciated. They never came and talked to me. It was like I did not exist or that I was invisible. Sometimes I wondered why I was being treated like that! I worked with their children, and I got tired with them. Parents should come and talk to me! There was no communication between us. They communicated only with the their children’s teachers.*

Even the SPE teachers neglected to adequately communicate with her. She believed that the teachers were the reason she was unable to cultivate relationships with the parents, noting that there were differences between how the hearing and speech teachers and the autism teachers introduced her to the parents. The hearing and speech teachers introduced her as the classroom teacher and asked her to share her opinions about the children. In contrast, the autism teachers never bothered to introduce her. In her mind, the autism teachers left the parents with negative impressions of her. She explained:

*It was because of the autism teacher that I did not have relationships with the parents of the children with autism. The hearing and speech teacher introduced me to the parents as the teacher of their children, but the teacher for autism never introduced me. She implied that I did not accept the inclusion of their children; therefore, they did not communicate with me. They were afraid that I would say something that would shock them and, honestly, I did not blame them!*

The teachers never collaborated. Muna and the autism teacher never worked together; they worked individually. Even during recess, the autism teachers observed one side of the playground while the kindergarten teachers observed the other sides. The autism teachers never socialised outside of their group. Muna said:

*Whenever I tried to tell the autism teacher about the children with autism, she got upset. She always said that they were her children, her children! She did not allow me to intervene, and I did not even dare because she would not permit me. There were times when I felt that the teacher of the children with autism was a barrier. She did not accept me. She got really upset whenever we intervened or gave her our opinions. I decided to keep my silence. It was difficult and exhausting to have to receive her permission for everything.*

Muna believed that she was unable to form relationships with the autism teachers and the principal because the school's strategic planning was inadequate. The school needed to define roles and responsibilities for each teacher. As it was, everyone worked separately. Muna believed that, for inclusion to succeed, the school must be unified.

#### 4.4.1.2.4 Inclusion is greatly needed.

Muna believed that the issue of inclusion was rooted in her society's beliefs. The kindergarten's situation reflected the society's beliefs about children with SEN and the stigmas about disabilities. In her mind, those beliefs strongly contributed to the issues of implementing inclusion at the school. The teachers and administrators were unable to detach from broader societal beliefs. She said:

*Our society is ignorant! Disabilities are stigmatised. If a family had a child with autism, they would not talk about or mention it to anyone. We have an issue with understanding disability.*

Muna recalled a case that illustrated how societal beliefs impacted their inclusive services:

*We used to have a child who was diagnosed as a child who needed SPE. The speech teacher spent the whole year working with him and giving him speech lessons. He got better. He came, and he was not able to speak. After the sessions, he could speak but in a very low voice. At the end of the year, his mother came to pick up his certificate. Once she saw that the certificate was for SPE, she got really upset. She asked, 'What is this? My child is not in SPE; he is a normal child'. Then she asked, 'Can you tell me what his diagnosis was based on? Was it based on what he was provided during the SPE lessons?' The speech teacher told her, 'He was not speaking'. The mother interrupted her and said, 'No, my child is normal'. She tore up the certificate and said that she would not accept a SPE certificate because she did not want her child to be stigmatised. The mother talked to herself, 'What am I supposed to say to my family and to our relatives? My child is a SPE—no, no'. The school issued her new certificate that did not mention SPE.*

Muna could not imagine being in the SPE teacher's position, who had sent notes every week to the parents, never receiving a response. In her mind, it was even worse because the mother was a teacher, but she had not paid enough attention to her son to notice that he could not speak. The issue related not only to knowledge about inclusion but also to the stigmatised nature of disabilities.

The case revealed serious issues related to society's perceptions of disabilities. According to her, the family did not take the child to a specialist because they wanted to avoid having him diagnosed and then stigmatised. The principal never asked for the child's assessment reports. The kindergarten teachers were never consulted. Finally, the SPE teachers worked alone and never met with the principal, the kindergarten teachers, or the parents to talk about the children. Muna suggested that there was a gap in the philosophy and practice of inclusion; nobody believed in inclusion and in the children with SEN. Inclusion would remain a form of exclusion as long as the parties did not collectively generate holistic plans that met the SEN children's needs. Until then, working at the kindergarten was too difficult for Muna. She decided to apply for a transfer to a non-inclusive kindergarten.

#### *4.4.1.3 Deem's experience.*

Deem worked in the same kindergarten classroom as Njood and Muna, and she was the only teacher who had a bachelor's degree in kindergarten education. She studied teaching because she loved it. After graduating, she applied for teaching positions, but she was unable to get one. Deem, like Muna, worked as an administrator at one of the KSA's ministries for eight years. Then, she was transferred to the kindergarten, which was, to her, a dream come true. However, she did not know at the time that it was an inclusive kindergarten.

She has worked as a kindergarten teacher for five years. Though she was not given the option to be in an inclusive kindergarten, she was confident that she could do it. She believed wholeheartedly in inclusion; however, because of how inclusion was randomly implemented at the kindergarten, her feelings changed. Inclusion became an exhausting experience, requiring

great physical and mental effort. She believed that the lack of practical planning before implementation negatively impacted inclusion. She said:

*Inclusion was not understood. They did not understand the children's needs or differences. Inclusion must be based on them. It could not be implemented randomly without preparation or planning.*

Initially, when children with autism were enrolled as part of an inclusion programme, there were no SPE teachers, and they were enrolled without being diagnosed. The teachers spent half of the year working with children with autism as children with emotional disorders. Deem knew that there was something seriously different with the children, but when she expressed her concerns, she was told that the children needed behavioural modifications. 'No one listened to me', she said. She knew that it was not her responsibility to diagnose these children, but she knew that they needed something more than behavioural modifications.

Within a year, three SPE teachers were hired to teach nine children with autism. With this, Deem thought that the problem was resolved, but she soon found herself facing a new issue. She had thought that they would collaborate and develop shared aims and plans, but, instead, the autism teachers rejected her. She said:

*I felt rejected whenever I gave my opinion about the children with autism. The SPE teachers did not accept my notes. I felt like I crossed the line whenever I intervened. They just wanted me to hold their children during their break. They did not listen to my opinions or take them into consideration.*

The situation quickly worsened. She believed that the SPE teachers undermined her ability to teach the children with SEN. She said that their attitudes stemmed from the common stereotype that kindergarten education was only about playing, not about learning and cultivating problem-solving skills. When she turned in her notes, the SPE teachers were surprised that she knew the children's needs, but her attempts to collaborate and create an inclusive classroom were always rejected. She explained:

*They did not understand kindergarten and its philosophy. They did not understand the children's needs. They only understood autism. If she [the SPE teacher] understood childhood, she would not reject my attempts to collaborate with her. And if she understood the concept of inclusion, she would not insist on separating the work. I prepared the classroom with tools for all the children, like puzzles, but she insisted on bringing her own tools for her own children. Both children could play with the same tools. Why segregate the tools?*

Deem talked at length about her frustration over the common misconceptions of kindergarten. She did not blame the SPE teachers for disregarding her advice because, as a kindergarten teacher, she was assumed to know nothing more than playing. Nonetheless, she believed that her degree in kindergarten education had made her knowledgeable about all aspects of teaching young children. In school, she had studied teaching methods and child psychology, and she believed that her education empowered her and expanded her knowledge. Consequently, she thought that she would be encouraged to contribute to creating an inclusive classroom. In reality, however, she found that her input was ignored. She discovered that inclusion, in this form, was not collaborative and did not benefit the children. She said:

*I thought we were supposed to have shared plans and objectives. And that inclusion would be based on collective effort like the kindergarten, but, instead, I found that inclusion was based on selfishness. The children's benefits and needs were forgotten. The SPE teacher came to the class only to observe and hold the children. Nothing more!*

During circle time, Deem encouraged the children with autism to participate, asking them to speak aloud a vocabulary word that they learned the previous week. With Deem's assistance, one of the children was able to repeat the word, but, for the other children with autism, the SPE teacher waved her hands and insisted that they were unable to repeat the word. Deem was frustrated because they were not given the opportunity to prove the SPE teacher wrong.

The rejection of Deem's attempts to collaborate with the SPE teacher affected her inclusive practices. Whenever a child with autism needed help, Deem called the worker or the



SPE teacher. During a classroom visit to an art exhibition, most of the children were given memorable gifts. However, she noticed that one of the children with autism did not receive a gift. Her only action was to voice aloud her opinion that his SPE teacher should get him one. When another child with autism ran away to the playground, Deem only called the SPE teacher. When she could, she avoided interacting with the children with autism, which was reflected in her classroom practices.

When children without SEN wanted to bring out her pillow for circle time, she asked them to leave it so that the children with autism would not take it. She explained that her behaviours were reactions to the absence of collaboration between her and the SPE teacher, the lack of support from the principal, and her guilt about the negative impact of inclusion on children. Instead, she withdrew and focused only on the children without SEN.

#### *4.4.1.3.1 They thought I was against inclusion.*

Deem talked at length about the lack of support from the principal. The principal never listened to her advice or her opinions. She always felt that she needed to defend herself because the principal considered her opinions (and similar opinions from other teachers) as the abnegation of inclusion. Deem was never provided the opportunity to clarify, saying:

*Inclusion was only exhaustion to the kindergarten teachers. We were overloaded and, unfortunately, could not say anything about it. No one ever listened to our notes.*

#### *4.4.1.3.2 Inclusion affected everyone.*

Deem believed that inclusion could improve the lives of children with SEN. She affirmed that inclusion would encourage other children to be more accepting. Children would not be afraid to communicate with children who were different, and they would be encouraged to

interact with children with SEN. Nevertheless, because of the flawed implementation of inclusion and the stereotypes about kindergarten, the damages of inclusion outweighed its benefits. In this way, inclusion was unjust and harmful. Her beliefs were rooted in her love for the children. She said:

*Immediate and full inclusion affected the children with autism. It was not right to include them from the beginning in a new world and new environment. It was difficult for the children with autism to be suddenly surrounded by so many teachers and children. The chaos during playground and corner time was too much for them.*

The failure to consider the differences between the needs of the children with autism affected the children as well. Deem said that several children with autism developed increasingly damaging behaviours. She offered the example of a child with autism who was doing well; she had a few disruptive behaviours, but they were manageable. However, after a child with severe autism was introduced, the first child's behaviours changed significantly. The child began to imitate the other child's disruptive behaviours, screaming, throwing, pulling, and harming the other children and laying down in the centre of the classroom. She believed that variations between the severities of autism should be considered. However, in this case, they were not. She said:

*This child seemed to do fine. They knew that she was imitating her sister, who was cognitively disabled. They knew that she tended to mimic the behaviours of the other children. I wondered a lot about why that child would be included in the same classroom. They mixed the children together without studying their conditions, and that affected the children.*

Significantly, Deem said that she was impacted too. She was not able to give children what they needed during circle time, and she missed the calm and concentrated circle times. Accounting for the variations among the children's needs was challenging and exhausting. After working to account for their needs for a long time, Deem gave up. She said that she felt she was a fighter, but one without support.

The children without SEN were impacted, too, by the introduction of the children with autism. They began to mimic their behaviours, screaming loudly and interrupting her during circle time. One child began to spin around, which was a repetitive behaviour of two of the children with autism. During corner time, the children without SEN had used the provided tools and listened to instructions, but now they behaved like the children with autism. They took things from the teachers' storage room without permission and ignored the classroom rules.

Deem described:

*The children used to line up before we went to the playground, but now they immediately ran to the playground without waiting for the teacher. They saw the children with autism run away and nobody did anything about it, so they copied their behaviours. It was getting worse.*

The situation was getting even worse, not because of the children with autism, but because of how inclusion was implemented in the kindergarten. In her opinion, if inclusion had been implemented gradually, and if the children's needs and differences had been fully considered, it would be better for both the children and teachers.

#### *4.4.1.3.3 The parents avoided the teachers.*

The parents of the children with autism frequently neglected to communicate with Deem and the other teachers. She felt marginalised, and her work with the children went unrecognised. When parents picked up their children, they talked only with the SPE teacher. In one case, a parent of a child with autism complained that the other children were not interacting with her child. She talked to the other parents and the SPE teacher and asked them to help solve the issue. However, the SPE teacher never informed Deem, and she and the other classroom teachers learned about the issue from a parent of a child without SEN. This parent approached Deem and asked her for advice about how to encourage her child to engage with the child with autism.

Deem was shocked. She ended up talking to the mother of the child with autism, who was not aware that Deem was in charge of her child.

Deem blamed the SPE teacher for not informing the parents and for not allowing Deem to help. In her mind, it was the SPE teacher's role to inform the parents that the teachers were responsible for the children's daily programmes, including the children with autism. Deem said:

*It was wrong that we weren't able to communicate with the parents of the children with autism. They avoided us because they did not know about our roles. They did not know that the SPE teacher took the child with autism for only one half-hour session each day. They did not know that their children spent most of their time with us in the classroom.*

#### *4.4.1.3.4 Neither the concept of kindergarten nor inclusion were understood.*

Deem insisted that the main issue that hindered inclusion in the kindergarten was the absence of understanding the concept and aims of inclusion and kindergarten. The supervisors, SPE teachers, principal and the parents viewed kindergarten as similar to elementary and high school programmes, with academic achievements and curricula as the primary concerns. Deem strongly believed that the unique needs, characteristics, and differences of children were not considered. Though she acknowledged that there were differences between the children with autism and the children without SEN, she said that these differences were normal. In her mind, kindergarten was the place to embrace these differences. However, with the particular implementation of inclusion, the children's differences were emphasised, and they served as the basis of the inclusive programme. She concluded that, if the concept and aims of kindergarten education were understood, then the concept and aims of inclusion would be understood as well.

## **4.4.2 Second classroom teachers' experiences.**

### ***4.4.2.1 Shahd's experience.***

Shahd was the only teacher in her classroom who had a bachelor's degree in kindergarten education from a university. She has worked as a kindergarten teacher for 23 years, spending 17 years working with children with hearing and speech disorders and only two years working with children with autism.

Shahd loved teaching young children and was passionate about her job. To her, nothing could compare to the feelings she had when she worked with young children. Her beliefs about childhood made her excited about inclusion. Her beliefs about inclusion stemmed not only from her love for children but also from her experiences with her nephew, who had cognitive and physical disabilities. She loved seeing him when he attended their family gatherings, and she frequently encouraged his parents to take him out in public. For Shahd, inclusion was the only way to spread awareness about disabilities. She strongly believed that children with SEN should participate as fully-functioning members of society, saying:

*Inclusion was nice because the children with autism were able to learn from the other children and the normal children knew that there were people with different needs. They would not be surprised when they encountered them. No barriers anymore. It would be normal to see children with SEN in society, so inclusion was really nice for them [children with SEN].*

At the kindergarten, she was thrilled to meet the SPE teacher and the children with autism. Shortly before the children with autism were introduced, she prepared the children without SEN to visit them. She talked to her students about autism and let them create gifts for the new children.

When they visited the children with autism, she introduced the children to each other and helped them build a rapport. The children told stories, gave them the gifts, and spent circle time

with them. Shahd said that she, too, wanted to learn more about the children with autism. In the end, it was a pleasant experience for Shahd; she thought she might be able to communicate with the children with autism, and they might respond to her. Even the SPE teacher seemed to be comfortable and knew how to manage the children with autism.

*4.4.2.1.1 Inclusion is nice, but not in that way.*

However, by the end of the first semester, everything had changed. The children with autism spent a full day in Shahd's classroom, and she found herself struggling. She said:

*Inclusion needed preparation. Before inclusion, many things had to be prepared for. It was not possible for the children with autism to be in the classroom. Between an eye blink and a look, they closed the classroom of KG1 [children from 3-4 years] and accepted inclusion and brought in children with autism...without any study and without anything. She [the supervisor] came and told us that she would include children with autism and you should ask Allah for rewards*

Shahd recalled an experience with a child with autism who was, at the time, not officially diagnosed. She did not know what was wrong with him. He climbed onto the tables, ran around the classroom, and refused to make eye contact with Shahd. She was emotionally overwhelmed. He was not a normal child, and he did not merely have hearing problems. Her inability to communicate with him frustrated her, and she did not know how to respond. Her only experience with children with SEN was with children with hearing and speech disorders. She struggled with the child for the rest of the year without any support, informational or otherwise.

The flawed implementation of inclusion changed Shahd's feelings. Though she supported the concept of inclusion, inclusion as practised was, in her mind, an injustice for the children with and the children without SEN. She noticed that the children without SEN suffered academically because she was not able to focus on them. She explained:

*Again, inclusion was nice, but not in that way. Normal children—honestly, from my experience—they were oppressed. I have to be around the children with autism all the time, and, when the normal children talked to me, I just did not pay attention because I wanted to focus on the children with autism and prevent them from damaging anything or hurting anyone. The normal children were neglected. Honestly, they were oppressed.*

Inclusion was unjust even to the teachers. She said that teachers were forced to include the children with SEN even though they were not properly trained. Even more egregiously, she often was not given the children with autism's personal information. To her, that was a tremendous mistake. The teachers could not agree on basic plans because they knew little to nothing about the children. Further still, the teachers were expected to help the children with autism in ways that exceeded their available means. To Shahd, that was unjust, and it affected her confidence about her teaching skills. She said that she no longer felt competent, explaining:

*At the end of every year, I was able to identify changed behaviours; and, at the end of the year, I had amazing children who made me feel really happy and proud. But, with inclusion, my performance suffered. Honestly, I am behind because I am working under pressure, and that affected my performance. There were many things that controlled the classroom. My focus was only on the children with autism. They needed us to watch them all the time.*

Full inclusion also affected the children with autism. When they were partially included and joined Shahd's students during circle time, they behaved differently, responding well to the teacher and the children without SEN. In addition, the SPE teacher was able to concentrate on each one individually during circle time. Consequently, Shahd concluded that, to benefit from circle time, the children with autism needed a calm and focused environment. However, with the large number of children and teachers in her classroom, full inclusion did not help the children with autism.

During one particular corner time, Shahd helped the children without SEN build a tower. A child with severe hearing and speech disorders was standing nearby, watching the other

children play. Shahd asked the child to join, but he did not respond. Shahd waved her hand and again asked him to join, but received no response. Later on, Shahd went to the discovery corner where a child without SEN was playing with a magnet. Another child with hearing and speech disorders came over and wanted to hold the magnet, but the child without SEN refused. Shahd said, *'Please let him try'*, but the child without SEN refused again, and the other child withdrew and went to another corner. Shahd believed that her lack of knowledge made her unable to foster relationships among the children and to include children with SEN authentically. Consequently, she resorted to simple attempts to include the children, rather than genuine attempts at inclusion. Her classroom practices involved only observing the children and preventing them from harming each other.

Shahd was unhappy, and she tried to solve the issues by going to the supervisor and the principal and talking about her problems. She told them that full inclusion was negatively affecting the children. They responded that all she could do was accept the children and ask Allah for rewards.

#### *4.4.2.1.2 We had insufficient support.*

The implementation of inclusion caused many problems for Shahd. The primary issue was that MoE's supervisor and the school's principal provided her with insufficient support. She did not understand how they expected the teachers to include the children and provide them rich learning experiences when they had to work under great pressure. Shahd said that the only thing that she was looking forward to was summer break. She felt emotionally and physically tired, saying:

*There wasn't any support. The teachers were treated differently. The SPE teachers were offered privileges and we were not! It was unfair; we worked with the*



*children all day, and we did not receive emotional or financial support. Even our opinions were ignored. We just had to accept children in our classroom and ask Allah for rewards.*

Even the parents of children with SEN did not support the teachers. Only the SPE teachers were consulted about the children with SEN, but even they could not communicate easily with parents. She recounted a case where an SPE teacher was unable to reach one mother for an entire year. The SPE teacher sent letters and put notes in the child's file but received no response. Eventually, the SPE teacher contacted the child's father, who did not cooperate. When she asked to give her mother's contact information, he said that she could communicate only with him. For an entire year, the child did not improve because the parents would not collaborate with the teachers. Nonetheless, Shahd believed that it would be wrong to blame only the parents, claiming that, if the teachers, the SPE teachers, and the parents had a unified and shared plan, there would not be gaps in collaboration between the school and the children's homes.

#### *4.4.2.1.3 Inclusion requires more than what was offered.*

Shahd believed that inclusion needed to be thoroughly researched and planned for before it was implemented. In particular, the school and the teachers needed to be prepared. The classroom was not large enough to accommodate the children and the teachers. The children did not have enough space in which to move around. It was terribly crowded, and the insufficient space affected both the children and the teachers.

In addition, Shahd believed the children's needs had been inadequately considered before inclusion was introduced. If children were expected to perform well, they had to be prepared. She said that a gradual process of inclusion would assist the children with SEN in acquiring the necessary life skills, saying:

*Inclusion was more than just bringing in the children. They needed to be gradually included until they learned basic skills and until we got to know them. Inclusion did not have to be implemented in the whole programme! If I were in charge, I would apply partial inclusion. Full inclusion needed time, study, and preparation, not just bringing children in like that.*

To Shahd, the imposed inclusion was unfair. She strongly believed that proper inclusion required more than random implementation. It had to be based on careful study. She explained:

*I believe that they really had to prepare teachers and the place for inclusion. Even the principal needed training. The principal needed to understand SEN so she could deal with children. All of us needed to be trained, so we could help the children perform their best.*

The lack of knowledge and preparation hindered the success of inclusion at the kindergarten. In her view, knowledge about inclusion and special needs was essential to the successful implementation of inclusion. Even having a degree was insufficient. Every SPE teacher had a degree; however, they lacked knowledge about inclusion. The SPE teachers knew how to help the children with SEN in their classrooms and individually, but they did not know how to include them in combined classrooms or how to foster their relationships with other children. Shahd believed that, even for her, a degree in kindergarten education was not enough. She recalled:

*I did not have any previous knowledge. Even my bachelor's degree did not prepare me. My studies were about normal children. I took an elective course about SPE, and it was really nice. It gave me a brief background of inclusion. It was a very narrow angle into inclusion, and it was not a wide enough subject to teach me how to discuss and apply inclusion.*

In Shahd's view, inclusion is an agreement, and inclusion should not be implemented without careful and holistic consideration. For inclusion to be successful, everybody had to work together as partners. One person's efforts should complement another's efforts. She said that the teachers, the parents, the principal, and the ministry have to operate under the same policy and to work toward a shared aim.

#### ***4.4.2.2 Haifa's experience.***

Haifa has a diploma in kindergarten education from a college and has worked as a kindergarten teacher for 26 years. For 17 years, she worked with inclusion at a different kindergarten, and then, 2 years ago, she moved to this kindergarten. Here, for the first time, she worked with children with autism and hearing and speech disorders. Her previous experience involved different types of disabilities and partial inclusion only. She had been under the impression that the inclusion at this kindergarten was partial as well, so she was shocked when she learned that the kindergarten was offering full and immediate inclusion for two types of disabilities. She was nervous because she believed that she did not know enough about the disabilities. She explained:

*Autism and inclusion were difficult. It was really difficult for me. It was really hard because I did not know about the children's characteristics, growth, abilities, or their needs. I did not have the appropriate background.*

When Haifa began working with full inclusion, she was completely opposed to it. She was afraid to engage with the children because she did not know how. However, as time passed, her feelings about inclusion changed. She discovered that teaching the children with hearing and speech disorders was not as challenging as teaching the children with autism. During circle time, Haifa was able to interact with the children with hearing and speech disorders. Once, she asked a child how her day was, and the child smiled and shook her head. Haifa said:

*Inclusion was a challenge but not with the children with hearing and speech disorders. I could deal with them easily, and I could see them benefiting. Some of the children came in at the beginning of the year and were unable to speak. Now they could speak and interact with the normal children, unlike the children with autism.*

Including the children with autism was still a challenge. In her opinion, her two years of teaching children with autism did not help her. She was not able to communicate with them or

understand their needs. Teaching became difficult when the children with autism were included. Once, during circle time, Haifa recited the Holy Quran with the children. She gave the children a microphone for the recitation, and they took turns with it. Then, suddenly, a child with autism began screaming, laying in the centre of the circle. Haifa could not hear the children recite the verses and was not able to quiet the child. She covered her face with her hands and broke into tears, unable to continue. Everything she tried did not work, and the children with autism inevitably disturbed her time with other children. She said:

*Nothing helped me; none of my years of teaching experience helped me with the inclusion of children with autism. I accepted the existence of children with autism only because I feared Allah and because I empathised with the children and their families. But, honestly, I did not have enough knowledge. My collaboration and assistance were based on my mercy and not based on scientific knowledge.*

#### *4.4.2.2.1 Inclusion affected everyone.*

Haifa developed a negative opinion about including children with autism. No matter how much she tried, the children with autism would not respond positively. She believed that they were not benefiting from inclusion, and she doubted that inclusion would set them up for decent lives. She truly wanted to help the children with autism, saying:

*I tried many times to include the children with autism, but, truly, I could not because I did not know how. I felt guilty because all I wanted was to make them sit down and get them busy. That was it. That was the only thing that I could offer them.*

Her feelings about including the children with autism changed the way she viewed herself. She said that she used to be rewarded for her teaching practices and that, once, she was chosen as the exemplary teacher. At the end of each year, she used to be very satisfied about her children's progress. In contrast, for the past two years, she has felt emotionally overwhelmed.

She felt guilty and incompetent that she was unable to provide the children—especially the children without SEN—with a proper education. She said:

*There were times when I wanted to cry during circle time. I came into the classroom prepared, wanting to give the children an education. But I found those children with autism screaming, laying down, and interrupting me. I felt depressed. I just could not.*

The inclusion of children with autism not only affected her; it affected the children without SEN. With the children with autism constantly disrupting circle time, Haifa was unable to teach the children without SEN. She noticed that the children's academic progress suffered, explaining:

*Inclusion did not affect only me. It affected my children too. Before inclusion, I was able to see their progress, but, now, no. I could see only few of them progressing.*

Haifa said that her feelings of being overwhelmed and incompetent were caused by the poor implementation of inclusion. Misunderstandings, mismanagement, and the poor planning of the inclusion programme ultimately hindered educational opportunities. Inclusion was difficult for everyone because they were not prepared. As a result, inclusion never had a clear mechanism and schedule for implementation. She described:

*The last two years have exhausted me. The school principal and the supervisors accepted children without planning and without official diagnoses. It was floating—no clear mechanism and no schedule. Nothing can work without planning, rules, and careful study. We could not provide a good education to those children [the children with autism]. We needed to teach them how to be independent, we needed to guide their behaviours, and we needed to work together before they were fully included.*

#### *4.4.2.2 The foundation of inclusion was not there.*

Haifa said that collaboration is the foundation of inclusion. Working in an environment where everyone had individual roles and no shared plans or goals was difficult for her. For Haifa,

working with the SPE teacher was particularly challenging. They shared the same classroom and children but worked separately. She said:

*We worked separately. There was no collaboration. But I do not blame the SPE teachers. The teachers were not trained about SPE, and SPE teachers were not trained about childhood. Sometimes I felt that they did not know what to do—just like us.*

The SPE teachers were challenging and burdensome. Haifa struggled during circle times. In addition to disruptions by the children with autism, the speech teacher frequently talked and interrupted Haifa. She felt that her and the children's attentions were scattered and unfocused. Furthermore, the autism teacher's role consisted solely of holding onto the children with autism and controlling their movement. Haifa thought that the SPE teachers were supposed to be doing more, saying:

*It was hard to teach when the speech teacher would not stop talking, and the autism teacher came in just to hold the children. Sometimes, I got really upset by them, especially the autism teachers. Sometimes, when the children with autism refused to walk with them, they strongly pulled the children with their hands. May Allah help us. It was not easy.*

Inclusion, for Haifa, required more. Collaboration and knowledge, the foundations of inclusion, were not there. Haifa said:

*The children with SEN were not included. The children played separately. Our children built, and their children destroyed. The role of the SPE teacher in the classroom was zero. The children with SEN did not learn how to be included. I think that the SPE teachers' understanding of inclusion was only about the physical inclusion of children.*

The absence of collaboration negatively affected the children. It was difficult to work with the SPE teachers and to communicate with the parents of children with SEN. Haifa was unable to intervene for the children with SEN because the SPE teachers and the parents did not believe that she was responsible for them. In one case, Haifa and the other teachers had problems

with one of the children with autism. The child took a doll to the bed, ripped off her clothes, kissed her, and then laid on the doll. The child did this several times.

Haifa was very worried, but she did not know how to respond, and she was worried about how the SPE teacher would react. Several days passed before they were able to inform the SPE teacher, and, afterwards, the teacher immediately informed the child's parents and got clarification from them. Haifa believed that, had she been able to collaborate with the SPE teacher, the teachers would have been able to resolve the issue more quickly and with less stress. Haifa thought that if she had been able to communicate with the families, the teachers would not have found themselves in that situation.

In the class, the children with SEN did not receive support and attention as they should have received. There was another child with autism who she wanted to help because he seemed to be gifted. Haifa said:

*I had a child with autism who was really gifted. He could memorise and read everything. I wanted to talk to his mother and tell her about her child because I knew that would make her really happy. And I wanted her to do something about his giftedness. She could teach him the Holy Quran. But I could not communicate with his mother. I told the autism teacher, and she discouraged me because she believed that his mother had special circumstances in her house, and she refused her child. She said the mother could not accept his condition.*

Haifa wanted to talk with his mother, let her know that her child was gifted, and encourage her to concentrate on his giftedness, not on his weaknesses. Haifa became very emotional when she recalled this memory. She was a mother, too, and she knew how mothers glowed whenever they heard positive comments about their children. Haifa was frustrated because she was unable to communicate with the families or meet the children's needs. She said that nothing could be done in the absence of collaboration and communication.

#### *4.4.2.2.3 Inclusion is like the sea.*

In Haifa's view, inclusion was difficult. To her, it was like a sea, and they were being forced to swim in it without being taught how to swim. Haifa believed that, for inclusion to succeed, it had to start properly. This required the correct diagnoses, the right teachers, thorough planning, understanding, and widespread collaboration. She said that the inclusion programme needed an annual plan with a start and an end. The teachers, the SPE teachers, the parents, and the principal needed to know what they intended to accomplish with each child. With the kindergarten's particular manifestation of inclusion and the great pressure placed on the teachers and children, nobody benefited.

Haifa's decision to become a teacher stemmed from her belief about the power of education to change children's lives and empower them. She believed that, with education, children would have more opportunities to fulfil their potential. She also believed that inclusion could create chances for children with SEN. However, since the kindergarten did not implement inclusion properly, causing the children to suffer, she has decided to apply for retirement next year. She said that she could not do it anymore.

#### *4.4.2.3 Hibah's experience.*

Hibah has a diploma in kindergarten education from a college, which is affiliated with the governorate of the central region. She has worked as kindergarten teacher for 25 years. For 17 years, she worked with children with speech and hearing disorders, and, for the last two years, she worked with children with autism.

Hibah was emotionally invested in inclusion, believing it to be a right for children with SEN. She believed that, through inclusion programmes in schools, children could be included in



society. She said that inclusion would instil more positive attitudes about disabilities and that she would never oppose including children with SEN in kindergarten classes. She did not want to deprive children with SEN from opportunities to cultivate new behaviours and interact with other children.

However, Hibah was totally opposed to the way inclusion was implemented at the kindergarten. Inclusion was applied suddenly, and the children and the teachers were unprepared. She believed that inclusion needed time, planning, and gradual implementation. For example, the children with autism were brought in even though they could not function independently. The teachers were unable to manage the children's behaviours because they lacked the relevant education and the time to familiarise themselves with each child. Hibah stressed that her lack of knowledge and preparation influenced her feelings about including children with autism, saying:

*I wish I could only accept children with autism but I could not. I did not know how to deal with them. I just feel that the last two years were the longest years of my life. Everything was messed up! I really felt sorry for them. It was heartbroken to see them screaming and moving around without being able to know what did they need. I wish I could provide them something but I did not know. I wanted to contain and include them but I really did not know how to do it.*

In the classroom and on the playground, Hibah's role was to observe the children with SEN. She was unable to intervene or help them because she did not understand their behaviours and needs. She desired to learn more, so, whenever she observed confusing behaviours, she asked the SPE teachers immediately to explain why the children were acting as they were. She joined the children with SEN during corner time, and she sat with them until the children moved away from the corner. Hibah was devastated. She desperately wanted to understand them. Being unable to speak with them left her despondent.

#### *4.4.2.3.1 A lecture was insufficient.*

Hibah believed that her lack of training and knowledge significantly affected her ability to work with children with SEN. She was forced to accept them in her classroom, even though she was untrained and was not instructed how to interact with them. Hibah recalled how, at the beginning of inclusion, the teachers were assembled for a two-hour lecture about autism. The lecture focused primarily on identifying children with autism and did not teach them how to manage them or how to encourage them to engage with other children, and very quickly she realised that the lecture was not addressing her situation. What she needed was a series of intensive training workshops, not a two-hour lecture.

Even the children needed to be trained and prepared. Children with SEN needed to be prepared to be surrounded by other children. She explained:

*They come to the circle time and hit the other children. They took the things from the other children. They distracted my thoughts and they pulled the attention of our children. They needed to be trained before they were included.*

#### *4.4.2.3.2 If the children benefited, they would change.*

The lack of training and preparation mitigated the benefits of inclusion. The disruptive behaviours of the children with autism hindered the educational experience of the children without SEN. The children were distracted and could not concentrate. Even Hibah found it difficult to focus on teaching the required curriculum. She questioned the benefits of inclusion for the children, especially for the children with autism. She recalled:

*I could not enjoy the end of the school year party. All of the children were sitting and enjoying the party except for children with autism. They ran around and hit the other children. I wished I had been able to close my eyes and not see them. It broke my heart that they had spent the whole year with us and they had not changed! [Silence] If the children with autism benefited from their inclusion, they would not act like that. They would sit when we told them sit! Instead, they were*

*running and hitting the other children! I was hardly able to control myself. I wanted the children with autism to enjoy the party, but if we left them like that, everything would be messed up! Really, it was so hard.*

Hibah's feelings about the benefits of inclusion varied. It was much easier to include and teach the children with hearing and speech disorders. She attributed this to two reasons. First, these children's behaviours were similar to the children without SEN. They followed the rules and responded when she communicated with them in simple sign language. Second, the teachers for the children with hearing and speech disorders were, according to Hibah, more collaborative and friendly than the teachers for the children with autism. They worked with the teachers and helped with the children without SEN as well.

In contrast, the teachers for children with autism did not interact with Hibah and the other teachers. Even during breaks or on special occasions such as the goodbye party for retiring teachers, they did not participate. They spent their free time in their classroom.

#### *4.4.2.3.3 The autism teachers hindered inclusion.*

Hibah struggled to work in environment where she was not allowed to work with the children with autism. Whenever she tried to direct the children with autism, their teacher became upset. The teacher for children with autism considered the autistic children to be her own children and rejected Hibah's attempts to intervene. Hibah recalled:

*Once, I told a child with autism to sit, and his autism teacher came in and said, 'No, you made the child afraid'. [Silence] Me! He was afraid of me? I was confused because I only told him to sit down exactly like I told the other children. I was trying to guide his behaviours. I was not harming him. The autism teachers did not accept us, and they did not want us to tell them anything. From that day, I avoided coming into contact with the children with autism because I did not want them to hate the school because of me.*

Hibah's lack of knowledge contributed to her decision to withdraw. She believed that the autism teachers were the only ones who were qualified to work with the children. Nonetheless, despite the autism teacher's qualifications, Hibah was upset with how she treated the children with autism. She described:

*The teachers for the children with autism were the ones who had become hardened. I did not know if they acted like that for the children's benefit, but, honestly, sometimes they were rough with children. [Silence] Sometimes they pulled children when they refused to stand.*

Hibah was puzzled. Often, she doubted the legitimacy of the autism teacher's education. Though she thought that the autism teacher must have learned teaching methods, the teacher was treating the children inappropriately. She said:

*She had to know how to convince the children, not just pull them around. She studied and knew about those children, and she pulled them by their hands. Not only that! she sometimes raised her voice when talking to the children and changed her facial expressions. It was just... [silence] I just did not want to oppress those children because I did not know how to deal with them. I am really confused.*

Hibah believed that the autism teachers impeded the healthy practice of inclusion. They rejected other teachers' attempts to collaborate and refused to share their knowledge and plans.

#### *4.4.2.3.4 I always asked myself, what future do children with autism have in our culture?*

Hibah explained that the autism teachers' methods symbolised larger societal understandings about autism and disabilities. She noticed that not only did the autism teachers treat the children poorly, the principal, the supervisors, the parents, and society also treated them poorly. To her, inclusion was not mere physical inclusion. She asserted that the children's right to be included also involved rights to be in an environment that was ready for them and under the guidance of prepared teachers. In this kindergarten, inclusion was not properly understood and, therefore, was implemented poorly.

Hibah said that the principal and the supervisors should listen to the teachers' notes and opinions. If they did, they would improve the children's lives rather than just physically include them. She recalled:

*Once, the other teachers and I went to meet the supervisor and the principal. We wanted to suggest a plan where children with autism would be gradually included and be prepared to be with the other children. The only thing that they told us to do was, when we could not handle the children's screaming anymore, we could ask their teachers to pull them out! It was not about us. It was about the children! They did not understand.*

In addition, the parents did not properly understand inclusion. Hibah never interacted with the parents of the children with SEN; the parents never asked her about their children's progress. They communicated only with the SPE teachers. To her, that was not inclusion. The kindergarten teachers' role was merely to have the children in their classrooms. Hibah also noted that even the children practised exclusion. The children without SEN did not interact or play with the children with SEN. She attributed the misunderstanding of inclusion to the lack of understanding about disabilities and inclusion in the culture. She said:

*We do not have a culture that understands children with SEN; we teachers, children, and parents do not understand them. Based on what we have, I asked myself, 'What future do children with autism have?'*

Hibah explained that working in the kindergarten was a very emotional experience for her, and she has decided to leave, saying:

*This is my last year teaching. I've applied for retirement. It was getting even worse. We were not moving forward, and we told the supervisors and the principal that. The only answer we got was count on the rewards from Allah. I want the rewards, but not everything is just waiting for a reward. We have to do something. Unfortunately, nothing was gained. [She clapped her hands, which is the cultural expression of coming out of something with empty hands.]*

### **4.4.3 Third classroom teachers' experiences.**

#### ***4.4.3.1 Tala's experience.***

Tala has a bachelor's degree in kindergarten education from a college. In total, she has nine years' worth of experience as a kindergarten teacher, with three years in private kindergarten and six years in a government's inclusive kindergarten. After she worked at the private kindergarten, she worked for six years as an administrator at one of the KSA's ministries. The office was closed in 2011, and Tala was given the option to teach in a kindergarten or work as an administrator in another ministry. Tala chose to work as a teacher, and she was assigned to an inclusive kindergarten. She was not aware at the time that she was going to an inclusive kindergarten.

From the beginning, Tala felt that she had been forced to work in an inclusive kindergarten. Tala said that she was not necessarily opposed to inclusion, but she was definitely opposed to how it was implemented and how the teachers were forced to practise it. She believed that inclusion was a child's right, but its implementation was a failure. For Tala, the kindergarten's inclusion was a daily challenge with an unprepared environment and unprepared children, parents, and staff. In her opinion, for inclusion to be successful, three conditions had to be met: first, work had to be evenly divided; second, there had to be a clear mechanism for inclusion, third, inclusion had to be a shared responsibility among all parties.

#### ***4.4.3.1.1 What we have is a misunderstanding of inclusion.***

Tala's experience with inclusion was dissatisfying. This was not the result of inclusion itself but from misunderstandings of inclusion. To her, inclusion was more than simply including children with SEN in the classroom; inclusion must meet the children's needs and respect their

rights. In her opinion, neither the school administration nor the supervisory office understood that the teachers and children needed to be properly prepared. Children would not be brought in the classroom immediately and teachers' notes would not be ignored. She explained:

*When the supervisor came, I told her that we had a child with autism who threw the bricks on our children during the circle time. I asked her if she saw him because he did it while she was standing. She said it was fine, that was inclusion! No, that was not inclusion. Unfortunately they wrongly understood inclusion.*

To Tala, this was not inclusion. True inclusion required that the children and the teachers be prepared. She believed that, if inclusion was gradually implemented, then every child would benefit. If the children with SEN were partially included for a few months, they would become familiar with the new environment. In her mind, it was unfair to include the children suddenly. Even the teachers seemed oppressed by the way inclusion was implemented. They were not given the choice or the ability to participate in the process of inclusion. She explained:

*I needed to share my opinion. I had an opinion, but it went unheard. Unfortunately, my opinion was the last thing they worried about. They did not even know about me. I wish I could receive a file that I could sign. I could see the children's conditions and if they liked to be touched or no? What did they like and is there any special food for them or... [silence] I did not know about anything. The children were brought inside of my classroom, and that was it!*

Tala believed that the inclusion's improper implementation negatively impacted the children. For example, Tala had a child with autism who was, according to her, a great child. She thought that he could benefit from inclusion; he repeated words that the other children said. Unfortunately, the child relapsed when the principal and the supervisor suddenly included two new children with autism, despite not having sufficient knowledge about their conditions. Both children screamed, left the classroom constantly, and acted aggressively with the other children. The child mimicked their behaviours, and now she had to manage the disruptive behaviours of three children with autism.

In another case, a child was affected by the kindergarten's improper understanding of inclusion. She said:

*Another child was also doing well. We did not know that she had autism. The school principal took her out of her classroom and brought her here only because the SPE teacher moved into our classroom. She wanted her children to be transferred with her. I asked them to return the child back to her classroom. It was unfair. I felt that they had caused her condition to deteriorate. It was difficult enough for the normal children to be in a new place let alone that child. The child was moved away from her friends and her classroom just for the sake of the SPE teacher.*

To Tala, inclusion, properly understood, prioritises the children. This particular child was not able to cope with the new classroom, and her condition worsened. The child suffered because the SPE teacher did not want to work with the new children. Her comfort was chosen over the children's comfort. To Tala, that was an injustice.

Tala described her situation as a tragedy. It was very frustrating to her to watch a great concept like inclusion changed into tragedy. Unfortunately, Tala felt that she was unable to change the situation. She and the other teachers were excluded from the process, and their voices went unheard. She tried to convince the school principal and the supervisor to take the children's diagnoses seriously and ensure that children were accurately diagnosed before they were included. She believed that it was unfair to include the children without knowing about their conditions and their specific needs.

However, whenever Tala shared her opinions, the administrators assumed that she was opposed to inclusion. She recalled an instance when she met with the principal and the supervisor and explained to them how the children with autism were different and how those differences affected the children with SEN and the children without SEN. She emphasised that it was important to accurately diagnose the children before including them. She was shocked by their response. She recalled:



*The supervisor held a booklet in front of my face and said, 'This is the organisational guide, and it says full inclusion, and next year you will see inclusion from the beginning of the year and for more than one type of disability'. She threatened me with inclusion. I did not say anything because she would not understand what I was trying to say.*

Tala became very emotional about how the principal and the supervisor perceived her role in inclusion. She believed that, since she was the teacher of the children, she should be allowed to share her opinion. She believed that the misunderstanding of inclusion had created an exclusionary, rather than inclusionary, environment. The teachers were not involved in any sense other than bringing the children with SEN into their classrooms. *'That was not inclusion'*, Tala said.

Tala believed that the cultural beliefs about inclusion and disabilities contributed to misunderstandings about inclusion and its flawed implementation. Additionally, she thought the families of the children with SEN hindered the inclusive programme. For example, many families hid their children's diagnoses to avoid the pervasive negative cultural beliefs about disabilities. The kindergarten was very far from being inclusive. She said:

*The structure that we had was below totally inadequate. There was no culture of inclusion. The administration and the environment offered nothing related to inclusion, nothing! [Silence]. We had a child with autism, and this year was her last at the kindergarten, so I asked the administrator, 'did you provide her parents with the numbers of organisations that they could take her to?' She said no. We did not have a culture of inclusion. They did not understand inclusion.*

Inclusion required more than the physical inclusion of the children. To Tala, inclusion meant providing children with opportunities to fulfil their potential. For them to do so, the school had to provide their parents with information and guidance about how integrate their children in society. Tala believed that it was unfair that the children were enrolled in the kindergarten and spent several years not knowing their options. She explained:

*The ministry should hire inclusion specialists to work at the kindergarten. We needed a person who knew about inclusion and about organisations that provided services to children with SEN. They should hire an administrator who knows about inclusion and knows about each child and who would follow-up with them. The school administration must at least have educational brochures for the parents.*

4.4.3.1.2 *I am like a fighter in the classroom.*

Tala believed that the teachers were unprepared to teach children with autism. She was not trained, and she did not know how to teach children with SEN. During circle time, she felt helpless. The children with hearing and speech disorders needed her to raise her voice and explain through sign language, but the children with autism became agitated by loud voices and distracted by her movements. When she raised her voice to teach letters to the children with hearing and speech disorders, the children with autism covered their ears. She was puzzled; she was a teacher, not a magician. She could not meet the needs of every child. Worse still, she felt that the differences between the disabilities had not been considered.

When a child with autism began throwing toys at the other children during corner time, Tala did not know how to respond. She offered stickers to the child with autism, saying, *'If you stop throwing, I will give you a star sticker'*. The child did not respond, so she pulled the other children away from the child and called the worker to take the child out of the classroom. Tala found it emotionally and physically exhausting to work with children with SEN, not knowing how to accommodate them. She said:

*I did not know. Inclusion was a personal effort; I discovered the children's conditions through personal effort. I feel like I am a fighter in the classroom. It is a problem. They just bring the children in the classroom and don't give me information. I am afraid that I might damage the children. I did not know how to guide their behaviours. I knew only that the children with autism did not want to listen to loud voices. I am just trying and fighting to discover what will work.*

Her ignorance about how to guide the children's behaviours made her classroom chaotic. She was not able to control their disruptive behaviours, and she could not stop them from hurting

other children. Five children without SEN refused to come to class. A child with autism hit one of them and cut off part of her hair. Another child with autism hit another child and ripped off her uniform. Tala and the other teachers tried to stop her, but the child hit them too. Tala observed sadly that children were unhappy, but no one listened to the teachers. Sorrowfully, she said:

*The children, where inclusion was supposed to benefit them, were the only ones who were paying for the adults' mistakes. The children were suffering, and they [the supervisors] were in their high towers, sitting behind their desks and giving decisions without coming into the field or conducting follow-ups.*

Tala said that the purpose of inclusion was unclear. She did not know if the MoE applied inclusion merely for recognition or if it was actually misunderstood. Her opinion was that inclusion required everybody to share responsibilities. A successful programme needed collaboration and continuous follow-ups. These did not exist in the kindergarten. The SPE teachers worked alone with the children, and Tala never participated in creating the children's educational plans, and she was not allowed to look at the children's files. Even the workshop about autism differed from the reality in the classroom. The workshop's content was irrelevant to her situation. In light of all of these consequences, she questioned the purpose of inclusion.

#### *4.4.3.1.3 Kindergarten does not exist anymore.*

Tala found it difficult to endure others' mistakes. She was emotionally exhausted, and her opinions of herself and her teaching competence had changed. She said:

*I felt that my lessons suffered; I am really tired emotionally. With all of this pressure and not giving the teachers financial or emotional rewards not even providing an appropriate learning environment, I am very overwhelmed.*

Tala said that it was very difficult to work in an environment that did not understand the purpose of inclusion and kindergarten. The kindergarten's rules, environment, and programme

needed to be understood before an inclusive programme was implemented. Even so, 26 children and seven teachers could not fit in a 6x8 meter classroom. A successful inclusive programme would prioritise the children's needs regardless of their differences. She said that she genuinely missed being a kindergarten teacher and her calm circle times.

#### *4.4.3.3 Malak's experience.*

Malak has a bachelor's degree in kindergarten education from a university. She has worked as a kindergarten teacher for five years, and before working as a kindergarten teacher, she was an administrator for five years. Like Muna, Deem, and Tala, Malak's office was closed, and she was transferred to an inclusive kindergarten. For her, the last five years have been nothing but a continuous challenge.

Every day at the kindergarten, Malak was worried and stressed out. She closed the discovery corner because she thought the children with autism endangered the children without SEN. They destroyed the corner's tools and threw them at other children. To Malak, it was unfair that the children without SEN were not able to learn. But, she said, this was inclusion. Nineteen children without SEN were unable to be educated because seven children with SEN were included.

#### *4.4.3.2.1 Inclusion is supposed to serve everyone's interest.*

Malak believed that inclusion should serve everyone's interests and not be so challenging. An inclusive programme had to be structured and planned before it was introduced. As it was, children were accepted without official diagnoses and without being prepared. In one case, a child with autism was enrolled as a child with a speech disorder. Malak knew that there

was something wrong with him, but she did not know what. She thought he was blind because he could not make eye contact with her. Later on, she discovered by accident that he was autistic. The child ate a croissant at a party and suffered from an allergic reaction. The mother later informed them that he had a wheat allergy and autism.

Malak said that, if she was given the choice, she would not have accepted the child without being provided with a comprehensive report about his condition. Though she believed that children were precious gifts and that they had the right to be in a classroom with other children, she also believed that, for their benefit, they should be included only after careful study and accurate diagnoses. Malak believed that, with the kindergarten's inclusion procedures, the children were not benefiting from inclusion. She said:

*Inclusion was implemented without study. Nothing can work without planning. Working randomly does not change anything; it just makes everything worse. The only thing that resulted from inclusion was increasing the teachers' workload. No one benefited [silence]. The children were the ones who lost, and we could not do anything about this mess.*

Malak was saddened that the children without SEN, who she described as 'our future', came to the kindergarten every day without benefiting. At the end of every academic year, she used to have children who had learned a lot and memorised many parts of the Holy Quran. After the kindergarten implemented the inclusive programme and brought the children with autism into the classroom, Malak believed that her students' performance suffered. She was not able to teach while the children with autism were screaming and hitting the other children. Rather than teaching, most of her time was spent managing disruptive behaviours.

Malak blamed the unplanned implementation of inclusion. It was imposed on the teachers. They had no role in the acceptance process, and the SPE teachers were required to accept children with SEN to reach a quota. If they did not enrol enough students, they would be

transferred. Consequently, many children were accepted even though they were not officially diagnosed, and their conditions and needs were not carefully considered. She explained:

*The children were accepted without being diagnosed. They accepted every child, regardless of his condition. I am only a teacher. I am not a doctor or superhero who would be able to accept any condition and make it better. The situation was getting worse. What mattered was the number of children who were accepted, and that was wrong.*

Malak believed that inclusion should be implemented, especially since it was required by international policy. However, at the kindergarten, inclusion was implemented without a mechanism. A total of 3 children with autism, 4 children with hearing and speech disorders, and 19 children without SEN were included in a single unprepared classroom. She believed that the situation was unacceptable, since it negatively impacted every child. She was opposed to it, and she tried to change it, but she could not. She explained:

*The teachers did not have any role in inclusion. We were only servants to them [the principal and the supervisor]. The supervisor told us that she did not have any mechanism to follow and that everything had to be from personal effort.*

Malak believed that an inclusive programme should be implemented according to standardised regulations. Personal effort was not sufficient. The lack of regulations diminished the children's abilities to learn. She said:

*The children were not enjoying their time at the kindergarten anymore! They were either being hit or being forced to observe bizarre behaviours. Our children were not comfortable; they were in an insecure environment. They didn't even develop friendships with the children with SEN. I did not believe that our children accepted the children with SEN.*

As a result of the flawed implementation, the children and teachers could not accept the children with SEN. Malak believed that, if inclusion had been applied according to international standards, she would be more accepting of the children with SEN. She wanted to improve her

students' lives, but, for this reason, she did not want to bring children with SEN into her classroom.

In one case, when the children sat down for circle time, a child with autism sat in the art corner and played with papers and colouring pencils. The children without SEN pointed out the child to Malak, and she responded that the child was not their business. Malak did not interact with the children with SEN, believing that they needed more than what she was able to offer. She had not been prepared for having them in her classroom.

While her transfer application was processed, Malak withdrew and simply observed the children. She said:

*Inclusion was a disaster! I could not continue living in that disaster. I felt responsible and guilty for not being able to provide the children with SEN and my children their needs. I just could not. This year I applied for a transfer to another kindergarten that does not offer inclusion.*

Malak acknowledged that her difficulties were not the children's fault. The haphazard implementation of inclusion had transformed the children into burdens. They emotionally exhausted her, and she could not bear the extreme pressure.

#### *4.4.3.2.2 Children were brought to an unsuitable place.*

Malak felt saddened that the kindergarten could not serve the children's needs. She said that she would never consider enrolling her niece, who has a cognitive disability. She thought that the special institutes for children with SEN benefited them more than inclusive kindergarten because they offered a specialised staff, an appropriate environment, and children who were in the same condition.

This kindergarten was a normal kindergarten. There was nothing unique about it that made it particularly suitable for inclusion. In a single classroom, she had a large number of children and two types of disabilities. She explained:

*The kindergarten was not prepared at all. The size of the classroom was too small for the number of children. The place did not even have tools and teaching materials for the children with SEN, and I did not know how to deal with them. Nothing was prepared for them.*

Malak was stressed and was not able to sit calmly with the children. She wished that the classroom was larger or that there were fewer children. As it was, the classroom was overcrowded and discordant. The children did not interact, and the teachers had their hands full observing them and trying to prevent problems. Malak thought that the children with SEN spent their time in the classroom aimlessly. She said:

*The best situation would be to teach the children with SEN using specific teaching materials that were appropriate for their conditions, such as cards or specific equipment. But we did not have that in our classroom. We relied on delivering information during circle time, but the children with SEN could not sit calmly and understand us. I just did not know. I felt that I was not qualified. I lacked experience. The workshop was insufficient.*

Malak believed that even the SPE teachers were unprepared for inclusion. Based on their practices, they appeared to lack knowledge of and experience with inclusion. She felt sorry for them because they had majored in SPE and had been hired immediately after graduation, even though they did not have sufficient experience with inclusion.

#### *4.4.3.2.3 We lack cultural awareness about SEN.*

Malak said that inclusion was imposed on the children and teachers without sufficient preparation because the culture did not understand SEN. She believed that, if SEN had been properly understood, inclusion would be implemented differently and the teachers, the parents,



and the administrators would have collaborated. She said that her role in inclusion constituted only a mere 1% of the necessary responsibilities. Children with SEN needed more from her. Teachers needed to be allowed to participate. Their participation would be a pillar of inclusion.

Even the parents of children with SEN did not understand inclusion. She was surprised when she discovered that some parents did not accept their children's conditions. They found the phrase 'SEN' unacceptable. Many parents hid their children's conditions and did not want them to be recorded in hospital files. These parents ignored the kindergarten's efforts to help their children, refusing to respond to files and weekly notes. In one case, the kindergarten had to write a report that the child was normal in order to conform to societal norms.

Malak believed that, if inclusion initially focused on educating the public about SEN and inclusion, it would be more successful. She further said:

*Anything that started right would continue to be right. If everyone did their jobs and knew the reality, then they would plan and implement inclusion well. But like it was, decisions were being made behind desks and far away from reality inclusion could not succeed.*

She said that, if the kindergarten did not change and if nobody followed up, the situation would become even worse. More children would be accepted without the school being prepared for their conditions and needs. To Malak, inclusion was accomplished on paper only and based on the number of children accepted into the kindergarten. Unfortunately, the sole criterion of an inclusive programme's success was based on the how many children with SEN were enrolled. She concluded by saying:

*I am not satisfied with the kind of inclusion we had, and I would not be satisfied if children with SEN were kept in homes. I wanted them to benefit and to learn but in the right way.*

#### **4.5 Summary of the Chapter**

The stories shared by the teachers about their experiences and perceptions of inclusion have provided insights into the nature of their experiences. They demonstrated that the improper implementation of inclusion negatively impacted their experiences. Instead of creating welcoming classrooms, exclusionary classrooms were generated. As a result, the teachers' developed feelings of being incompetent and of being overwhelmed. Their negative emotions carried over into their classroom teaching practices. The teachers' stories also reflected the barriers they encountered and believed that those barriers had hindered the success and development of inclusion.

In this chapter, I explored the experiences and perceptions of eight ECE teachers with the inclusion of children with SEN. The narratives were a combination of stories shared during interviews and informal conversations and the researcher's observational field notes. The next section will discuss the main themes that have emerged from the teachers' narratives. They will be organised based on the research questions. The first section, which answers the first research question, will discuss the improper implementation of inclusion. The second section, which answers the second research question, will present and discuss the barriers teachers encountered during their experiences. The third section, which answers the third research question, will discuss the experiences of the teachers and their influences on them. All of the next sections will be discussed in light of the previous studies and contemporary policies.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion of Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of Inclusion**

Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems... They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility...(Noddings & Witherell, as cited in Altieri, 2001, p. 128)

### **5.0 Introduction**

The teachers' experiences of inclusion in the kindergarten have provided insights into the implementation of inclusion and revealed several key barriers that teachers encountered with inclusion. The stories of the teachers provided insights into their struggle with inclusion of children with SEN in the kindergarten. Their struggle was a result of the improper implementation of inclusion, which faced multiple barriers such as cultural barriers, lack understanding of inclusion and childhood, lack of preparation, lack of support and collaboration, and other barriers that will be discussed in detail. The shared stories shed light on the impact of those barriers on teachers' emotions towards themselves and towards their teaching skills and competency. This chapter will discuss the themes that emerged from the teachers' narratives in light of the literature review to answer the research questions. This chapter is organised based on the research questions. **Section 5.1** discusses the improper implementation of inclusion, which answers the first research question. **Section 5.2** discusses the barriers to inclusion in the kindergarten, which answers the second research question. **Section 5.3** discusses the teachers' experiences with inclusion in kindergarten, which answers the third research question.

## **5.1 The Improper Implementation of Inclusion**

To answer the first research question about how inclusion was implemented in the kindergarten, I refer to past studies as discussed in the literature review regarding the implementation of inclusion. This section also discusses the findings based on an overall picture of teachers' experiences at the kindergarten.

### **5.1.1 Poor implementation.**

In every story, the teachers identified the improper implementation of inclusion as the most influential factor in their experiences of inclusion. Their stories suggested that inclusion was '*poorly implemented*', meaning that, as Deem stated, inclusion was '*implemented randomly without preparation or planning*'. The lack of preparation or planning was evident for the teachers, for the children, for parents and for the environment all of which compounded the difficulties faced by the teachers and created for the children. This is supported by Aldabas (2015), who found that inclusion was implemented poorly in the KSA. He attributed the limited success of inclusion to the lack of preparation and planning, finding preparation to be absolutely necessary for inclusion to be successful. Similarly, Frankel et al. (2010) wrote that inclusion in Guyana's schools confronted many obstacles because it was implemented without careful research or planning.

The failure to implement inclusion properly could be attributed to the lack of guidance and clarity in inclusive policies. This claim is supported by Alahmadi (2009), who found that the absence of clearly articulated guidelines for implementing inclusion represented one of the greatest difficulties for Saudi teachers. Similarly, Alborn (2017) found that unclear and misguided policies have significantly impacted the implementation of inclusion in the UAE.

As pointed out in the literature review (Chapter Two), the KSA's MoE has committed to developing inclusive education for all learners in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Almoussa, 2010) and the Salamanca Statement (Alhudaithi, 2015). Thus, it is possible that inclusion was poorly implemented because schools were required to open up for all learners without being given guidance for implementing inclusion. As Kraska and Boyle (2014) and Hodge (2014) stated, the lack of guidance has produced a general shortage of people experienced in the practical aspects of implementing inclusion. After all, agreement with the policy of inclusion in principle does not necessarily imply that the policy will be implemented in practice.

This claim is supported by Hettiarachchi and Das (2014) who argued that the absence of clear, definitive inclusive policies has created a gap between policy and the implementation of inclusion. They argued that inclusion requires more than governmental commitment. Indeed, inclusion is much more than a piece of paper or a signed document; it is a policy that fundamentally changes practices. Miles and Singal (2010) support this claim, finding that inclusive frameworks, such as the Salamanca Statement, have not adequately demonstrated how to implement inclusion for all children. These frameworks have produced greatly varying views and a general lack of clarity around implementation procedures.

Divergent views about inclusion could be the result of linguistic differences. For example, the teachers often used the term 'inclusion' to describe 'integration'. Moreover, their definition of 'proper inclusion' involved children merely being partially included. For example, Shahd said, *'if I were in charge, I would apply partial inclusion'*. In Arabic, the term '*Damjj*' is used to describe inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming; this might therefore cause native Arabic speakers to be unable to differentiate between inclusion and integration. In Arabic,

‘inclusion’, ‘integration’, and ‘mainstreaming’ have the same definition, are used interchangeably, and are typically used to describe integration (Alhudaithi, 2015). This suggests that the Saudi legislation for inclusion does not differentiate between inclusion and integration and, hence, tends to prescribe integration, not inclusion. This claim is supported by Kang et al. (2015), who found that the legislation for inclusion in Korea does not distinguish between ‘inclusion’ and ‘integration’ and that, importantly, has caused inclusion to be improperly implemented.

### **5.1.2 Integration as inclusion.**

The teachers implied that their schools had implemented integration instead of inclusion. For example, Hibah and Tala explicitly stated that, in their kindergarten, what they had ‘*was not inclusion*’. This was evidenced by the presence of the SPE teachers in the classroom and by the emphasis on teaching children with SEN in special sessions. The way that the kindergarten operated reflected the medical model of disability, which treats disabilities as deficiencies and seeks to ‘cure’ children of their disabilities with special services. This was reflected in the discourse of normalization with children with SEN being seen as deviating from society’s norms and therefore ‘abnormal’.

In the kindergarten, integration was applied under the guise of inclusion, and misunderstandings about inclusion were widespread. This finding is supported by Paliokosta and Blandford (2010), who found that misconceptions about inclusion can lead schools to practise integration instead of inclusion and operate under the medical model of disability. In addition, it is validated by Farr (2018) that, in many cases, schools seem to be inclusive while they are operating under the medical model of disability in which the focus is on disability and

deficiency.

The inability to distinguish between inclusion and integration not only causes confusion in practice; it also creates conflicts between the international policy of inclusion and particular nations' perspectives of inclusion. For example, Malak said that her kindergarten did not apply inclusion according to the international policies. In fact, she believed that the kindergarten's inclusive programme contradicted the international policies and that, as practised, no one benefited from inclusion. This finding is supported by Alharbi and Madhesh (2018), who found that even though inclusive education in the KSA was based on international educational policies, it failed during the implementation stage. The researchers asserted that the foundation of the KSA's inclusive educational policies was not compatible with the foundation of the international policies. In other words, the KSA's educational policies are based on the deficiency perspective and on the medical model of disability, which views impairment as an individual problem, not a social problem. Consequently, integration is applied under the name of inclusion and many children are left behind. It is clear that cultural differences in how disabilities and inclusion are understood will determine the success of inclusion in particular countries.

While studying inclusion in Lithuania, Genova (2015) found that inclusion was poorly implemented due to the conflict between societal views of disability and the views implicit in the policy of inclusion. Contradictions between the international policies and their implementation in specific cultural contexts could be due to linguistic differences and ignorance about the contexts themselves. These claims are supported by Hauerwas and Mahon (2018), who found that linguistic differences have caused countries to develop different interpretations of inclusion and divergent views about disability, and Frankel et al. (2010), who argued that failing to account for particular social contexts negatively impacts the implementation of inclusion. Consequently,

though there is significant agreement about inclusion as a policy, 'inclusion' itself is understood and applied differently in different countries.

### **5.1.3 Confusion about inclusion.**

The teachers' stories reflected not only confusion about the differences between inclusion and integration but also confusion about the concept of inclusion itself. For example, Hibah, Malak, and Tala stated that inclusion is a '*right*', and Shahd argued that, through inclusion, children with SEN would be able to '*socially participate*' and become '*full members of their society*'. The kindergarten's logo advocates for inclusion as a right and difference as a positive defining trait. The beliefs of teachers reflect the social model of disability and its core philosophy that inclusion is a fundamental right for children.

However, in their stories, the teachers also demanded services such as definite diagnoses, assessments, technological and professional assistance, and the partial inclusion of children with SEN. The kindergarten itself is structured and organised in a way that contradicts the claims in its own logo. For example, there are special classrooms for children with SEN; children are pulled out to receive special sessions during corner time and playground time, while it could be the best time to foster interaction between the children and their peers. It seems that the kindergarten has failed to live up to its own aspirations. Ultimately, confusion surrounded the practical aspects of inclusion, and inclusion seemed to be accepted only in theory.

This failure could be connected to the negative views about disability common throughout the KSA and the significant influence that these views have on inclusive practices. This claim is supported by Tiwari et al. (2015), who found that teachers in India had conflicting perspectives about inclusion and accepted inclusion only in theory. Similarly, Hettiarachchi and



Das (2014) found that teachers had contradictory opinions about inclusion and were often unable to identify the differences between inclusion and integration. They found that although the teachers understood the rationale behind inclusion being a right, they attributed the qualities of integration to inclusion. In addition, Jordan et al. (2010) found that inclusion was accepted only conceptually among elementary general teachers in Canada.

All of the aforementioned studies argued that these contradictions stemmed from deeply ingrained, negative sociocultural beliefs about disability. It seems that, despite the teachers' strong beliefs that inclusion is a right and that differences should not be viewed negatively, the cultural beliefs that accompany the medical model of disability continue to dominate and, consequently, are reflected in the practice of integration. This claim is supported by Oliver (2013), who argued the dominance of medical model of disability impacts how inclusion is implemented and is largely the reason for the social model's limited influence.

The inability to distinguish between inclusion and integration can explain why the teachers believed that they were given '*false promises*' and were manipulated by the MoE's supervisors and the school principal. For example, Njood said that they were promised that they would '*not be responsible*' for the included children and that the children would be educated in separate classrooms by SPE teachers. These promises, however, do not reflect inclusion. Emphasising special services and '*fixing*' children profoundly reflects the medical model of disability and clearly demonstrates how inclusion has been misunderstood by teachers and policy representatives such as the MoE's supervisors. The promises also reflect how embedded societal beliefs about disability can affect how educational systems operate. As Lloyd (2008) wrote, the inability to understand the multi-layered nature of inclusion can lead to exclusionary practices and the failure of inclusive policies. As Goodley (2014) suggested, normative societies react to

uncertainty about disabilities in conflicting ways, and these contradictory responses create tensions within an educational system, causing it to focus on the children's differences and providing services to compensate for these differences. In my study, the teachers focused on the children's differences (often expressed as 'disruptive behaviour') but did not have access to services to compensate for differences.

Ainscow and Kaplan (2009), and Drudy and Kinsella (2009) suggested that the success of inclusion depends on a country's social and political systems. Therefore, as Altamimi et al. (2015) wrote, if the KSA's social and political systems continue to be mired in the medical model of disability, then contradictions between inclusion and the reality in which it is implemented are inevitable. This point was supported by Vygotsky et al. (1993), who argued that the way that society perceives children with SEN as social abnormalities creates an educational system oriented toward disability as a principle in which disability becomes the foundation and the focus of education. According to Vygotsky et al. (1993) without reforming the societal norms related to children with SEN and establishing positive social aims, it is impossible to create an inclusive educational system.

#### **5.1.4 Flawed implementation.**

Four teachers (Deem, Shahd, Malak, and Tala) spoke about how the '*flawed*' implementation of inclusion influenced their ability to implement inclusion in practice and emotionally accept inclusion. The implementation was flawed in the sense that inclusion was implemented randomly without preparation and clear guidance. The teachers said that they were asked to immediately move from the concept to the actual practice of inclusion without sufficient consideration about what this would require in terms of classroom organization, curriculum

planning, and their own professional development.

This abrupt shift can be attributed to the unwillingness of policy makers, such as MoE's supervisors, to implement inclusion through appropriate funding and policies. It can also be related to the policymakers' ignorance about the factors necessary for implementing inclusion successfully and to the failure to understand that inclusion is a process. Alahmadi (2009) supports this claim as she found that, in the KSA, the unwillingness of policymakers to implement inclusion has weakened inclusive efforts. The teachers were required to implement inclusion alone and were not guided. Similarly, Mbwambo (2015) found that teachers in Tanzania were forced by the government to implement inclusion even though they were not properly informed about how inclusion should be implemented. In both studies, flawed implementations and the lack of guidance caused the teachers to develop negative attitudes about inclusion.

The unwillingness of policymakers and MoE's supervisors to implement inclusion and provide guidance can be explained by the fact that ministries in the KSA share responsibilities. For example, according to Alahmadi (2009), Almousa (2010) and Alquraini (2011), the Ministry of Health is responsible for providing physical and occupational therapy for children with SEN and the Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for providing rehabilitation and social services. The MoE is responsible primarily for education and placing students in schools. With the medical model of disability dominant in the KSA and the view that children with SEN need rehabilitation services commonly held, the division of responsibilities could make the policymakers and MoE's supervisors unwilling to implement inclusion. As Miles and Singal (2010) wrote, in nations where children with SEN are seen as uneducable, it is not thought that the MoE should be responsible for them. Instead, it is thought that the Ministries of Health and

Social Affairs should be solely responsible.

However, this claim does not imply that the ministries' responsibilities should be clearly separated. Instead, it suggests the necessity of accounting for the ontology of a society in which knowledge about disability is oriented toward deficiency and sickness and of seeing how this ontology influences how responsibilities toward children with SEN are understood by and divided between social institutions. In a society that perceives disability as a sickness and a deficiency, it would be difficult to understand why the MoE should focus on inclusion. The negative views of disabilities and the inability to see beyond the physical impairment of the children have created an exclusionary culture. Achieving inclusion in such cultures is a challenge and requires reform movements and cultural deconstructions of its hidden beliefs and contradictions about disability. As Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011) asserted, there is a need for considerable cultural deconstruction and restructuring of the culture of disablism.

In the kindergarten, the flawed implementation and the contradictory views about inclusion caused the teachers to question why they were implementing inclusion. For example, Tala said that, because the purpose of inclusion was unclear, she started to wonder '*if it was implemented only to receive recognition*'. Njood had similar feelings, saying that '*inclusion was implemented just to be able to say that it was applied*'. Consequently, they believed that inclusion was applied only in theory and was concerned merely with including a certain number of children. It seems that the kindergarten's manifestation of inclusion consisted of merely ensuring that the children were physically present, not genuinely involving them. This is a feature of integration, not inclusion.

According to Cameron (2014), integration is ‘a state to be achieved by setting targets in terms of numbers’ (p. 79). Thus, the focus on the number of included children confirms that integration, not inclusion, was implemented. This finding is supported by Slee (2013), who argued that, because many international educational systems have focused on providing resources and including more children with SEN, it has become increasingly common to separate children with SEN from other children. The implementation of integration instead of inclusion is likely an unintended consequence of ingrained social beliefs about disabilities. Resemble, Graham and Slee (2008) noted that inclusion was comprehended, in the Australian state of Queensland, as the creation of an educational system that allows children to be physically present, though not necessarily included. The failure to build an inclusive educational system was the result of the normative cultural assumptions that formed and directed policy.

As outlined in the literature review chapter, the MoE (2018c) defined inclusive education as: ‘a comprehensive, modern approach to education that aims to meet the needs of all learners, regardless of their disabilities, within general education schools through consultation with a multidisciplinary team and the provision of adaptive measures and facilities for students according to personalised educational programmes’ (para. 1). According to this, inclusion in the KSA is understood as the placement of children with SEN in general schools that meet their needs with specialist-guided individualised educational programmes. The emphasis on providing individualised educational plans and on the number of included children reflects, as Vygotsky et al. (1993) pointed out, an educational system that focuses on disability as a principle; consequently, this system is one that isolates children. Runswick-Cole (2011) supported this claim, arguing that ‘although there may have been an inclusive education policy rhetoric, this rhetoric is rooted in conceptual incongruities which, rather than promoting inclusion, undermine

an inclusive approach to education' (p. 112). The negative views of disability and children in the KSA represent the conceptual incongruities that are rooted within the culture and instead of implementing and promoting inclusion, implemented and promoted exclusion.

Therefore, as Vygotsky et al. (1993) asserted, changing perspectives about deficiency is critical to efforts to achieve inclusive education. To do so, education needs to emphasise, as Barton (1997) wrote, the 'how, where and why, and with what consequences, we educate all pupils' (p. 234). Inclusive education entails 'broad, systemic change' (Pearson, 2015a, p.412); it also requires significant changes to educational practices, which could very well cause discomfort to the involved parties; these changes would require revisiting assumptions that are rooted in particular contexts and not often considered when new policies are introduced. Revisiting these assumptions might provoke a broader reconsideration of an educational system that has failed to anticipate its responsibilities to the children who it has included (Goodley, 2014).

#### **5.1.5 No benefits from inclusion.**

The teachers' narratives offer consistent evidence that the KSA's educational system has failed to anticipate its responsibilities for children with SEN. The teachers' narratives reflected how inclusion, when improperly implemented, can negatively impact children. For example, Tala said, '*the children, who were supposed to benefit from inclusion, were the only ones who were paying for the adults' mistakes. The children were suffering, and they [the supervisors] were in their high towers*'. The other teachers also indicated that the children did not benefit from inclusion and were, in fact, being victimised by an educational system that did not understand inclusion.

This harm is the consequence of broader sociocultural beliefs that hold disability to be an individual problem located within the children. According to these beliefs, children with SEN, who are unable to meet the social expectations of normality and demonstrate the abilities that other children commonly have, are labelled as purely disabled and nothing more; consequently, depriving them of opportunities to benefit socially, emotionally and cognitively is justified. Vygotsky et al. (1993) supported this claim, writing that social expectations influence whether or not children with SEN are able to access certain experiences and acquire skills for their healthy development.

The teachers' narratives provided ample evidence that many children did not benefit from inclusion. For example, Deem said, '*the damages of inclusion outweighed its benefits. Inclusion was unjust and harmful*'. This suggests that, in addition to not benefiting, the children with SEN were actually harmed. They were excluded, isolated, and ignored. This finding is similar to the findings of Runswick-Cole (2011) and Pivik et al. (2002), who found that children with SEN in England and Canada were frequently excluded, ignored, and bullied in ostensibly inclusive schools.

This finding can be attributed to the negative sociocultural beliefs and the medical view of disability that are embedded in Saudi culture. In the KSA, children with SEN are considered to be deficient and abnormal, and the deviation from commonly accepted notions of normality is considered to be sufficient justification for depriving them of their rights to be included and to be full members of society. As Alrubiyea (2010) found, Saudi social beliefs constitute a significant barrier that prevent children with SEN from taking advantage of their rights.

This finding is also supported by studies that have found that normative societies frequently focus on abnormality and, therefore, treat those who diverge from the norm unjustly and unequally (Goodley et al., 2018). This finding also provides evidence that the Saudi educational system, which operates mainly under the medical model of disability, exerts an exclusionary influence. As suggested by Clough and Corbett (2000) and Gyarmathy (2014), the way that society views disability is reflected in the way that society treats individuals with SEN. Vygotsky et al. (1993) argued that disability is, fundamentally, a social notion and how it is viewed is reflected in how societies treat people with SEN. Consequently, being considered abnormal (and, thus, failing to fit in) would result in exclusion.

Vygotsky et al. (1993) claimed that negative cultural views of disabilities and the impairment-centric focus frequently harm children more than the impairments themselves. He argued that social factors could cause children with SEN to deteriorate and develop secondary disabilities, which have the potential to negatively impact higher psychological functions. His writings, ultimately, lend support to the teachers' feelings that the children were harmed by how they were treated in the kindergarten's inclusive programme.

In addition, other studies have found that children with SEN do not feel that they belong in the classroom and often feel excluded. The feelings of non-affiliation consequently affect their 'personal well-being' (Goodley, 2014, p. 10). Vygotsky believed that, as stated by Dixon and Verenikina (2007), social beliefs have the potential to significantly limit children's development and can actively produce the delays and differences that are characteristic of many people with SEN. This can be seen in the way the teachers identified the 'disruptive behaviours' of children with autism. They understood these as problems presented by the children, rather than the possible result of the environment creating problems for the children.



The teachers' narratives suggested that the 'normal children' did not benefit from inclusion and were, in fact, harmed. For example, Shahd said, '*the normal children were neglected. Honestly, they were oppressed*'. The teachers said that, facing the demands of inclusion, they did not have the time to meet the 'normal' children's needs and, consequently, neglected them. This finding is supported by Cagran and Schmidt (2011), who found that teachers tended to pay less attention to the 'normal children' after the inclusion of children with SEN.

These are likely the result of the poor implementation of inclusion and the lack of clear guidelines. The teachers mentioned that the DKC does not provide any guideline on how to include children with SEN in class curriculum and activities. There is a curriculum document to guide teachers' practices, but there are no guidelines or strategies provided in this curriculum for teachers to include children with SEN in the classroom activities. The structural weakness is that the MoE's policies do not adequately support teachers or children. This shows that there are many layers of problems and omissions in Saudi's inclusive policy, and teachers have no understanding of what they are required to do in practical settings. The findings of this study suggest the existence of a chain that represents the interconnected consequences of societal views about disability. This chain reflects the complicated reality and the interwoven barriers that challenge inclusive efforts. Hauerwas and Mahon (2018) support this claim, asserting that inclusion is complex because it reflects societal attitudes about disability.

The 'normal children' did not benefit from inclusion even though the teachers believed that inclusion would cause them to form positive attitudes about and make them more accepting of differences. However, according to the teachers, the way that inclusion was implemented prevented the 'normal children' from benefiting. They did not become more accepting of their

peers, and they were not more likely to interact and form friendships with the children with SEN. Instead, they obviously avoided them. This finding contradicts Carrington et al. (2016), who found that ‘normal children’ benefited from inclusion by developing moral values such as acceptance and tolerance.

This finding may reflect the teachers’ interactions with the children with SEN. In practice, they tended to avoid them. Consequently, it is possible that the ‘normal children’ imitated their teachers and modelled their behaviour. According to Smagorinsky (2012), Vygotsky believed that adults played an important role in the formation of children’s social behaviours, and that children model their behaviours after exemplary adults. This claim is supported by Keefe and Moore (2004), who found that teachers function as role models and, hence, how they interact with children with SEN is critical. Similarly, Sapon-Shevin (2007) argued that children learn from their teachers how to be empathetic and respect differences. If teachers avoid interacting with children with SEN, then it is easy to see why ‘normal children’ do not learn the values that underpin inclusion.

The teachers’ tendency to avoid interacting with the children with SEN could be the result of inherited social beliefs that portray children with SEN as deficient and abnormal; prejudices could cause the teachers to avoid interacting with them. As Namrata (2011) wrote, teachers are significantly influenced by commonly held social beliefs about disability and, thus, tend to exclude children with SEN. These beliefs were expressed in some of the images and metaphors teachers used such as *‘I am only a teacher. I am not a doctor or superhero. I am not a magician’*.

The extent to which the teachers interacted with the children with SEN depended on the type of disability. The teachers talked about the challenges of interacting with the children with autism. They said that they were not able to form relationships with them or understand what they needed. This finding is supported by Robertson et al. (2003), who found that teachers tended to interact less often with children with autism, especially, children with more challenging behavioural problems as those behaviours added challenges to the teachers.

It seems, as well, that the teachers were unable to look beyond the children's impairments. Indeed, the children with SEN were not considered to be children at all and were instead seen only as carriers of disabilities. As Curran and Runswick-Cole (2014) wrote, children with SEN are often viewed 'in problematic terms and without any expectations of development or, even, of having childhood at all' (p. 1618). Vygotsky made a similar argument when he suggested the issue of children with SEN must be presented and understood as a social problem because the disability is usually perceived as dominant and fundamental: 'the greatest mistake occurs when one sees in abnormal children only disease, forgetting that in addition to illness, they still have a normal psychological life' (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 80).

The consequences of forgetting children's childhood and focusing on their deficiencies and weaknesses are linked with empathy. The teachers talked extensively about their feelings of empathy, mercy, and pity for the children and their families. For example, Haifa said explicitly that she '*empathised with the children and their families*' and that her assistance was '*based on mercy only*'. Hibah said that she felt '*sorry*' for the children, and Malak said she felt '*sorry*' for the SPE teachers because they majored in SPE. These findings reflect the embedded social beliefs that hold disabilities to be tragic and view people with SEN to be pitiable. Goodley and

Roets (2008) wrote that the word ‘impairment’ designates ‘social death, inertia, lack, limitation, deficit and tragedy’ (p. 239).

In Saudi society, disability is viewed as tragic and the proper domain of charity. These views are deeply ingrained in the culture and were, in fact, the trigger for the establishment of SPE in the KSA. Services for people with SEN were initially provided charitably and, until present, charities and private organisations occupied important positions in the provision of services for people with SEN. Alahmadi (2009) supported this claim, acknowledging the crucial role that charities played in the establishment and development of SPE in the KSA. This claim is also supported by Hettiarachchi and Das (2014), who found that teachers’ negative perceptions about children with SEN were linked to the view that charities were responsible for addressing disabilities.

These deeply rooted beliefs about disability caused the teachers to pity the children and forget about their childhoods. This claim is supported by Goodley et al. (2018), who argued that disability is connected to the culturally antique views of revulsion, sympathy, and panic and, therefore, that people with SEN face the risk of being invalidated by their ‘disabling worlds’ (p. 208). As a result, this invalidation would prevent children with SEN from benefiting from inclusion. This relates to Vygotsky’s perspectives about the potential of social surroundings to create an environment founded on sympathy and denial, which disables children by instilling in them feelings of inferiority. Vygotsky also argued that the propensity for sympathy and charity and the view that impairment is a deficiency and a sickness has fundamentally limited the education of children with SEN (Vygotsky et al., 1993).

### **5.1.6 Exclusion instead of inclusion.**

Vygotsky was correct in his claims, and these continue to have relevance decades after his original work. Cultural views about children with SEN have limited the potential of inclusive education and affected how it is implemented. Exclusion figured prominently in my observations and in the teachers' narratives, present in how the kindergarten operated, how the teachers and the children with SEN interacted, and how the children with SEN and their peers interacted. For example, in my field notes, the phrase '*this is not inclusion*' was repeated a lot. Exclusion was reflected in the teachers' isolation, in the prominence of the withdrawal model, and in the segregated classrooms. Put simply, it was impossible to find anything in the kindergarten that reflected inclusion other than the board with the logo near the school's entrance.

All the teachers said that they were sad that they were excluded from inclusion. For example, Tala and Njood said that '*teachers were excluded from the process*', and Hibah and Deem said that '*no one listened*'. This finding is supported by Wood (1998), who found that, in the USA, teachers tended to be excluded from the process of inclusion. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) also found that, in England, secondary education teachers were often excluded. Teachers were unprepared conceptually for inclusion; their foundational knowledge was not sufficient for them to develop inclusive practices. The exclusion of the teachers provides evidence that exclusionary practices still existed within schools.

The continued existence of exclusionary practices could be the result of the educational system itself, which was imposed after the government committed to an international policy that contradicted the country's cultural beliefs and institutional structures. Inclusion, as Runswick-Cole (2011) wrote, requires structural and cultural changes. In the case of the kindergarten, inclusion was implemented poorly, and neither its structure nor its cultural beliefs were changed.

Saudi culture is dominated by authoritarian approaches. In the KSA, leaders are responsible for leading the implementation of policies and procedures, for identifying aims, and for choosing the appropriate approach to achieve these aims (which also would not let others participate and feel autonomous). Ainscow and Sandill (2010) argued that leadership is essential for implementing inclusion. Schools' principals play a crucial role in providing leadership in inclusive schools. The inclusive cultures that they create influence the perceptions and practices of the teachers and students.

In addition, inclusive efforts have also faced negative cultural beliefs about disability and this was evident in the attitudes of the families and the teachers. Thus, schools are simultaneously expected to be inclusive while continuing to practise exclusion. The KSA's institutional structure and cultural beliefs contradict the concepts that underpin inclusion. As long as changes are not made, it should be expected that exclusionary practices will continue. As Slee and Allan (2001) wrote, inclusion is a social movement that requires structural and cultural alterations; without these changes, exclusion would continue to exist. Consequently, if the teachers themselves experience exclusion and are excluded from the process, how, then, is it possible for them to practise inclusion? The kindergarten's structure and the social relations present within were inherently exclusionary. Inclusion was, indeed, divorced from the context (Ainscow, 2007).

Institutional structures and cultural beliefs influenced not only how the kindergarten practised inclusion but also how the teachers practised inclusion. Their teaching practices embodied exclusion and, noticeably, did not give the children with SEN opportunities to be actively involved. Every teacher withdrew physically and emotionally from them. For example, Muna and Tala withdrew physically by avoiding looking at the children and by leaving the

classroom to get the SPE teachers. Hibah withdrew physically and emotionally and left the SPE teachers to care for the children. Exclusion was also embodied in the failure to recognise the presence and strengths of children with SEN, which only served to discourage their participation. This confirms Vygotsky's claim that children with SEN are usually excluded and isolated within their environment when 'everything is calculated for and adopted to the defect' (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 85). In my study, children with SEN were excluded and isolated and there were no particular strategies to support them in any way other than them being removed from the classrooms if they were disruptive.

Embodiment, as Curran and Runswick-Cole (2014) wrote, is 'a social practice' (p. 1622). In cultures that emphasise normality and ability, teachers are ignorant about disability and, when they are confronted with it, respond with silence. The teachers had clear conceptions of what 'normal children' and their teachers should do, but these clear distinctions did not include children with SEN. Instead, they were viewed as abnormal and beyond the teachers' capacity to provide care and education.

Watson (2012) suggested that children's differences are usually ignored and hidden. This is supported by Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011), who found that cultures of disablism have clear conceptions of what constitutes a normal childhood and what constitutes an abnormal one. Therefore, this finding reflects the influence of cultural beliefs that are rooted in the medical view of disability. This model views children with SEN as inherently deficient and sick and requiring special assistance. With the dominance of the medical model in the KSA, the teachers felt unqualified to interact with and teach children with SEN.

The kindergarten's structure emphasised the concept of abnormality and the necessity of being an expert to include children with SEN. As discussed earlier, this was reflected in the exclusion of the teachers from the inclusive programme. In the kindergarten, the SPE teachers were almost entirely responsible for the children with SEN. As a consequence, the ECE teachers came to believe that they were unqualified to teach children with SEN. This could explain their exclusionary practices. Buell et al. (1999) found that most of the general education teachers in their study believed that they were unqualified to teach children with SEN. The teachers emphasised that including the children required professional assistance and special training. This is supported by Naraian (2010), who found that the provision of special and professional assistance has encouraged the development of categories of differences, not inclusion. Further, Slee (2013) argued the focus on assessment and the provision of special services maintains exclusionary practices. This focus causes regular teachers to feel unqualified and, thus, continue to engage in exclusionary practices.

This finding relates to Vygotsky's beliefs about the consequences of misunderstanding the nature of 'disability' and focusing on impairments. According to him, these attitudes create educational settings that fail to recognise children's strengths. Rather than creating schools that help children 'escape from their isolated worlds ... [the] school usually develops in them tendencies which direct them toward greater and greater isolation and which enhance their separatism' (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 65). Indeed, the children experienced a great deal of exclusion in the kindergarten. They were isolated during activities and even in how they sat during circle time. The children with SEN sat near each other and were not allowed to interact with their peers. In all three classrooms, the SPE teachers sat behind them and held on to them. It was a clear metaphor of exclusion. This practice reflects the view that children with SEN are



abnormal and the desire to normalise them (for example by thinking that children with autism could be ‘trained’ before they enter the kindergarten). The SPE teachers regulated their movements because their behaviours did not conform to the behaviours of normal children. This is supported by Davis and Watson (2001), who found that teachers tend to control the movements of children with SEN to teach them normal behaviours. They argued that this practice is common in contexts that focus on categorising differences and impairments rather than understanding and accepting these differences. The idea of children fitting or not fitting into the environment was shared by all teachers, and they did not have the resources to change the environments to fit the children.

#### **5.1.7 Experiences of abuse.**

Due to the focus on normality, the SPE teachers frequently abused and aggressively handled the children with SEN. For example, Hibah said that the SPE teachers ‘*pulled them [the children] by their hands. Not only that! She sometimes raised her voice when talking to the children and changed her facial expressions*’. Even during my observations, I witnessed hostile behaviours. This cannot be tolerated, but it can be attributed to the cultural views that emphasise ability and normality and, consequently, fail to see past children’s disabilities and expect positive outcomes.

This is supported by Hughes (1999), who argued that the persecution of people with SEN is associated with how society understands disability and impairment (as cited in Goodley, 2014). Similarly, Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011) found that children with SEN experienced abuse and hostility because they were placed beyond the standards of normality. Vygotsky et al. (1993) asserted that disability is reinforced and nurtured by particular social conditions. The

extent to which children's disabilities are reinforced (and, hence, are 'normal') depends on the extent to which they have adapted to their social environment.

The exclusion and abuse that the children with SEN experienced in the kindergarten reflects the dominance of disablism in Saudi culture. There seems to be a profoundly ontological orientation toward disability in Saudi culture that has significantly impacted inclusion. The way that knowledge about disability is constructed in Saudi culture has led the kindergarten to reject differences and advocate for normality. Rather than embracing differences and respecting diversity, the kindergarten emphasises these differences and seek to eradicate them through normalisation.

#### **5.1.8 Summary of the section.**

These findings clearly indicate that there is tension between the policy of inclusion, which embraces differences, and the Saudi context, which perceives differences as abnormalities. The teachers' narratives revealed many discrepancies between the international policy of inclusion and the reality of the Saudi context. The narratives also highlighted the significant impact that the improper implementation had on the children. They were excluded, ignored, abused, and further disabled. It is, as Vygotsky asserted, the consequence of 'the incongruence between the child's individual psychological structure and the structure of the cultural forms' (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2012, p. 444).

Consequently, when implementing the international policy of inclusion at national levels, it is necessary to account for cultural differences among countries, including differences between their conceptual and linguistic interpretations of disability and inclusion. This study's findings not only indicated that inclusion was poorly implemented in the KSA and that many

interpretations of inclusion existed; it also found substantial evidence that the children were negatively impacted by the poor implementation. The failure of the implementation put the rights of the children with SEN at risk; they were treated unjustly and harmed. Inclusion in the kindergarten, as Slee and Allan (2001) wrote, seemed to have a ‘ghostly presence, since inclusion appears to be both there and not there’ (p. 181). Despite the laudable intentions behind the implementation, the reality of inclusion is, unfortunately, far behind its philosophy.

This section discussed the implementation of inclusion in the kindergarten, as reflected in the teachers’ narratives and the field notes. It sought to answer this study’s first research question, which involved exploring how inclusion was implemented in the kindergarten. The next section seeks to answer the second research question. It will discuss the barriers that the teachers encountered in their experiences with inclusion. These barriers, numerous and significant, hindered the development and the practice of inclusion in the kindergarten.

## **5.2 The Barriers to Inclusion in the Kindergarten**

It is important not to stigmatise teachers for any perceived and actual failures to implement inclusion. The teachers’ narratives reflected the barriers they faced during their experiences with inclusion. The barriers included culture—expressed to be a highly significant barrier—negative views on childhood, childhood education and autism, and a lack of understanding related to disabilities and inclusion. The teachers also mentioned other barriers, such as a lack of preparation, a lack of training, a lack of defined roles and responsibilities, lack of follow ups, a lack of support and a lack of collaboration. To answer the second research question about what are the barriers to inclusion in the kindergarten, I refer to past studies as discussed in the literature review chapter about the barriers to inclusion. This section discusses

these barriers in depth and shows how they intersect in ways that construct and intensify forms of exclusion.

### **5.2.1 Culture as a barrier.**

The teachers' narratives highlighted culture as a significant barrier to implementing inclusion and as the main influencer of their experiences with inclusion. For example, Muna said, *'our society is ignorant! We have an issue with understanding disability'*. Also, Hibah stated that they *'do not have a culture that understands children with SEN'*. Consequently, the teachers attributed improper implementation to the culture and expressed that the understanding of disability and inclusion contributed negatively to the way inclusion was implemented in kindergarten. This finding is in line with the findings of Alhudaithi (2015) and Alrubiyea (2010), who reported that in the KSA, the culture and the social norms were the greatest barriers to implementing inclusion and to fulfilling the rights of children with SEN. Moreover, Stone-McDonald (2012) affirmed that the negative cultural beliefs in Tanzania in which a disability is viewed as a curse have greatly influenced the educational services provided to children with SEN as well as their inclusion in society.

In Saudi culture, a disability is viewed as a test of patience from Allah, as a punishment for a mistake that parents made in the past and as a result of the *'evil eye'*. These negative views could lead to the unfavourable treatment of children with SEN, such as segregating them and depriving them of opportunities to learn, interact and participate as other children do. This is supported by Alquraini (2011), who affirmed that due to Saudi cultural beliefs that a disability is a punishment and a test of patience, children with SEN in the KSA are often ignored, deprived from practising, or being given access to, their rights and viewed as dependent individuals.

Disability Studies support this interpretation in which it is believed that negative cultural attitudes and beliefs result in regarding children with SEN as dependent and powerless, and thus they are deprived of their rights to be fully participating members of society (Hosking, 2008).

As Vygotsky affirmed, a disability is a social notion that has become ‘socially unavoidable’ (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 83). If the culture devalues children with SEN and views them negatively, it is difficult to construct inclusive environments in all areas of children’s lives. Cultural values and attitudes shape the way society responds to differences. According to Disability Studies, the consequence of negative social views is reflected in the way individuals with SEN are regarded in their society as tragic, vulnerable and dependent (Hosking, 2008). As the teachers expressed in their narratives, social reconstruction and awareness of disabilities are essential before implementing inclusion in schools. This is in line with Vygotsky who asserted the essentiality ‘of fitting in societally, of being included and accepted, in the midst of critical biological and developmental difference’ (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 75).

#### ***5.2.1.1 Inclusion is a burden.***

Cultural influence was reflected in the teachers’ narratives. For example, children with SEN were perceived as a burden to the teachers and their families. Two of the teachers, Haifa and Hibah, expressed their feelings of sympathy for the families of children with SEN. Malak, on the other hand, sympathised with the SPE teachers for majoring and specialising in SPE and for teaching these children. Based on these examples, it seems that teaching and caring for children with SEN was perceived as an encumbrance due to cultural beliefs regarding the difficulties of caring for and educating children with SEN. This finding aligns with that of Stone-Macdonald

(2012), who argued that, due to negative cultural beliefs regarding disabilities in Tanzania, children with SEN were considered burdens to their families.

The sense that a disability is a burden could be attributed to the negative cultural views of children with SEN. In the Saudi culture, a disability is viewed as a sickness and a deficiency; therefore, children with SEN are viewed as dependent and in need of assistance from others. Farr (2018) stated that the notion that children with SEN need additional assistance is grounded in inclusive education. Inclusion is ingrained in the concept of dependency as a consequence of the medical views of disabilities.

As suggested by Disability Studies, when individuals with SEN are viewed negatively, they are perceived as dependent and vulnerable and thus in need of others' assistance (Hosking, 2008). The need for continuous assistance could cause others to feel burdened and could cause children to develop feelings of dependency on others. Vygotsky et al. (1993) believed that through interactions with others, individuals become who they are. He affirmed that people who interact with children with SEN are often those who create a disabling environment of sympathy and refusal along with other negative views that could lead to feelings of dependency among children with SEN (Smagorinsky, 2012). This contrasts with the view that appropriate assistance and support can enable children to develop independence and to live full and meaningful lives. In this way, children with SEN would not perceive themselves as dependent unless they are treated as dependent by society.

### ***5.2.1.2 Children with autism are a burden.***

Saudi culture has stigmatised children with autism and has portrayed them as burdens on society. Muna said that in Saudi society *'disabilities are stigmatised. If a family had a child with autism, they would not talk about or mention it to anyone'*. This statement reflects profound beliefs regarding disabilities that are ingrained in the medical model of disabilities and that fail to look beyond the children's biological impairments. It not only reflects the general beliefs about disabilities but also reflects the way autism is viewed in the Saudi culture. Autism is viewed as a result of the *'evil eye'*, a punishment and a test for patience; it is socially and culturally an issue of shame. These negative beliefs have influenced the way children with autism are viewed and understood. Alqahtani (2012) confirmed that the negative views of autism and its causation have influenced the understanding of autism and have thus prevented seeking early intervention services. He found that Saudi parents considered the cause of autism to be a cultural causation rather than a genetic or medical causation. As a consequence, parents have rarely attributed autism to genetic causes and are often unconvinced that the medical treatment for autism would be successful. Moreover, there is little understanding of the range of behaviours that children may show, or the range of strategies that may be helpful to support their participation and inclusion.

The teachers' narratives indicated that the belief that a disability is a burden is mainly related to the inclusion of children with autism. For example, Haifa said, *'inclusion was a challenge but not with the children with hearing and speech disorders'*. Njood believed that the inclusion of children with autism was one difficult challenge that she encountered. The teachers mentioned that children with autism required more assistance, attention and knowledge than children with hearing and speech disorders. Knowledgeable and trained teachers are required to

educate these children. It seems that negative social views of autism and a lack of understanding have caused the teachers to consider the inclusion of children with autism a challenge and to view it as a burden. This is similar to the findings of Alhudaithi (2015), who indicated that general teachers were challenged by the inclusion of children with autism and were unsupportive of the practice. She attributed this to the inability of Saudi teachers, parents and students to understand autism, which has led to the failure to manage children with challenging behaviours and to fully include them. Alhudaithi (2015) acknowledged that one of the major challenges of including children with autism results from social obstacles both within and outside schools. However, what teachers may see as 'challenging behaviours' may for children be their responses to challenging environments. As this study has shown, few adjustments were made to the classroom space, the curriculum, or the social support provided for the children with autism.

Likewise, a study by Robertson et al. (2003) showed that teachers in the US were unable to interact or to form relationships with children with autism in their classrooms. The feelings of frustration and being burdened increased among the teachers with students who exhibited more challenging behaviours. Other studies (Alhabet, 2014; Cagran & Schmidt, 2011; Gal et al., 2010; Rakap & Kaczmarek, 2010; Soodak et al., 1998) have indicated that children with learning, emotional and behavioural disabilities are viewed negatively and present challenges in inclusive classrooms. These findings resemble the findings of this study in that they reflect the dominance of the concepts of normality and normalisation.

It seems that children who are not able to behave in a conventional way, and who are not able to fit in with 'normal children', are often viewed as burdens and thus might be excluded. As Runswick-Cole (2011) found the concept of ableism, which explains the attitude that children must have to fit in with 'normal children', has negatively impacted the inclusive experiences of



children with SEN. Children experience exclusion as a consequence of the deeply rooted social beliefs related to normality and differences. As Vygotsky et al. (1993) explained when only deficits are seen in children, teaching approaches and pedagogy become limited to ascertaining those deficits. This confirms the argument of Hodge (2014) that children with SEN in inclusive schools ‘become positioned as “problems” and their personhood is then lost’ (p. 3).

### ***5.2.1.3 Children with autism are harmful.***

Children with autism were viewed as physically harmful to other children. Muna, Haifa, Tala and Malak described children with autism as harmful to other children as they threw bricks, pulled other children and loudly screamed. Muna explicitly stated that children with autism ‘*love harming other children more than making friendships*’. Autistic children’s behaviours were described as aggressive and destructive. This is in line with the finding of Fayez et al. (2011), who indicated that Jordanian early childhood teachers excluded children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities because they feared children with intellectual disabilities. According to Fayez et al. (2011), children with intellectual disabilities were described as potentially aggressive and harmful to other children.

These descriptions reflect the common beliefs in Saudi culture related to disabilities. Children with SEN, especially children with intellectual or behavioural disorders, are usually viewed as detrimental to the learning environment. They behave differently, and they require more attention than other children. This is a reflection of the failure to view disabilities as a social problem. The Saudi’s society focuses on disabilities as an issue for the children and their families. Children behave aggressively because they are aggressive and not because their social environment has failed to understand the children and their needs, or to make appropriate

provision for them. This is a consequence of disabling children with SEN and consistently viewing them as deficient. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011) stated that in a disablist culture, the 'body is a cultural body, and the physical act of violence is felt and interpreted through our relationships with others' (p. 10). Therefore, if the broader culture views autism negatively and as a punishment or as the result of the '*evil eye*', the cultural beliefs promote such negative views of children with autism as burdensome and aggressive.

As a result of these social, cultural and material conditions, children with autism experience discrimination. They are viewed as a challenge, a burden, and as harmful to other children, which could be consequences of the lack of understanding autism and its causation. However, it is essential to acknowledge that during observations, children with autism and children with hearing and speech disorders were treated in the same way. Both groups were excluded, and their participation in classroom activities was limited. The care of and the responsibility for children with hearing and speech disorders were left to SPE teachers. There was a clear absence of interaction between the teachers and children with hearing and speech disorders as well as an absence of interaction between the other children and children with hearing and speech disorders.

The kindergarten thus reflected segregation. This suggests that all children with SEN were viewed in the same negative way in which they were seen as different, deficient and not belonging to society. However, due to the differences in behaviours between children with hearing and speech disorders and children with autism, teachers regarded the inclusion of children with autism as a challenge and as a burden. It seemed that children with autism were discriminated against due to their behaviour and inability to fit in with other children and due to the social and cultural views about autism as an issue of shame. The challenging behaviours that

children with autism exhibited were considered against the norms, and thus they were excluded and regarded as ‘uncanny objects of modern society’ (Goodley, 2014, p. 119). Haifa asked, ‘*What future do children with autism have in our culture?*’ This question reflects the uncertainty that children with autism face in Saudi society. This finding aligns with the findings of Carrington et al. (2016), who reported that children’s challenging behaviours were the greatest challenge that teachers had in their study.

#### ***5.2.1.4 Absence of understanding related to disabilities and inclusion.***

The teachers’ narratives emphasised the lack of understanding of inclusion and disabilities, which they expressed is a significant barrier to inclusion. Deem said, ‘*inclusion was not understood. They did not understand the children’s needs or differences*’. Tala also believed that ‘*there was no culture of inclusion*’. Inclusion was implemented in kindergarten by physically including children with SEN along with the provision of SPE teachers. Indeed, nothing in the kindergarten classrooms reflected true inclusion. This finding is in line with Runswick-Cole (2011), who found that there is a failure to understand that inclusion involves more than the geographical inclusion of children with SEN. The failure to understand that inclusion involves equity and valuing and recognising differences has resulted in exclusionary practices of inclusion within inclusive schools.

According to Stewart (1998), inclusion is context dependent. A society’s negative views of disabilities could lead to a lack of understanding inclusion. Therefore, because disabilities are perceived in Saudi culture as individual problems and as deficiencies, physically including children and providing specialist assistance are the solutions. In Saudi culture, there are inherited negative and prejudiced beliefs towards persons with SEN that have the potential to influence the

understanding of inclusion. This is in line with Frankel et al. (2010), who highlighted that the persistent prejudicial attitudes towards persons with SEN in Guyana were major barriers to understanding and implementing inclusion. Despite the efforts and commitments to develop inclusive education for all children, inclusion in the KSA seems to be confronted with challenges related to the cultural beliefs and understanding related to disabilities. Vygotsky et al. (1993) confirmed that due to the influence of cultural views, most education systems have neglected and have not understood children with SEN. Given that Vygotsky was writing about these issues over a hundred years ago, it seems that little progress has been made in some countries.

Moreover, the education system under which these kindergarten classrooms operated reflected the absence of an understanding of inclusion within the system. The teachers shared examples of the imposed exclusionary practices within the system that reflected the lack of understanding of inclusion. For example, Njood said, *'we never saw children's reports or participated in their educational plans. We even assessed our children, the "normal children", through a program called Noor. SPE children have their teachers'*. All other teachers felt that they were excluded and segregated by the system itself. This means that the teachers were not using everyday routines and structures such as curriculum planning, pedagogy, play and assessment practices to support all children. This confirms Vygotsky's claims that when education focuses on disability it produces teaching pedagogy in which disability becomes principle (Vygotsky et al., 1993).

The insistence on separating the teachers from the children with SEN implies the absence of understanding inclusion. The exclusionary practices that are embedded within the system reflect the influence of Saudi's cultural beliefs on the practice and interpretation of the inclusion policy and highlight the conceptual incongruity in which inclusion is rooted. As Goodley (2014)

suggested, normative society often reacts to the uncertainty towards disabilities in conflicting ways. The contradictory ways of understanding inclusion could result in conflicts within the system in which the focus becomes fixed on differences. This is similar to the finding of Evans and Lunt (2002), who showed that due to its focus on identification and its lack of understanding of inclusion, the educational system in the UK has become an exclusionary system in which children with SEN are viewed as the responsibility of special needs teachers and assistants.

This absence of understanding inclusion in the kindergarten as a right and as an approach to respect diversity was clear in the provision of SPE teachers and the focus on meeting the needs of the included children in special classrooms. Barton (1997) believed that inclusion involved understanding why and how children with SEN are included rather than simply focusing on their physical existence in schools. Inclusion requires a reconstruction of the educational system and involves cultural and structural changes (Lloyd, 2008; Slee, 2013). The way inclusion has been implemented does not reflect a reconstruction of the entire system or a shift from viewing disabilities as individual problems to viewing disabilities as a social problem. Instead, it seems that inclusion has gone through the first order of change in which it has been implemented as a substitute for integration without any changes to or reconstruction of the system. Changes have been made in policy, but in reality, the system has remained the same, and the understanding of the concept of inclusion as a right and of a disability as a reflection of diversity is still absent. This is in line with the findings of Aldabas (2015), who asserted that fundamental changes in the educational system in the KSA should be considered prior to the actual implementation of inclusion. He believed that there is a need for change and for acquiring a better understanding of disabilities to progress towards inclusive education. The educational system in the KSA begins with national policies and filters into structures in kindergarten such as

curriculum and assessment, as well as processes such as differentiation, adult-child interactions, play, resources and materials, and how the environment and routines organised. Thus, there is a need for changes in systems, structures and processes as well as changes in beliefs and values. The lack of understanding inclusion confirms the assertion of Lindsay et al. (2014) that inclusion is one of the most multifaceted and least understood fields of education and that achieving inclusion requires a thorough understanding of the concept.

This finding suggests that there is an entire cultural layer and context that underlies the Saudi educational system. Despite the commitments to laws and to the international policy of inclusion, the influence of ingrained social beliefs related to disabilities is unavoidable. Children with SEN were included in the kindergarten classrooms with the expectations that with the assistance of SPE teachers, the children would behave similarly to the other children. Their differences were rejected, and they were excluded. As McGowan (2014) suggested, in ‘a barrier-laden society’ (p. 41), there is a need for social and physical reconstructions of the society and a need to challenge society’s ableist views.

#### ***5.2.1.5 Lack of understanding related to childhood.***

Njood, Deem and Tala believed that the lack of understanding related to childhood and the underestimation of childhood education in the Saudi culture has the potential to contribute to the inability to understand the inclusion of children with SEN. Deem stated that ECE and inclusion involved the children and their needs regardless of their differences. She insisted that kindergarten is the place to embrace these differences, though this has not been realised. Njood and Tala also felt that childhood and ECE are not properly understood and that this is reflected in the way children were included without considering their needs. This could be interpreted as a

consequence of the overall underestimation of ECE in the Saudi culture.

There is a common belief that kindergarten is needed only if the mother is working and in need of a place for the child. Kindergarten is considered informal and an optional choice for families. The formal education system in the KSA begins with primary education. Aljabreen and Lash (2016) supported this interpretation by acknowledging that one of the major challenges facing ECE in the KSA is the devaluing of the importance of ECE. Therefore, enrolment in kindergarten is optional. According to UNESCO's website (2018), the percentage of Saudi children enrolled in kindergarten in 2016 was around 24.97%. This indicates that around 75.03% of young children do not attend kindergarten, which could be a reflection of the cultural beliefs regarding the importance of ECE and could also provide justification for understanding why inclusion in kindergarten was implemented without consideration or careful planning. Because it is non-mandatory and informal education, why should effort be made?

Deem felt that her ability to teach children with SEN was underestimated because she is an ECE teacher. She said it is assumed by others that she knows nothing more than instruction related to playing. This is in line with the finding of Gahwaji (2013), who found that ECE teachers felt that their expertise was neither recognised nor valued by society. Gahwaji (2013) asserted that ECE teachers in the KSA have 'historically struggled for recognition of their qualifications' (p. 339). Childhood is an interpretation that is constructed socially, historically and culturally. The way children are perceived in a society influences the way society thinks about their education, learning and their rights as human beings. This finding sheds light on an important issue related to the way society values the education of all children. It seems that the education of 'normal children' within a normative society is unrecognised and devalued and thus an optional choice for families. If the early education of 'normal children' is optional and less

emphasised, then this could explain the way inclusive education for children with SEN has been implemented with a concern for only the physical inclusion of the children.

As discussed previously in this chapter, ECE is overlooked in Saudi culture. The education and experiences of all children with and without SEN seem to be marginalised within the educational system. There is a genuine absence of understanding that early education for all children forms the basis of the entire educational system. Vygotsky believed that ‘the groundwork for all future educational work is laid in preschool education’ (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 113). There are issues related to valuing childhood and understanding the aims of ECE as well as incongruence between the implemented international policies such as Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which states that education and opportunities of learning is a right for every child, and the Saudi context. This incongruence requires extensive changes. There is a necessity for the reconstruction of the entire cultural understanding of childhood to deconstruct issues, such as the exclusion of children with SEN and the barriers they face as consequences of cultural and contextual factors.

This section has discussed culture as a significant barrier to inclusion, and the next section discusses other structural and relational barriers that seem to have initially occurred as a result of cultural beliefs regarding inclusion and disabilities.

## **5.2.2 Structural barriers.**

### ***5.2.2.1 Lack of preparation.***

A lack of preparation was reflected in the teachers’ narratives as a significant barrier to their experiences with inclusion. For example, Shahd described the implementation of inclusion as something that occurred ‘*between an eye blink and a look*’; she believed that inclusion



requires preparation. Deem agreed that inclusion cannot be implemented randomly without preparation, and Muna stated that the lack of preparation is a serious issue regarding inclusion. Hibah said that due to a lack of preparation, the benefits of inclusion were diminished. This aligns with the finding of Paliokosta and Blandford (2010), who showed that the lack of preparation among schools in the UK was a barrier to implementing inclusion and has led to the practice of integration as inclusion. Singer (2011) and Stewart (1998) also indicated that inclusion requires preparation and that a lack of preparation is a concern among teachers.

Indeed, inclusion requires physical, social, and most importantly, conceptual preparation. The findings discussed in this chapter have indicated that there is no conceptual understanding of inclusion in the Saudi culture; in fact, the significant conceptual incongruence between the policy of inclusive education and the context it was implemented in has been demonstrated. Based on the findings, ECE is unimportant and is devalued within the culture as well as within the educational system. Children with SEN are negatively viewed as deficient and as a source of pity. According to Vygotsky and Luria (1993), the values and beliefs of a society are impossible to separate from the way society treats its individuals. As Goodley et al. (2018) suggested, the values of any society are reflected by the way people are treated within their societies. Therefore, if ECE is devalued and children with SEN are viewed negatively, what is the rationale for preparation? This finding reflects the consequence of the discrepancy between policy and context and strongly emphasises the necessity for cultural reconstruction and deep considerations of the society's values before implementing policies such as inclusive education. Ainscow and Sandill (2010) stated that 'in order to bring about the cultural change that inclusion demands, it is essential to consider the values underlying the intended changes' (p. 407). Inclusion in Saudi Arabia has been implemented without revisiting the cultural values or changing them. Such

changes would include the country's policy makers, as well as service providers and the wider population, especially regarding beliefs about SEN being the result of the 'evil eye'. As discussed, initial changes have been made in which inclusion simply substitutes for integration without cultural, structural or systemic changes.

#### *5.2.2.1.1 Lack of preparation for teachers.*

The teachers revealed that they were not prepared for inclusion. According to them, being prepared means being informed and trained to practise inclusion and to educate children with SEN. All the teachers except Deem believed that neither their educational programmes nor the MoE prepared them for inclusion. They expressed that they lacked knowledge and education related to inclusion and that they suddenly found themselves obligated to practise it. Mbwambo (2015) found that teachers were not prepared for inclusion and that it was imposed on them without being provided with knowledge or education related to inclusive education. Furthermore, this finding is in line with the findings of Ely (2013) and Sandfort (2015), who showed that teachers were unprepared for inclusion and that the lack of preparation negatively contributed to their experiences with inclusion.

Most ECE teachers' educational programmes in the KSA offer only one to three courses on SPE. None of the courses are dedicated to inclusion. The focus is on the identification of the categories of SPE, which mirrors the inherent medical model of disabilities in Saudi culture. This could explain why teachers who participated in this study felt that they were unprepared for inclusion. Alquraini (2014) asserted that although there are many universities that provide SPE and preparation for teachers in the KSA, there is an absence of a knowledge base and skills that can assist teachers in the practice of inclusion. Murry and Alqahtani (2015) also affirmed that

Saudi pre-service teachers do not have knowledge related to children with SEN and their educational rights and asserted that they were not being prepared for inclusion. Aljabreen and Lash (2016) and UNESCO (2010) indicated there is a lack of well-qualified and trained Saudi teachers in the areas of ECE and inclusion.

These findings demonstrate that inclusion in the KSA is rooted in multiple conceptual incongruences that have led to the improper implementation of inclusion. Goodley (2014) mentioned that inclusion requires society to revisit and to reconstruct the educational system; however, if society adheres to the medical model of disabilities in which they are viewed as individuals' issues, why should the entire education system be reconstructed? How can revisiting the education system be expected when the society does not acknowledge its shortcomings? The issues inclusion faces in the kindergarten reflect a social, cultural and historical context of understanding inclusion and disabilities in the Saudi culture as well as the conceptual incongruity that is deeply rooted within the policy of inclusion in the KSA.

This conceptual incongruity has caused teachers to struggle with inclusion, and rather than including children with SEN and attempting to understand them, the teachers seemed to push them away. They could not physically or conceptually view the children as individuals with rights and capabilities; they could not even determine what could be done to help or to interest the children. It seemed that the teachers felt that the child-centred principles do not extend to children with SEN. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) found that the incongruity in the inclusion policy has forced teachers to work under the medical model of disabilities in which impairment is treated 'as a disease and difference as a social deviance' (p. 184). According to Paliokosta and Blandford (2010), the emphasis on weaknesses rather than strengths has influenced teachers' teaching practices and they affirmed that teachers' conceptual unpreparedness has led to a lack of

understanding inclusion and the inability to accommodate differences.

There is no doubt that preparation is essential to successful inclusion. As Vygotsky et al. (1993) explained, to respond to children's needs, teachers must be aware of their needs. Teachers could either consciously or unconsciously attribute their inability to practise inclusion to being unprepared, and failing to recognize children's strengths and capabilities. Deeply rooted beliefs regarding disabilities could have led to a lack of motivation to develop their knowledge. As mentioned, the cultural beliefs towards children with SEN could cause teachers to focus on the lack of preparation and knowledge as a significant barrier that prevents them from including children with SEN. Sapon-Shevin (2007) argued that although preparation and training are important, it would be a false assumption to believe that they would provide all the skills that teachers require to practise inclusion. Nevertheless, in my view, preparation is still necessary and would help and therefore shouldn't lead to demonizing or blaming teachers. There is a major barrier related to the heart of Saudi cultural beliefs towards children with SEN that hinders preparation for inclusion. It is the social and cultural barriers that have resulted in a false conceptualisation of inclusion and of the needs and capabilities of children with SEN.

#### *5.2.2.1.2 Lack of preparation for SPE teachers.*

In their narratives, the teachers' highlighted that even SPE teachers are not prepared for inclusion and ECE. Haifa, Tala and Deem stated that SPE teachers are not trained in ECE and inclusion and are not prepared to work in kindergarten classrooms. As a result, Haifa and Malak believed that SPE teachers lacked an understanding of inclusion and children's needs and focused only on the physical inclusion of the children in the classroom. This finding could be attributed to the consequences of the dominance of the medical model of disabilities within the

culture and the educational system. SPE teachers are trained and prepared to provide assessments and special sessions for children with SEN but not to include them with other children. Sharma et al. (2015) indicated that the focus on teachers' preparation programmes in Pakistan was based on the medical model of disabilities in which the emphasis is on the identification and assessment of children with SEN rather than their inclusion in schools. Therefore, because SPE teachers are unprepared for inclusion and are not necessarily supportive of inclusion they practised segregation.

This finding indicates the connective nature of the impact of cultural beliefs and values on the inclusion of children with SEN in a culture, such as the Saudi culture. This is consistent with a socio-cultural perspective that culture is not 'out there' but is embodied within the beliefs, values and practices of people acting in cultural environments. The findings highlight the incongruity between the concept of inclusion and the conceptual understanding of the context in which inclusion is implemented. As Evans and Lunt (2002) and Slee (2013) wrote, the provision of SPE teachers or assistance contradicts the concept of inclusion in which the focus is on the differences and the children are guided by SPE teachers to fit in with the environment of general education.

#### *5.2.2.1.3 Lack of preparation for children.*

The teachers' narratives reflected the need to also prepare children before the implementation of inclusion. They mentioned that children with SEN were suddenly brought into the classrooms without being prepared or provided with the basic life skills that would help them be included. Njood said that '*children did not take their full rights from the beginning. They were not prepared; inclusion was imposed on them*'. It seems that it was assumed that the children

would fit in with the existing environment, daily routines and practices. The transition into the school system is not easy for all children, as suggested by Sandfort (2015), who found that the transition into kindergarten can be stressful for children and requires appropriate preparation and support. Indeed, children must be prepared for inclusion, and Abu-Hamour and Muhaidat (2014) asserted that transitioning into the school system is a challenge, especially for children with autism. Abu-Hamour and Muhaidat (2014) affirmed that skills, such as social, attention and independence skills, are prerequisite skills for successful inclusion.

The teachers also believed that the lack of preparation extends to children without SEN. Hibah said that children suddenly found themselves surrounded by children with SEN. However, although teachers acknowledged the importance of preparing children for inclusion, they did not provide opportunities to learn about children with SEN and differences during classroom activities or playground activities. There was an absence of inclusive attempts among the teachers. The teachers only monitored interactions between the children without SEN, while children with SEN interacted alone. As Vygotsky et al. (1993) argued, when disability is strengthened and nourished by the social surroundings of the children, their relationships with their surroundings and interactions with others will be significantly affected.

There was a clear exclusion practised by the teachers and the children. Indeed, there is incongruence between the teachers' beliefs and practices. This is a reflection of the broader incongruence in the policy of inclusive education in the KSA. The policy advocates and is committed to providing inclusive education; however, the values and beliefs that shape the policy contradict the values and beliefs of the context in which it was implemented, which has led to exclusionary practices. Lloyd (2008) stated that the contrasting nature between the policy of inclusion and the practices of inclusion based on the concept of normalisation and the concept

of deficiency, respectively, has led to the failure to implement inclusion successfully. This is because inclusion necessitates reconstructing the culture and the entire education system into a context in which differences are acknowledged and respected.

The lack of preparation for children with SEN and differences could be the result of the broader issue related to negative cultural beliefs. These beliefs have significantly affected the way inclusion is understood and implemented and have thus affected its preparation. Vygotsky noted that society's beliefs and values influence the opportunities for children with SEN to be involved in joint activities and to interact with peers (Gindis, 1999).

#### *5.2.2.1.4 Lack of preparation for kindergarten administrators.*

In their narratives, the teachers highlighted the lack of preparation of the kindergarten's administrators and considered this lack a barrier to inclusion. Muna and Njood agreed that the kindergarten's principal was not prepared for inclusion. Tala also believed that neither the kindergarten's principal nor the administrators were prepared for inclusion. Shahd believed that the kindergarten's principal needed training to understand the needs of children with SEN.

The teachers felt that if the administrators were prepared and understood inclusion and the children's needs, inclusion in kindergarten classrooms would operate differently. This finding is similar to that of Hofreiter (2017), who indicated that the lack of preparation among 18 principals in the US influenced their understanding of inclusion and its benefits; therefore, they were not able to develop inclusive cultures in their schools. An inclusive culture in the kindergarten classrooms was noticeably absent. As discussed, exclusion was imposed on the teachers, and segregation was practised within the educational system before teachers in classrooms practised it.

The kindergarten's principal's lack of preparation and understanding of inclusion has led the principal to solely focus on the physical existence of children with SEN in the classrooms. She placed the teachers under high surveillance, such as by prohibiting them from closing their classrooms' doors and stepping into the classrooms unexpectedly several times during the day to ensure whether children with SEN were in the classrooms. This reveals the principal's ignorance of inclusion and her inability to assess teachers' inclusive teaching practices. To her, inclusion means the physical presence and possibly the containment of the children in the classroom. Kuyini and Desai (2007) found that ignorance among schools' principals in Ghana regarding inclusive education has made them unable to assess the teachers' teaching practices; however, their study is dissimilar to this study in that the schools' authoritarian leadership approaches did not impact on the teachers' teaching practices, whereas in this study, the principal seemed to use the authoritarian approach to compensate for the lack of preparation and knowledge regarding inclusive education.

This could reflect what might occur due to the incongruence between the policy and the context in which it is implemented. There is a massive gap between the policy and the context, which presents a considerable challenge not only for teachers and children but also for principals when practising inclusion. Singer (2011) stated that 'when school staff is not in agreement on policy or practice, and administrators do not connect vision to action, inclusion is designed inadequately and, ultimately, set up to fail' (p. 181). This seems to be the case in KSA on the basis of the evidence presented from this research.



#### 5.2.2.1.5 Lack of preparation of the physical environment.

The inappropriateness of the physical environment of the kindergarten classrooms was also considered a barrier. The teachers agreed that neither the classroom nor the playground were suitable or reflected an understanding of the needs of children with SEN. The teachers explained that their classrooms felt overcrowded. For example, Njood said that '*sometimes the classroom feels like a festival*'. Therefore, the teachers felt that the lack of the physical preparation of the kindergarten classrooms affected their ability to include children with SEN. This is in line with the findings of Koller et al. (2018), who asserted that the typical crowded physical environments of schools and a lack of adjustments affect the social inclusion of children with SEN and affect the creation of inclusive experiences. In contrast, the findings of Avramidis et al. (2000) indicated that the school and classroom sizes did not have an influence on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion.

This finding also confirms those of Alhudaithi (2015), who found that mainstream schools in the KSA were unprepared and inappropriate for the inclusion of children with autism. In the kindergarten, the number of children in the classroom was high in relation to the needs of the children and to the space of the classrooms. Children with autism were screaming and running around the classrooms. Lindsay et al. (2014) explained that the typical busy school environment with loud voices and crowdedness could be distressing to children with autism and might cause them to be distracted and overstimulated, which could explain the disruptive behaviours of children with autism that the teachers reported in their narratives. The lack of thorough preparation and careful consideration of the kindergarten classrooms was indeed a barrier to inclusion. Children and teachers were affected by the inappropriateness of the kindergarten classroom environment. Vygotsky emphasised the importance of carefully designed

school settings for inclusion, as it could enable or prevent teachers from meeting and serving the needs of children with SEN (Gindis, 1995).

This lack of a physical preparation of the environment reflects the way changes have been made for the inclusion of children with SEN. It seems that changes have been made superficially with the substitution of integration for inclusion without a deep consideration of the interweaving requirements of inclusion or the impact of the lack of preparation on children's overall development. As Voltz et al. (2001) suggested, including children without considering the physical environment decreases the children's opportunities to become active participants and to feel they belong in their classrooms. Goodley (2014) noted that:

While disabled children might occupy a space such as the school playground, classroom or leisure context, the extent to which they feel a sense of belonging within these spaces is debatable. Disabled people often feel unwelcome in mainstream spaces, struggle with a sense of belonging, with subsequent impact upon personal well-being. (p.10)

This again reflects the incongruities between the policy of inclusion in which the emphasis is on children's rights to belong and to be respected and the context in which it is implemented. According to Alquraini (2014), Saudi families tend to avoid participation due to experiencing shame for having a child with SEN. Likewise, Hauerwas and Mahon (2018) asserted that cultural beliefs such as shame and punishment have caused some families to hide their children from their societies. Therefore, it can be stated that in societies that view disabilities as a form of shame and punishment, it could be difficult to recognise the importance of a sense of belonging among children with SEN, and even to attempt to foster a sense of belonging within their schools' physical environment.

### **5.2.2.2 Lack of training.**

A lack of training was an issue that teachers experienced with inclusion. For example, Njood said that teachers are *'facing a serious issue because we do not have any background or training, and no one came to us and said that this child has autism spectrum or this one has mild autism. Never! They just let them in, and that is it! Only through classroom practices we get to learn about the child'*. Muna said she needed training to determine the meaning of inclusion. Teachers did not have knowledge and sought knowledge and information on their own. Alahmadi (2009), Mbwambo (2015) and Namarata (2011) indicated that teachers reported experiencing a lack of training and professional development related to inclusion. In particular, this finding aligns with those of Sandfort (2015), who found that ECE teachers were required to include children with autism in their classrooms without being provided training or any professional development opportunities either in their educational programmes or from their school districts. The teachers who participated in Sandfort's (2015) study reported that to learn about children with autism, they had to seek knowledge on their own. Unsurprisingly, they reported feeling overwhelmed and frustrated.

A lack of training related to inclusion seems to be an issue across the globe, and studies such as the one conducted by Kraska and Boyle (2014) in Australia have shown that pre-services teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are greatly influenced by the training opportunities available to them. Kang et al. (2015) found that a lack of training among ECE teachers in Korea related to inclusion has hindered the development of inclusion. Rakap and Kaczmarek (2010) found that Turkish teachers who lacked training held negative views of inclusion. A study by Cagran and Schmidt (2011) that was conducted with Slovenian teachers indicated that training helped teachers with inclusion and improved their attitudes towards it.

The findings of this study contrast those of Sharma et al. (2015), who found that the provision of training for teachers in Pakistan did not contribute to forming positive attitudes towards inclusion. In contrast, they found that teachers who had less training were more favourable towards inclusion. Alquraini (2012) indicated that training was not among the factors that impacted Saudi teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, and he concluded his report with an affirmation that there is no relationship between teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and training. The potential reason that these studies found training to be less important is that the cultures, the Pakistan and Saudi cultures, share common cultural beliefs regarding disabilities and childhood development. According to Sharma et al. (2015) and Alquraini (2012), both cultures operate under the medical model of disabilities in which importance is placed on the provision of special and professional services for included children. Within this context, the importance of providing training to teachers could be unrecognised because children with SEN are already receiving the services needed from specialists.

When disabilities are culturally viewed negatively, the shift to inclusive education is a difficult process and could reveal the incongruity between the international policy for inclusive education and different contexts. Ainscow (2000) and Hauerwas and Mahon (2018) indicated that educational concepts, such as childhood development and disabilities, differ significantly in countries such as Pakistan and India than in other cultures, such as Western cultures. As affirmed by Sharma et al. (2015), there is an incompatibility between modern international education and inclusive education in Pakistan. The researchers attributed the incongruity to the commitment to international policies and legislations related to inclusive education that conceptually contrast with the cultural beliefs and values of the country. This indicates the challenges of predominantly Western values and models, and their influence on supranational discourses.

Whilst many of these studies indicate the cultural beliefs surrounding inclusion, and the incongruities that have been revealed, it seems that culturally informed models need to be developed to generate changes from within systems and countries.

The teachers expressed that the cultural values and beliefs not only affected the provision of training but also affected the quality of the training content. To illustrate, the teachers acknowledged that at the beginning of inclusion, the MoE provided a training lecture for the teachers. Hibah stated that they were provided with a two-hour lecture about autism in which the focus was assessment and identification. Hibah, Haifa and Tala believed that the lecture was inappropriate because the SPE teachers undertake assessment and identification. They asserted that they needed intensive training regarding how to include the children, how to manage their behaviours and how to encourage them to engage with other children. They felt that the one session of training was insufficient and was not relevant to their situations. This finding aligns with the findings of Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Hills (2009), who indicated the importance of the quality of the training provided to teachers. Both studies reported that teachers felt that situations and students' needs differ in reality; thus, basic or theoretical information about disabilities and inclusion is insufficient. Concepts of inclusive curricula, pedagogical approaches, play and assessment that have practical relevance for teachers are needed to address these problems.

### ***5.2.2.3 Lack of defined roles and responsibilities.***

The teachers' narratives reflected their confusion and ambiguity towards their roles and responsibilities related to the inclusion of children with SEN. For example, Njood and Tala said that they were unsure of their responsibility to children with SEN. Malak said that the role of

teachers in inclusion constituted a mere 1% of the necessary responsibilities. Muna explicitly stated that everyone worked autonomously in the kindergarten classrooms and affirmed the need to define the roles and responsibilities of the teachers for inclusion to be successful. This is in line with the finding of Smith and Leonard (2005), who indicated that both general and SPE teachers reported that they felt confused regarding their roles in inclusion.

The lack of defined roles and responsibilities could contribute to the lack of collaboration, and vice versa. If teachers are unsure of their roles and their responsibilities, how can they collaborate and on which basis should they collaborate? Keefe and Moore (2004) found that in American inclusive schools, the absence of defined roles and responsibilities among teachers caused difficulties in fostering collaboration between general and SPE teachers. The teachers who participated in the study conducted by Keefe and Moore (2004) reported that they worked separately and that they had to determine how they could collaborate with each other on their own.

It seems that both groups of teachers lack collaboration, and the undefined roles and responsibilities have resulted from the way the school or the education system operates. These barriers reflect the exclusionary pressure and the lack of collaboration within the education system. The teachers' experiences also highlight the broad cultural and systemic context in which they live. This corroborates the argument of Slee and Allan (2001) that 'exclusion proceeds through deep structural and broad cultural mechanisms' (p. 178).

#### **5.2.2.4 Lack of follow-ups.**

Malak and Tala mentioned a lack of follow-ups as a barrier to inclusion. Tala said that *‘the children were suffering, and they [the supervisors] were in their high towers, sitting behind their desks and giving decisions without coming into the field or conducting follow-ups’*. She emphasised that without follow-ups, nothing could be changed in the kindergarten, and the situation would remain the same. This finding reflects the unexpected consequences of previously discussed barriers, such as the absence of a cultural understanding of disabilities and inclusion and the absence of an inclusive culture at the kindergarten school. As Ainscow and Sandill (2010) suggested, ‘becoming more inclusive is a matter of thinking and talking, reviewing and refining practice, and making attempts to develop a more inclusive culture’ (p. 407). The lack of follow-ups reflects the way inclusion has been implemented physically with the focus on, as Barton (1997) described, ‘dumping pupils into an unchanged system of provision and practice’ (p. 234). It also reflects the failure to understand inclusion as a process that requires cultural and structural changes (Runswick-Cole, 2011). If these barriers persist, follow-ups are not expected. In fact, under the influence of such values and beliefs, what is the rationale for follow-ups?

#### **5.2.3 Relational barriers.**

##### **5.2.3.1 Lack of collaboration.**

The teachers’ narratives also reflected the need for collaboration to make inclusion successful. For example, Haifa felt that collaboration is the foundation of inclusion. She believed that nothing could be achieved in the absence of collaboration and communication between the teachers and the school staff. Hibah, Deem, Tala, Malak and Njood shared their frustration with

their opinions and thoughts being disregarded. The lack of collaboration caused Malak to describe the role of the teachers as ‘*servants*’ to the principal and the supervisor. This finding resembles to the findings of Smith and Leonard (2005), who found that the lack of collaboration affected teachers and caused them great stress. Similarly, Ruble and McGrew (2013) found that teachers were emotionally exhausted and stressed because they lacked support from the school principals.

This reflects the dominant authoritarian approach that is used at the school, which mirrors the dominant approach to leadership in Saudi culture. Due to the influence of cultural factors, it could be difficult for principals to create inclusive cultures within schools in which teachers’ opinions are acknowledged and taken into consideration. This aligns with the findings of Pather (2007), who discussed the strong influence of the dominant authoritarian approach in African society on the visibility of teachers’ voices. Pather (2007) affirmed that the major barrier to the teachers’ ability to practise inclusion was the lack of collaboration and relational issues with school staff. The lack of collaboration has prevented the teachers from increasing the children’s participation. When collaboration is limited or does not exist, as was the case at this kindergarten school, and when the power remains in the hands of school principals, as Pather (2007) suggested, there can be serious issues related to inclusion. The collaboration issue indicates that inclusion is facing deeply rooted challenges that reveal the incongruence between an international policy and a cultural context. Thus, as argued by Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011), ‘there is a need for extensive cultural deconstruction and reformation’ (p.2) of values and beliefs regarding both exclusion and inclusion.



#### *5.2.3.1.1 Lack of collaboration with SPE teachers.*

The teachers also struggled to collaborate with the SPE teachers. Haifa described the role of the SPE teachers in fostering inclusion and collaborating with the teachers as non-existent. Deem and Hibah said that not only was collaboration non-existent, but there were also rejections by SPE teachers in attempting to collaborate and to enhance the experiences of children with SEN. Wood (1998) indicated that there is a lack of collaboration between general teachers and SPE teachers and that they worked separately in the classroom, and that general education teachers were not involved and were not allowed to take on any responsibilities for inclusion in their classrooms. This confirms the findings of Hamaidi et al. (2012), who revealed that a lack of collaboration between general education teachers and SPE teachers existed among teachers from the UAE and Jordan, which significantly influenced the quality of services provided to children with SEN.

There are two possible interpretations of this finding. First, it could be that due to the dominance of the medical model and its influence on the way inclusion has been understood and implemented in the kindergarten classrooms, the teachers believe that children with SEN are the responsibilities of SPE teachers. Therefore, collaboration did not exist, and the two groups of teachers worked alone. As discussed, although the teachers expressed support for inclusion as the children's right and acknowledged the importance of collaboration and joint efforts in the success of inclusion, their teaching practices in the classroom reflected contrary beliefs. This highlights the conceptual incongruence in which the policy of inclusion in the Saudi culture is rooted. Smith and Leonard (2005) confirmed this interpretation and attributed the lack of collaboration between general education teachers and SPE teachers to the belief that the sole responsibility of inclusion lies with SPE teachers. This belief led teachers who participated in

Smith and Leonard's (2005) study to express dissatisfaction regarding SPE teachers. Mulholland and O'Connor (2016) affirmed that in Ireland, general education teachers and SPE teachers were not provided with many opportunities for collaboration in schools, which implies that there are cultural beliefs that underlie the lack of collaboration in schools.

The second interpretation is linked to the possibility that the lack of collaboration could be the result of the way SPE teachers are prepared and educated. As mentioned, there is evidence that the focus of preparation in SPE teachers' educational programmes is on identification and assessment and that there is an absence of knowledge and skills related to inclusive education. Therefore, SPE teachers in the kindergarten classrooms did not collaborate and did not accept teachers' attempts to collaborate due to their lack of preparation and knowledge related to inclusive education as well as their lack of experience with inclusion. Silverman (2007) supported this interpretation by suggesting that due to a lack of knowledge and experience, new SPE teachers could view inclusion negatively and might not collaboratively work with general education teachers.

The lack of collaboration could also be a consequence of the cultural beliefs ingrained in the medical model of disabilities, which focuses on the provision of assessments and specialist services. In addition, it reflects the way the society operates under the influence of the medical model of disability in which it created two separated education systems (general and SPE). Aldabas (2015) discussed the importance of collaboration between general and SPE education systems in the KSA. He acknowledged that due to the absence of collaboration between them, the KSA is far from successfully achieving inclusion. The discrepancy within the education system that separates SPE from general education does not imply inclusion but rather implies exclusionary practices within the education system. If inclusion is going to work, the SPE needs

to collaborate with general education. A conversation between both systems is necessary to start exchange knowledge and understanding about what is required. Vygotsky et al. (1993) argued that the fundamental concept of inclusive education is to overcome the concept of differences. Thus, he affirmed the importance of unifying the education system in which it operates under the same principles for all children. Alborn (2017) and Glazzard (2011) affirmed that the incongruence and lack of collaboration between general and SPE education systems in the UAE and in northern England reflect exclusion and are the major barriers for teachers when attempting to practise and to implement inclusion in schools.

#### ***5.2.3.2 Lack of support.***

A lack of support was a common thread in the teachers' narratives. The teachers expressed feelings of being emotionally and financially unsupported at the school. For example, Shahd said, *'there wasn't any support...We worked with the children all day, and we did not receive emotional or financial support. Even our opinions were ignored. We just had to accept children in our classroom and ask Allah for rewards'*. Haifa, Tala and Njood felt the same, and Deem described herself as a *'fighter'* with no support. This contributed to feeling powerlessness among the teachers, which is explored in greater depth in (Section 5.3.2). This finding confirms the finding of Ely (2013), who indicated that general education teachers feel segregated and powerless due to the lack of support in their schools.

#### 5.2.3.2.1 *Lack of principal's support.*

The teachers felt unsupported emotionally and financially by the kindergarten's principal. Njood said that teachers are not emotionally supported at all and that no one listens to them or appreciates their efforts. Muna expressed her needs for emotional support: '*we need to be thanked. We need to feel appreciated*'. The lack of emotional support has prevented the teachers from overcoming the challenges of inclusion and from enhancing the experiences of the children. This in line with the findings of Hurt (2007) and Ruble and McGrew (2013), who determined that teachers in the US face difficulties in including children with SEN due to the lack of support they receive. They feel emotionally overwhelmed, stressed and segregated. The lack of support from the principal that the teachers at the kindergarten school experienced could be related to the lack of the principal's preparation. As discussed, the teachers reported that the principal did not understand inclusion or the needs of the children because she was not prepared for inclusion.

Hofreiter (2017) suggested that regarding SPE and inclusion, unprepared principals face difficulties in implementing an inclusive culture at their schools. As Barton (1997) noted, inclusive cultures in schools require the involvement of everyone in discussions and debates and learning to listen and to respect each other. Vygotsky and Luria (1993) stated that the adult is the product of his/her society and a reflection of the quintessence of his/her society. Due to the absence of an understanding of an inclusive culture in society as a whole as well as in schools, and due to the belief that leadership should follow the authoritarian approach, it might therefore be difficult for principals not only to implement inclusion but also to recognise the principles of an inclusive school culture. As Cameron (2014) stated, exclusion is practised as the result of society's historic development; thus, it has not been viewed as a mistake that necessitates changes.

The teachers Njood, Muna, Shahd and Tala affirmed that in addition to being unsupported emotionally, teachers have not been supported financially. Muna said, '*teachers do not receive allowances for including children with autism, even though the SPE teachers receive a 30% monthly allowance for teaching children with SEN*'. Njood stated that she and the other teachers had to pay the cost of teaching activities because there was no financial support at the kindergarten school. This aligns with the finding of Evans and Lunt (2002), who showed that the scarcity of funding in England was regarded as a major barrier to the shift towards inclusive education. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) found that a lack of funding was one of the difficulties and barriers facing teachers trying to implement inclusion. This finding does not necessarily reflect a lack of funding as much as it reflects the value the society places on inclusive education.

Rugh (2002) stated that the government of the KSA gives the priority of funding to education. According to the MoE (2018d) in the KSA, the budget of the ministry in 2016 was SAR 124,319,484,000. The government of the KSA allocates a large amount of money to the country's budget for education; however, inclusive education seems to receive less from the budget allocations. Aref (2011) confirmed this interpretation and found that despite the education budget, one of the greatest barriers to the inclusion of children with SEN was the lack of financial support and allocations in schools that support their inclusion.

The MoE announced in 2018 that the budget for education would be SAR 192,000,000,000. "Ministry of Education: Directions" (2018) stated that 'the MoE devoted more than SAR 118,000,000,000 to *general* education, SAR 15,000,000,000 to higher education and the rest is dedicated for the provision of training' (para. 2). There was no dedication to inclusive education in the budget, which could serve as evidence of the society's beliefs towards children

with SEN and their inclusion in schools. As discussed, the medical model is ingrained in Saudi culture; therefore, significant efforts are devoted to the provision of special schools, professional development and assistive educational materials but not to the social inclusion of the children. However, this study has reinforced that cultural understanding and beliefs require extensive changes and reconstruction, as well as systemic and structural changes. The implementation of a policy such as inclusion without these changes and reconstructions reveals the conceptual incongruity between the policy and the cultural beliefs of the context.

#### *5.2.3.2.2 Lack of parental support.*

It might be expected that parents would be a source of knowledge about their children that could be helpful to the kindergarten teachers. However, Muna said, *'even the parents made me feel unsupported and unappreciated. They never came and talked to me. It was like I did not exist or that I was invisible...There was no communication between us. They communicated only with their children's teachers'*. All the teachers' narratives reflected the absence of support and involvement of the parents of children with SEN. The teachers believed that the lack of parental support contributed to the exclusionary experiences of teachers and children with SEN. Mbwambo (2015) found that teachers considered the lack of parental support a significant factor that negatively influenced their attitudes towards inclusion. Lindsay et al. (2014) also found that teachers acknowledged the importance of parental support and believed that having good relationships with parents helped in successfully including the children.

The lack of parental support could be associated with the parents' beliefs related to disabilities and inclusion. Disabilities in Saudi culture are viewed as a punishment and as a source of shame; this could impact the parents' communication with the general teachers because

they might feel embarrassed and uncomfortable discussing their child's disability with general education teachers. Alquraini (2014) supports this interpretation and found that some Saudi parents felt ashamed of having children with SEN, and so they refused to communicate and avoided participation and collaboration with researchers.

Furthermore, the lack of parental support could be linked to a lack of a preference for inclusive schools. Parents in this study seemed not to have the choice. According to the MoE's website (2019), special institutes for children with autism accept only children at the age of primary education. There are no special institutes for children at the age of kindergarten. Under the influence and dominance of the medical model of disabilities in Saudi culture, parents might prefer their children to be educated in special schools because they might believe that their children would be better supported, served and educated under the supervision of specialised staff. Evans and Lunt (2002) indicated that parents favoured special schools over inclusive schools because they believed special schools are the best choice for their children. According to Evans and Launt (2002), parental preferences have significantly prevented the development of inclusive schools and have maintained the existence of special schools.

Similarly, Abu-Hamour and Muhaidat (2014) found that the number of parents in Jordan who viewed inclusion negatively was higher than the number of parents who viewed inclusion positively. In their study, parents showed reluctance towards inclusion because they believed that the school staff and the students were unprepared for inclusion. The parents were concerned that their children would experience exclusion and could be harmed in inclusive schools. They were also concerned about the level of training and knowledge general education teachers have in relation to disabilities and inclusion, and thus they preferred their children to be educated in special schools under the supervision of well-trained and knowledgeable staff.

#### **5.2.4 Summary of the section.**

This section has extended the discussion to the barriers teachers faced in their experiences of inclusion. It showed how those barriers intersect in ways that construct forms of exclusion. In their narratives, the teachers highlighted the absence of cultural understanding and awareness as a significant barrier to inclusion. According to the teachers' narratives, disabilities and childhood development are not properly understood or appreciated. As a result, the implementation of inclusion is a challenge. Teachers' narratives provided evidence that children's needs and rights are at risk due to the lack of understanding. There is extensive evidence that children with SEN were physically included into the space of the kindergarten and classrooms with no social inclusion. Children experienced exclusion. They were not included in activities with their peers. There was no educational inclusion of the children; there was no differentiation of activities and experiences, no provision of resources and equipment and even no consideration of the individual needs of the children and their capabilities.

Children's rights for immediate and future potential for living full lives and for participating in and contributing to society and for developing independence were denied. This evidence confirms Vygotsky's beliefs that children with SEN could develop secondary disability as a result of their disabling society that fails to understand the children and fail to go beyond their biological impairments. Childhood and disability are interpretations that are constructed socially, historically and culturally. According to Vygotsky et al. (1993), if children with SEN continued to be treated by their societies as deficient and as different children, their overall wellbeing would be damaged more than the damage caused by their biological impairment.



The teachers' narratives also reflected a number of structural barriers, such as a lack of preparation, knowledge, training and follow-ups and relational barriers, such as the absence of collaboration and support; however, although the structural and relational barriers are entirely legitimate, the teachers' narratives revealed that the creation of the structural and relational barriers has resulted from the social and cultural beliefs within the KSA. As Vygotsky et al. (1993) stated, the disability is the creation of social and cultural factors and it is the production of the incongruences between physical impairment and the society. Indeed, as Runswick-Cole (2011) stated, despite the existence of inclusive policies, these policies are ingrained in conceptual incongruity. The conceptual incongruity that the teachers' narratives revealed were about teachers' beliefs and teachers' professional knowledge, were about views of childhood and disability. The conceptual incongruity also indicated that inclusion is a social and cultural issue that not only influences inclusion but also influences all children and teachers. The way inclusion has been implemented with the existence of conceptual incongruity has a significant influence both emotionally and physically on teachers, and it has led to an incongruity within the teachers' beliefs and practices. The next section continues to discuss the teachers' experiences with inclusion at the kindergarten school.

### **5.3 The Teachers' Experiences With Inclusion**

This section will discuss the cumulative impact of the way inclusion was implemented and the barriers teachers encountered with their experiences of inclusion. It reflects the teachers' personal experiences with inclusion under the influence of the interrelated nature of the findings discussed earlier in this chapter. To answer the third research question, which is around how the teachers experienced inclusion in the kindergarten and what impact those experiences had on

teachers, I refer to past studies as discussed in the literature review chapter around teachers' experiences with inclusion. This section presents the unheard voices and emotions of Saudi ECE teachers about their experiences with inclusion that were found to be ignored due to social, cultural and structural contexts.

### **5.3.1 Overwhelmed.**

This section connects teachers' perceptions and experiences with their strongly expressed emotions, and indicates the embodiment of their beliefs and practices, and the tensions that they experienced. The analysis revealed that the teachers' experiences with inclusion were greatly influenced by how inclusion was implemented and the barriers that they encountered. The teachers felt emotionally and physically overwhelmed. For example, Tala was emotionally exhausted and consistently overwhelmed. Muna could not endure the pressure; she got headaches and felt physically exhausted. These experiences align with the findings of Smith and Leonard (2005) and Ruble and McGrew (2013), who found that the teachers in their studies were distressed and suffered from headaches because of the challenges they faced when trying to implement inclusion. Similar to my study, both studies attributed the teachers' feelings to the absence of collaboration between the teachers and inadequate support from their schools.

The teachers' feelings of being overwhelmed could be attributed to the levels of stress they experienced during their days in the kindergarten. Teachers were stressed out because of the way inclusion was imposed on them. They had to work in small classrooms with (22-26) children and (5-7) adults and with no permission to even close the doors. Children with autism frequently ran away from the classrooms and teachers were trying to keep them in. These daily struggles to keep the children calm and inside of the classrooms caused the teachers to be

stressed out and thus, overwhelmed. Ely (2013) revealed that teachers found inclusive classrooms to be very stressful and that resulted in feelings of physical exhaustion such as headache and of emotional overwhelming such as tiredness, irritability and isolation.

### **5.3.2 Powerless.**

The teachers expressed their feelings of powerlessness. Njood said that *'no one here listens to us, what can we do?'* Teachers did not have the power, or agency, to make a change. The teachers were ignored, and no one listened to their opinions. As Ely (2013) and Ruble and McGrew (2013) found, general education teachers often feel powerless in inclusive schools even though they want to be involved in the process of inclusion. Hettiarachchi and Das (2014) found a similar sense of powerlessness in teachers at inclusive schools in Sri Lanka.

The teachers provided many examples of instances when they felt powerless. For example, they were not allowed to share their opinions or their notes with either the MoE's supervisors, principal, parents, or the SPE teachers, and, since they were not involved in inclusion or in decision-making processes, they believed that they did not belong at the school. Teachers also felt powerless because they lacked the knowledge and training to help the children. They experienced internal and external feelings of powerlessness. On the internal level, teachers felt powerless as they lacked knowledge and were ill-informed about disability and inclusion; they felt incompetent and unable to help the children. On the external level, teachers experienced feelings of powerlessness within the kindergarten environment.

Teachers described themselves as being powerless and deprived of the ability to make decisions. Malak said the teachers were like *'servants'*. This powerlessness led the teachers to emotionally withdraw and push away the children, thus creating an incongruity between their

practices and their personal beliefs as early childhood educators. The teachers felt powerless for many reasons. They lacked autonomy because they could not exert any degree of control. They were not able to participate in the process of inclusion. Their desire to be the masters of their own classrooms was undermined by the principal's surveillance, the presence of the SPE teachers, their inability to provide input, and their inexperience in relation to dealing with children with SEN. Those reasons suggest that there are broader and structural barriers that are preventing the teachers from exercising power and agency to make changes in their classrooms. As discussed earlier in this chapter, in Saudi culture the authoritarian approach dominates workplaces, in which employees are pressured to follow the orders and achieve the goals of the leaders. In this kind of approach, participation in the process and autonomy among employees do not exist. The kindergarten mirrored the dominant cultural beliefs; teachers were excluded from the process of inclusion, their inputs were denied and their attempts to make changes were rejected.

This finding could be the consequence of the conceptual incongruity between the policy of inclusion and the Saudi context. According to Barton (1997), 'inclusive education is part of a human rights approach to social relations and conditions' (p. 234). It is about reconstructing cultures and social movements against the exclusion of all (Slee & Allan, 2001). Under this aim, it seems crucial to establish a working environment that enables the participation of all members and empowers the employees and listens to their voices. Contrasted to that are the experiences of the teachers in the kindergarten in which they were de-powered in exclusionary environment that operates under the influences of both the medical model of disability and the authoritarian approach.

### **5.3.3 Incompetent.**

Teachers explained that their experiences with inclusion caused them to feel incompetent. Haifa and Tala said that their teaching performance suffered and thought that they were falling behind. Shahd said, *'with inclusion, my performance suffered. Honestly, I am behind because I am working under pressure, and that affected my performance'*. The findings of Altieri (2001) also showed that teachers lost their confidence in their teaching practices and felt incompetent to teach children with SEN in inclusive classrooms.

The feelings of incompetency could be because teachers felt powerless and unable to make changes. Their inputs were denied and their attempts were rejected, which might lead to feelings of being ineffectual and incapable to teach children with SEN. This interpretation is supported by Ely (2013) who found that teachers in her study developed a sense of incompetency and, thus, believed that they were ineffective and incapable of helping their students because they were powerless in their inclusive classrooms and were not involved in the process of inclusion.

The lack of training and preparation could contribute to the development of incompetency feelings among the teachers. They may feel lack of confidence and skills in teaching in inclusive classrooms because they had no frames of reference for the principles and practices of inclusion. Avramidis et al. (2000) found that teachers who had training in inclusive education were confident in their abilities to teach children with SEN and to achieve the requirements of their individualised educational plans. This means that there is a link between teachers' feelings of competency and the provision of training.

This finding is a consequential result of depriving teachers of power and a reflection of the dominance of the medical model of disability in the Saudi culture. Since the culture treats

disability as a deficiency that requires professional assistance and specialised knowledge, general education teachers frequently think that they are unqualified to teach children with SEN and need training to be competent (Slee, 2013). Goodley et al. (2018) explained that how individuals come to feel is the result of his/her relationship with others. Vygotsky and Luria (1993) affirmed that individuals come to create themselves through their interactions and engaging in actions with others. Their social context, through the way that their colleagues and superiors treated the teachers, imbued them with the sense of incompetency.

#### **5.3.4 Isolated.**

As discussed previously in the section about barriers to inclusion, the teachers were isolated, excluded and unsupported, and they lacked opportunities to collaborate. In fact, they worked in a stressful, authoritarian environment that actively discouraged their participation. Teachers' feelings of isolation could be the cumulative impact of being disconnected from the kindergarten as they lacked opportunities to collaborate with other teachers; unsupported and discouraged from being involved in inclusion. The teachers' feelings of isolation resemble Ely's (2013) findings; she reported that the teachers felt isolated in their inclusive schools because they were unsupported and lacked opportunities for collaboration. In addition, it is in line with Wood (1998), who found that teachers developed feelings of exclusion and isolation due to their lack of involvement in the process of inclusion. Vygotsky and Luria (1993) affirmed the importance of being engaged within the environment and the influences of isolation and treatment as passive recipient of information on individuals. According to Vygotsky, individuals acquire knowledge and skills about themselves and about their surroundings from their social contexts and social interactions (Dixon & Verenikina, 2007). Being isolated created stressful and

challenging experiences for the teachers, as they did not know what to do and how to practise inclusion. It seems that if teachers were not isolated and their collaboration and participation were not denied that they might gain knowledge and understanding of the children's needs and, thus, overcome some of the challenges that faced. This confirms that the success of inclusion requires collective actions to identify the issues of inclusion and produce changes (Watson, 2012).

### **5.3.5 No continuance.**

In response to feeling isolated, unsupported, unrecognised and powerless, five teachers chose to leave the kindergarten. Njood, Muna, Haifa, Hibah, and Malak either applied to retire early or to be transferred to a non-inclusive kindergarten. Malak said, *'this year I applied for a transfer to another kindergarten that does not offer inclusion'*. Hibah also said that *'this is my last year teaching. I've applied for retirement. It was getting even worse. We were not moving forward'*. This supports the findings of Leatherman (2007) that found ECE teachers encouraged teaching in inclusive classrooms and pursued teaching in inclusive classrooms. Teachers in Leatherman's study had positive experiences with inclusion in which they felt very supported from principals, colleagues and therapists. The support and the collaboration teachers received made them develop the beliefs that inclusion involves benefits not only for the children but also for the teachers themselves. They believed that through their teaching in inclusive classrooms, they are making a great contribution to the children; thus, they were happy to seek work in inclusive classrooms. This indicates that the extent to which teachers are supported, recognised, communicated and allowed to participate influences their experiences and their decisions. According to Vygotsky (1978), individuals construct their world from their social experiences

and interactions. Individuals acquire knowledge and understand their worlds through their social interactions within their social contexts. The negative experiences and absence of positive interactions have led teachers in my study to choose to leave the kindergarten and, for three of them, to leave the profession altogether. This reveals that the improper implementation of inclusion and its barriers not only had an impact on the children, but also impacted on the teachers' emotions, professional knowledge and continuance in the teaching profession. Teachers' choice to leave the kindergarten means that the impact would extend to the kindergarten, as there would be a shortfall of teachers.

The teachers' personal experiences had broader structural consequences. The feelings of powerlessness, guilt, emotional and physical exhaustion and incompetency have caused five teachers to decide to leave the kindergarten. That suggests that in the upcoming years, the kindergarten might be understaffed. Tala said that the MoE's supervisors told her that '*next year you will see inclusion from the beginning of the year and for more than one type of disability*'. More children will be accepted with fewer teachers. With the possibility of shortfall in experienced teachers and the continuous policy of randomly including children, it seems that inclusion, as Hibah said, '*was getting even worse. We were not moving forward*'. The structural issues that the kindergarten will face such as shortcoming in teachers might be resolved in the provision of new, probably, unprepared teachers, which implies the recurrences of teachers' experiences. The failure to take inclusion into consideration and the absence of structural and cultural changes, not only would cause structural issues but it also suggests that teachers and children could continue practising inclusion as exclusion. The teachers' choice to leave the kindergarten requires thinking about the way inclusion was implemented; as Malak said, '*anything that started right would continue to be right*'. There is a need for long-term plans that



require deep changes and reconstructions rather than just substitutions.

### **5.3.6 Fearful and anxious.**

In addition to feeling overwhelmed, powerless, incompetent, and disconnected from inclusion, the teachers were frequently beset by fears and worries. Tala was afraid that she might accidentally damage the children, and Haifa feared engaging with the children because she did not know how to interact with them. The lack of knowledge, preparation, and training caused the teachers to feel reluctant and afraid that they would accidentally harm the children. In Robison's (2017) study, the teachers were fearful and anxious because they believed that they could not understand the children's needs. Similarly, in Altieri's (2001) study, the teachers doubted their ability to meet their students' needs; they needed education and extensive support to overcome their challenges with inclusion.

The feelings of fear and discomfort could be the sequences of the incongruity between teachers' personal beliefs, cultural beliefs and their practices. The inconsistency between their beliefs such as inclusion is a right and children with SEN as deficient has caused the teachers to practise exclusion. Ely (2013) explained the possibility of inconsistency between beliefs and inclusive practices in causing anxiety and distress among teachers. This incongruity caused the teachers to feel confused, especially with the lack of knowledge and preparation that they had. It seems critical that teachers learn about disabilities and inclusion before inclusion is implemented. This is especially true in places like the kindergarten, where the teachers were unprepared and faced culturally ingrained beliefs about disabilities. Their experiences involved not only structural obstacles, including inadequate training, knowledge, and preparation—factors noted by Ely (2013)—but also struggles with their own cultural beliefs. As Vygotsky and Luria

(1993) argued, an adult is the product of his/her society. In this regard, the teachers were manifestations of a society that viewed disabilities as sicknesses and deficiencies, and, lacking sufficient support and training, they struggled to implement international policies that were fundamentally opposed to their culture.

### **5.3.7 Guilty.**

The conflicts between the teachers' cultural beliefs, their professional knowledge of ECE, and their inadequate knowledge about disabilities and inclusion left the teachers feeling guilty. The fact that the children experienced exclusion instead of inclusion caused the teachers to feel first stress, and then guilt, for not being able to do anything. For example, Malak said, *'inclusion was a disaster! I could not continue living in that disaster. I felt responsible and guilty for not being able to meet the needs of my children and the children with SEN. I just could not'*. Haifa said that she felt guilty for not being able to include the children.

This guilt reflected the incongruity that the teachers experienced. Though they believed that inclusion was a right, they did not know how to fulfil this right, due to the dominance of the oppressive cultural beliefs and the medical model of disability. They believed in the principles of a child-centred approach, but they did not know how to extend these principles to include children with SEN. They worked alone in fear and anxiety, lacking support and guidance; thus, they chose not to continue.

### **5.3.8 Religion as source of relief.**

The teachers' religious beliefs and practices served as a source of relief and strength. For example, Muna prayed for patience and strength; Haifa asked for Allah's help to overcome her

challenges; and Njood said that her '*complaints are only to Allah; may they be forgiven*'. The teachers shared their feelings and desires by communicating with Allah, and they expressed their dissatisfaction about how the children with SEN were treated.

This finding exemplifies the conceptual incongruity in the KSA's policy of inclusion. There was an incongruity between the teachers' religious beliefs and their cultural beliefs about disabilities. Saudi society is greatly influenced by Islamic values and beliefs; however, these influences were not reflected in how the children with SEN were included. In short, Islamic beliefs about disability are totally opposed to the culture's beliefs about disability, such as how, in Islam, people with SEN have the right to be active members of their communities. In the Holy Quran, there is evidence that people with SEN are viewed as they are viewed in contemporary societies in which they have right to be active and full members of their societies. For example, Allah reprimanded the Prophet Mohammed for how he treated a blind man who came to the Prophet to ask about religion. The Prophet ignored the man and turned away from him. Importantly, the Prophet was not being reproached for his insensitivity toward a man with a disability but rather for his inattention to someone who had come to learn.

In addition, the Holy Quran does not refer to people with SEN except in the context of war. For example, Allah said in Surat An-Nisa, Verse No: 95: 'Not equal are those of the believers who sit (at home), except those who are disabled (by injury or are blind or lame), and those who strive hard and fight in the Cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives' (Khan & Alhilali, 2007, p. 137-138). These examples show that it is an Islamic belief that people with SEN ought to be treated as others are. They have rights and responsibilities. Islam does not believe that disabilities prevent people from living normal lives.

According to Altamimi et al. (2015), Islam supports the concept and principles of inclusive education. In Islam, children with SEN have the ‘right to enjoy, and have duties to perform as any member of the community’ (p. 99). This resembles the findings of Alhudaithi (2015), who found that Islamic beliefs helped teachers overcome negative and degrading cultural beliefs about children with autism. It seems that, as Goodley (2014) suggested, ‘religion is not simply a heart in a heartless word but also a helpful practice for dealing with everyday neuroses and collective unconscious conflicts’ (p. 123).

It seems that the principal and the MoE’s supervisors exploited the teachers’ religious beliefs and values. Muna, Shahd, Hibah, and Tala were told to respond to their challenges by asking for rewards from Allah. For example, Hibah said that *‘the only answer we got was to count on rewards from Allah. I want the rewards, but not everything is just waiting for a reward. We have to do something’*. It seemed that the principal and the MoE’s supervisors could not look beyond the children’s disabilities and were convinced that the children were deficient and that they framed inclusion as an act of charity. Consequently, their practices reflected the belief that nothing could be done for them and that the only reward that the teachers could get would come from Allah. This finding reflects the dominance of the belief that disabilities are deficiencies and sicknesses that must be treated with patience to be rewarded by Allah (Alquraini, 2011). Influenced by Islamic values and Saudi society, the principal and the MoE’s supervisors knew that they could convince the teachers to remain calm in the face of challenges if the teachers knew that Allah would eventually reward them.

#### **5.4 Summary of the Chapter.**

This section discussed the teachers' experiences with inclusion in the kindergarten. It seemed that the inadequate implementation of inclusion and the barriers produced by this significantly impacted what the teachers experienced. The teachers felt overwhelmed, powerless, and incompetent and, consequently, began feeling guilty about the numerous problems they faced when trying to include children with SEN. There was an incongruity between their Islamic beliefs, which valued the rights of people with SEN and did not distinguish them from other people; their cultural beliefs, which portrayed people with SEN as deficient and sick; and their professional knowledge as early childhood educators, which caused them to believe in the child-centred approach. This incongruity not only caused the teachers to feel overwhelmed, isolated, and stressed but also led them to describe inclusion as a '*tragedy*' that they could no longer bear. Tala commented that it was very frustrating to her '*to watch a great concept like inclusion changed into tragedy*'.

This chapter interpreted the research data and used the literature to contextualise and explain the data. The final chapter will provide a summary of the findings, my conclusions, and recommendations, and explain how this research makes an original contribution to knowledge.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the concluding thoughts of this research, its results and its limitations and implications. **Section 6.1** summarises the main findings of this work; **Section 6.2** details the limitations of this research; **Section 6.3** suggests implications for society, the Saudi MoE and policymakers; **Section 6.4** presents recommendations for future research; **Section 6.5** highlights the contribution of this research to the field of education; and **Section 6.6** relates the personal reflections and thoughts of the researcher.

### **6.1 Summary of Key Findings**

This study was conducted to gain a nuanced understanding of the way inclusion is implemented in the KSA, to explore the barriers it faces and to reach a holistic picture of ECE teachers' experiences and perceptions with inclusion. Through its case study and sociocultural approaches, observations and interviews, this research revealed several points that illuminate how inclusion was implemented in a KSA kindergarten and how ECE teachers experienced the inclusion of children with SEN in their classrooms. The findings of this study led to a deeper understanding of the sociocultural barriers that significantly impact the implementation of inclusion and the emotional and professional status of teachers.

By presenting its data in a narrative writing style, this research produced rich and deep insights into how ECE teachers experienced the improper implementation of inclusion while facing many structural, relational and sociocultural barriers. Those experiences reflected teachers' views, their interactions and the events that affect teachers' feelings about themselves, the children and their teaching capabilities.

The findings and their discussions were structured based on the research questions of this research. The three main questions of this research are: 'How was inclusion implemented in the kindergarten, from the perspectives of the teachers?', 'What are the barriers to inclusion, from the perspectives of the teachers?' and 'How did ECE teachers experience inclusion within a kindergarten?'

The first research question yielded rich data about the implementation of inclusion in the kindergarten; unfortunately, these findings demonstrated that inclusion was improperly implemented. Such improper implementation lacked sufficient consideration or planning. Consequently, teachers were required to implement and practise inclusion suddenly, without being informed adequately. This improper, flawed implementation of inclusion in the kindergarten revealed that inclusion was implemented as integration and there was confusion regarding inclusion within the Saudi culture. This confusion and inability to distinguish between integration and inclusion lessened the benefits of inclusion in the kindergarten, as teachers found that no one—including themselves, children with SEN and children without SEN—were benefiting from inclusion. Instead, inclusion in the kindergarten was a form of exclusion, in which teachers themselves were entirely excluded from the process by the education system, the principal, and SPE teachers.

However, teachers were not the only ones excluded; unfortunately, exclusion also reached the children with SEN. In this research, children were found to be socially, emotionally and educationally excluded. There was no differentiation of activities and experiences, no provision of resources and materials, and no considerations of individual needs and capabilities. Children were only included in the kindergarten's physical space, and they were physically included solely through their presence in the kindergarten.

Findings also revealed that children with SEN were abused in the kindergarten. They were emotionally ignored, socially avoided and physically pulled and screamed at. Therefore, the first research question revealed that the improper implementation of inclusion did not just impact the teachers, it also affected all the children. Children with SEN were rejected by their society, and their rights to live independently were denied. Children were taken for granted as disabled, weak and dependent; in short, they were not perceived as right holders at all.

The second research question explored the barriers to inclusion that teachers face in the kindergarten. Teachers in this study encountered several obstacles that impacted their ability to include children and alter their teaching practices into inclusive practices. These barriers were multi-layered and intersected in ways that construct forms of exclusion. In this research, the barriers were categorised into three main themes: cultural barriers, structural barriers, and relational barriers. Cultural barriers to inclusion were found to play a significant role in shaping and influencing teachers' experiences with inclusion. Teachers were found to face difficulties within their surroundings and within themselves concerning a cultural understanding of disability, inclusion and childhood.

In addition, the study found an understanding of disability mainly shaped by the medical model of disability. Hence, this mode of understanding has greatly influenced inclusion and obstructed an understanding of its philosophy and aims. Due to these cultural beliefs and understandings, the teachers felt burdened with the inclusion of children with SEN, especially children with autism, who were considered harmful and aggressive.

The study also found a lack of understanding concerning childhood and childhood education in general. Teachers were underestimated and excluded from participating in inclusion because, in that specific context, they were perceived solely as ECE teachers. Teachers felt



rejected from the inclusion process because of the assumption they knew nothing more than play-related instruction.

Teachers were found to believe that, due to those negative cultural beliefs and the absence of understandings of disability, inclusion and childhood, the children's rights were at risk. There is much evidence that children were deprived from their rights to be socially included.

This study found that inclusion in the early childhood phase is a political, social and cultural choice rather than a pedagogical choice that the teachers were responsible to make. Childhood is an interpretation that is constructed socially, historically and culturally. The way children are perceived in a society influences how society thinks about their education, learning and rights as human beings. This study found that full inclusion was weakened by how childhood was devalued and how children with SEN were seen as deficient and dependent in Saudi culture.

The study also revealed that teachers found several structural and relational barriers that greatly impacted their experiences of inclusion. Structural barriers included a lack of preparation and knowledge, training, defined roles and responsibilities, and follow-ups. Relational barriers included the absence of collaboration and support. The teachers found the barriers to intertwine and intersect in ways that constructed exclusion instead of inclusion. Hence, the second research question of this research confirmed that, although structural and relational barriers are entirely legitimate, the creation of those barriers has resulted from sociocultural beliefs within the KSA regarding childhood and disability.

The third research question focused on teachers' experiences of inclusion within the kindergarten. The study revealed the complexity of the teachers' experiences that was expressed through their shared stories. With the improper implementation of inclusion and the barriers

teachers encountered at work, they felt physically and emotionally overwhelmed. Teachers felt powerless. They did not have the agency to make changes, share opinions or even have knowledge of what to do. Teachers also experienced a great sense of isolation. They lacked opportunities to collaborate and to be part of the process of inclusion; their voices were not heard.

Furthermore, the teachers felt incompetent. They were unprepared and lacked a knowledge and understanding of disability and inclusion, which meant they felt ineffectual and incapable of teaching children with SEN. As a result, instead of including the children, they pushed them away. The teachers experienced fear and anxiety; teachers did not want to damage the children because they were not competent to meet the children's needs. Consequently, teachers felt guilty about their inability to do anything. This guilt was generated from the incongruence teachers experienced. They believed that inclusion is a right and children's needs must be fulfilled, but they did not know how to fulfil these rights and needs, due to the dominance of oppressive cultural beliefs and the medical model of disability that created significant structural and relational barriers.

Moreover, the teachers experienced incongruity between their Islamic beliefs, which value the rights of people with SEN and do not distinguish them from other people; their cultural beliefs, which portray people with SEN as deficient and sick; and their professional knowledge as early childhood educators, which caused them to believe in the child-centred approach. This incongruence led five teachers to quit working in an inclusive kindergarten. The incongruence caused them to describe inclusion as a '*tragedy*' they could no longer bear.

In summary, the literature supported the teachers' descriptions of their experiences with inclusion, which in every case was a struggle to implement inclusive policies and meet the demands of these policies. My study's findings provided insights about the teachers' experiences with inclusion and explained how these experiences were affected by sociocultural issues related to disabilities and inclusion in the KSA. The teachers emphasised that more training, preparation and education were necessary for inclusion to be successful. However, their experiences also revealed the pernicious effects of inclusive policies that are fundamentally ingrained, as Runswick-Cole (2011) stated, with a conceptual incongruity.

This incongruity consists of a massive gap between inclusive policies based on a social model of disability and the cultural context, which is based on a medical model of disability. This incongruity created challenges not only for the teachers but also for the children, their families and everyone involved in implementing inclusive policies. It reveals the potential, immediate and long-term effects of disabling children from participating and contributing, as well as from preventing them from living their lives fully and with dignity.

Accordingly, the results of this study reflect the complexity of implementing a notion of inclusive education borrowed from international policies based on different cultural beliefs and values. This study also shows that there are many layers of problems and omissions in the KSA's inclusive policy such as the heart of the policy, the lack of guidance in schools, the culture and beliefs about children with SEN, and the lack of strategies and guidelines available for teachers on how to include children with SEN in classroom activities. The findings of this study also indicate that inclusion requires more than technical training; it requires an acknowledgement of the emotional aspects of inclusive practices. As Vygotsky stated, within an education system oriented toward children's deficiencies, it is as impossible to provide an inclusive education as 'it

is . . . to build a house on sand' (Vygotsky et al., 1993, p. 74). Indeed, it is impossible to achieve inclusion without conclusive, positive social goals (Vygotsky et al., 1993).

The findings of this research indicated that, to enable children with SEN and to achieve full inclusion in society, there is a massive need for sociocultural reconstructions about childhood and disability. There is a need for broad and deep changes, and these changes provoke and necessitate questions, such as: Who is responsible for these changes? What changes must Saudi culture undertake first? In addition, how long would it take for Saudi culture to make these changes? Specifically, how would Saudi culture move from the medical model to the social model of disability?

## **6.2 Limitations of This Study**

This research followed an interpretive, qualitative approach to its work with a small group of teachers who worked in one kindergarten in Riyadh in the KSA. The purpose was to gain a deep understanding, rather than reach generalised findings. Therefore, this study lacked generalisable results, though I strove to ensure and achieve trustworthiness in reporting the findings, as explained in detail in (Section 3.8). Importantly, the interpretations and analysis of this study's results are specific to this kindergarten, participants' particular situations and the number of participants. However, the findings of this research might be useful to understand the intersecting and intertwining barriers within similar cultures and educational systems.

Another limitation was that the data collection was undertaken in nine weeks due to unforeseen Royal orders and the constraints of this PhD study. I am a sponsored student, and I only have twelve weeks' permission from my sponsor to collect data. Nonetheless, the nine weeks allowed me to collect rich data that fully informed my analysis. Adopting two research

methods to collect the data observations and interviews enabled me to generate a thorough understanding of kindergarten teachers' experiences.

### **6.3 Implications of This Study**

Reflecting on the findings of this study, this research has several implications for society, the Saudi MoE and policymakers. On the societal level, this study revealed that the implementation of inclusion is facing serious issues regarding its sociocultural and ethical understanding and beliefs about childhood and disability. Those sociocultural issues necessitate social reconstruction and reforms. Therefore, the first step to generate those changes is to recognise the current understanding and beliefs about childhood and disability and to be aware of their influences on the children and their potential. To do so, collaboration is needed among parties like researchers, the media and educators. Researchers can contribute by studying this area to provide evidence and reflections of the current understanding of individuals with SEN and its influences on them.

The findings of these studies should be disseminated through local and international conferences. Sharing the findings of these studies and the experiences of individuals with SEN would help in recognising the current level of understanding and the future level that could be achieved. We live in the age of technology—with media covering conferences, knowledge about these studies and their findings could be easily disseminated. In collaboration with researchers, parents and educators, the media can produce short video clips that illustrate the reality and the challenges that individuals with SEN experience in society. There are several channels through which the media can spread those videos to the public, for example social media tools such as

Twitter, Instagram, Facebook or WhatsApp. Those videos would increase societal awareness about the reality, challenges and needs of individuals with SEN.

Educators also can contribute to spreading an understanding of influences of the current understanding of disability on children and on concepts such as inclusion. In this study, all the teachers acknowledged that inclusion is a right and that cultural understanding obstructed the implementation of that right. Therefore, when teachers share their experiences and make their voices heard, current sociocultural issues can be illuminated, contributing to enhancements in those understandings. There are several ways in which teachers can contribute, for example by participating in academic studies and conferences, conversing with parents and, most importantly, talking with children and following pedagogical approaches to teach about accepting and living with differences. However, this would require the provision of clear guidelines for teachers in regard to the requirement and practices of inclusion. It would also require changing the curricula to support differentiation and the needs of all children rather than expecting all children to follow and reach the same learning goals.

Another step to generate changes and reconstruction is to increase awareness about the concept and philosophy of inclusion and the rights of individuals with SEN. This also requires the collaboration of researchers, the media, educators and policymakers. The first step to increase awareness should be taken with individuals with SEN and with their parents. This study revealed a sociocultural issue of shame regarding disabilities that restrained parents from collaborating with teachers and enhancing their children's experiences. Accordingly, it is crucial to empower parents by increasing awareness about their children's rights, perhaps through workshops about the rights of children with SEN and the foundation of inclusive education. Parents are the strongest advocates for their children, and parents have effected changes and rights for children

in many societies. Hence, I believe that, through empowering parents, changes would be generated.

In addition, Saudi society is highly influenced by Islamic values. In Saudi culture, mosques have the responsibility to share and to provide guidance and awareness about sociocultural and political issues. Consequently, mosques must spread awareness of the rights of individuals with SEN and how they are viewed in Islam as active members of society with rights and responsibilities. Support from mosques would contribute significantly to increasing and spreading awareness.

Regarding the MoE, the findings of this study could assist them in understanding the current implementation of inclusion and the deep, invisible barriers that teachers face in attempting to implement inclusion. This study could help the MoE to have a clear idea of what must be done before requiring teachers to implement inclusion, for example explaining inclusion and its aims and philosophy to supervisors, principals and teachers to ensure that an understanding exists before implementation. Additionally, the distance between the MoE and the schools must be shortened through enabling teachers' and parents' voices to be heard.

The findings of this study also necessitate the MoE to spend more effort and time in increasing awareness about inclusion and disabilities. This could be done by creating curricula that do not expect all children to achieve the same learning goals, providing knowledge about inclusion as a right and presenting its aims and philosophy, and providing guidance to teachers on how to support and include all children. In addition, the MoE must consider practising inclusion within their system. They must allow individuals with SEN to work as administrators and teachers, which would augment awareness and represent a genuine example of inclusion to the students. The MoE must also consider unifying SPE and the general education systems and

allow conversation and exchange of knowledge and understanding about what is required in both systems.

Finally, the findings of this research revealed the importance of providing preparation and knowledge to pre-service teachers. Thus, educational programmes in KSA's universities must prepare teachers for inclusion. They also ought to provide an understanding of inclusion and its aims and empower these teachers with inclusive teaching skills.

On the level of policymakers, this study shed the light on the importance of inclusion policy to be congruent with the Saudi cultural context so that all children can have genuine inclusive experiences that enable them to reach their potentials and fulfil their needs. For this to occur, the incongruence between the international policy of inclusion and sociocultural values in the Saudi context must be addressed through deeply examining policy and checking its appropriateness for the culture. Policymakers must be aware of the incongruence and address it by increasing awareness and knowledge within society before implementing policy.

The findings of this study indicated that the policy was implemented poorly, randomly and without follow-ups. Therefore, policymakers must be aware they are accountable for the genuine implementation of inclusion and for meeting the rights and needs of all children. Implementation must be carefully considered, and evaluations and follow-ups must be an ongoing procedure. They must also bridge the gap between policy and actual practice in school through allowing the participation of supervisors, principals, teachers and parents in the process.



#### **6.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

This project could be a basis for more studies in understanding the experiences of teachers with inclusion and the deep sociocultural barriers that contributed significantly to shaping those experiences, and to building a holistic picture of the obstacles that inclusion encountered during its implementation.

Based on the findings of this work, there are several recommendations for future research. First, the literature provided evidence that there is a need for more qualitative studies that focus on inclusion and its implementation. In the KSA, there is an absence of qualitative research that targets the gaining of a deep understanding and insights into inclusion and explores hidden barriers. Therefore, future research should be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of inclusion. In addition, participatory research is needed in which children with SEN can share their experiences and construct knowledge and understanding about those experiences. This might inform ways that society can adapt to children and their families, rather than them being expected to adapt to society.

Second, future research on the experiences and views of parents, children and principals would be important to gain an understanding of those different experiences and to reach deep insights into their various aspects. Sharing experiences from diverse perspectives would also contribute to increasing awareness.

Third, this study has focused on a small group of teachers in one kindergarten in Riyadh. Therefore, it is important to undertake future research in more schools and at a range of educational levels. It would be helpful to study the similarities and differences between schools and levels. Finally, future research would be beneficial to understand ways of increasing

awareness in society, such as the level and the nature of professional development opportunities for teachers.

### **6.5 Contribution to Knowledge**

The study aims to understand the implementation of inclusion in ECE, explores its barriers and understands the experiences of ECE teachers with inclusion. Previous studies in the KSA and across the Arab region focused mainly on quantitatively measuring the attitudes of early childhood educators towards inclusion and qualitatively examining structural barriers. Thus, there is no previous research that attempts to deeply understand the experiences of ECE teachers with inclusion. Internationally, there are few studies about the experiences of ECE teachers with inclusion. However, the studies that do exist focus on the structural barriers and issues that influenced inclusion and affected teachers' experiences, and they are entirely legitimate. However, this research addresses the hidden sociocultural issues that have impacted on inclusion and the teachers' experiences of it through enabling them to share their voices and prioritising the development of respectful and trustful relationships between the researcher and the participants.

Furthermore, this study provided insights about the influences of such barriers and experiences on all children. It revealed the impacts of improper implementation and the cultural, structural and relational barriers with a negative impact, not only on the teachers who were the focus of this study but also on the children at that kindergarten. This study indicated that children with SEN are seen differently (and in deficit) from other children; there is a failure to look beyond their physical impairments to their capabilities and potential. This finding supports the creation of a new area of research, Disabled Children Childhood Studies (Curran & Runswick-

Cole, 2014), and I hope that the findings of this study will contribute to providing evidence that children with SEN are, indeed, seen as deficient children and due to their disabilities, they are deprived of their childhoods in various cultural contexts. Hopefully, this research will contribute to the enhancement of inclusion in ECE and, most importantly, place a lens on reality for most children with SEN, however uncomfortable that may be.

## **6.6 Reflections of the Researcher**

My PhD journey has been packed with many different experiences. It was like being on a rollercoaster on which I experienced ups and downs, excitement and anxiety, happiness and fear, tears and laughter, all simultaneously. Throughout my PhD journey, I experienced many challenges, endured personal changes, and acquired many skills and deep knowledge as an international student, a researcher, an academic, and as a mother.

As an international student, the journey to my PhD was not easy. I had to adapt myself and my family to a new lifestyle and to totally different weather. It was challenging to be away from our home and our family. We had to make sacrifices, but thanks to this experience, I have learnt many valuable things and acquired many skills. I learnt how to endure difficult times alone and how to balance my responsibilities as a single mother and as a full-time PhD student. Furthermore, studying in the UK strengthened my academic writing abilities and my English language skills. It also helped me acquire critical thinking and academic research skills. By improving my research skills and being able to critically review literature, I am confident my experience as an international student has developed me into a better academic researcher.

As a researcher, I was able to develop my critical thinking and a deep understanding of knowledge in my area of research. Through reviewing the literature, I evolved an understanding of the views of inclusion, disability and childhood; that enabled me to understand the distinctions between my culture and others. Finishing a PhD in the West made me realise that there is, indeed, a gap between international and national understandings of inclusion and disability, such as the different models underlying the understanding of disability and the connotations that some terms have, such as 'SEN', 'normal children' and 'disablism'. The concepts I worked with during my PhD challenged my thinking and widened my perspective. I know that, at the end of my journey, I will return to the context where I will continue working with these problems. I am unsure if I can use these ideas back home, because they are so far ahead of the current educational and social contexts in KSA. What I am certain about is that the ideas I learnt during my PhD journey have dramatically shifted my understanding and strengthened my commitment to enhance the lives and education of all children in my country.

Moreover, by doing this research, I became a better researcher. The challenges I encountered during data collection improved my research. I had power and I was given the opportunity to practise it, but I chose not to. My choice to build relationships with teachers and have mutual trust between us helped me to achieve the aim of my study and to contribute to knowledge. My good rapport with teachers enabled me to understand their experiences and the reality of implementation and barriers of inclusion with which they live. I would not have reached the same or even similar findings if I chose to introduce myself as a figure of power.

As a researcher, I learnt that, in addition to my responsibilities to the research, I have great responsibilities to the participants. I have the responsibility to honestly represent their experiences and voices and to articulate their words, feelings and views. It is my duty to bring

the hardly listened-to voices of the participants to the forefront. Hopefully, through this research, I have successfully represented their experiences and lauded the teachers' voices that have been always unheard in our sociocultural context. Finally, I also learnt the importance of having an open mind and being open to the many possibilities that research and participants may offer. I also improved my skills in writing, reflecting, organising and planning.

As an academic, my doctoral journey changed me into a positive, knowledgeable, confident and organised person. I gained new, different perspectives on learning. Through my experience as a student, I learnt that, through providing guidance and, simultaneously, a space, students would develop confidence, gain skills and learn more. I had the great example of experienced supervisors who guided and supported me, meanwhile giving me the confidence that I can do this work. My experience as a student under supervision helped me understand my role and prepare myself to be an academic back in my country, the KSA.

Last, as a mother, my PhD journey taught me that exclusion existed due to sociocultural beliefs that we did not choose but, rather, acquired through our childrearing. Therefore, I have been trying to raise my children so they are not affected by such sociocultural beliefs. Living in the UK since 2016 and seeing many individuals with SEN in school, in the community, on public transportation and in malls have made it an easier task. I am open to my children's questions, curiosity about differences, we had and still are having many conversations and stories about disability. I provided age-appropriate resources such as the 'Wonder' movie, it provoked a lot of discussions and questions. My children are aware people are different, and that is okay. In fact, it is normal to be different.

Through this challenging but fruitful journey, I hope that I will contribute to the inclusion of children with SEN in ECE and to sociocultural changes with childhood and disability. I know

these changes are possible, but also that they will not easily happen and will take a long time. The recent, fast changes to Saudi culture and the creation of Saudi Vision 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2018e) acknowledge the lack and poor services and education for children with SEN. With these changes and the plan to ensure lifelong learning, as well as equal, inclusive education for all children, I hope these changes will not take a long time.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Interview Questions**

##### **Interviews' Questions**

- 1. Tell me about your experience with having children with special educational needs in your classrooms?**
- 2. What do you think of the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the kindergarten?**
- 3. What do you think of the implementation of inclusion in the kindergarten?**
- 4. What are the challenges of including children with special educational needs in the kindergarten?**
- 5. How do you think you can overcome those challenges?**
- 6. Who do you think benefits most from inclusion?**
- 7. How do you describe your relationship with families of children with SEN?**
- 8. How do you describe the level of support you receive from your school?**
- 9. What do you think about the physical environment of the kindergarten?**
- 10. What do you think about the educational program that you graduated from?  
Did it prepare you for inclusion?**
- 11. Describe the barriers you have faced in attempting to implement inclusion?**
- 12. How do you think inclusion would be better?**
- 13. What do you need to make inclusion works better in your settings?**



## Appendix B

### Ethical Approval Letter (School of Education, University of Sheffield)



Downloaded: 06/12/2018  
Approved: 21/03/2017

Nada AlWadaani  
Registration number: 160137237  
School of Education  
Programme: PhD in Education

Dear Nada

**PROJECT TITLE:** Exclusion inside of inclusion: the experiences of Saudi Early Childhood teachers with the inclusion of Children with special educational needs

**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 012846

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 21/03/2017 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 012846 (dated 03/03/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1028012 version 1 (02/03/2017).
- Participant consent form 1027957 version 1 (01/03/2017).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

*- It is advisable to obtain the Principal's decision that parental consent is not required. - That consideration be given to the number and range of kindergarten schools engaged in the study. This is recommended in order to avoid the possibility of direct comparison/contrast between the two institutions. - Minor changes to participant information sheet as follows: Teachers' participant info sheet: 1) para 4 Change to '... first, allow the researcher to observe your classroom for a total of six hours over a four week period 2) para 10 Name of workplace will not be identifiable 3) distinguish between teachers' and parents' Participant info sheets in titles*

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt  
Ethics Administrator  
School of Education



## Appendix D

### Teachers ' Information Sheet

#### Teachers' Information Sheet

**Research Study Title: The Experiences of Saudi Early Childhood Education Teachers with the Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs.**

You are being invited to participate in a PhD research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done, and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask any questions that you may have regarding this study. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

**1. The purpose:**

This study is in partial fulfilment of my doctoral studies at the University Of Sheffield, United Kingdom. This study aims is to explore the experiences of early childhood education teachers of inclusion and understand the implementation of inclusion in the kindergarten and the barriers teachers face.

The objectives of the study are to:

- a) Obtain deep insight into the experiences of early childhood education teachers with inclusion.
- b) Understand the implementation of inclusion in the kindergarten.
- c) Reveal the barriers that teachers face within inclusion.

**2. Selection of participants:**

You were chosen as a possible participant for couple of reasons. One is because my research is about inclusive kindergartens, which where you are working at. Second, because the kindergarten's principal was willing to participate in the study.

**3. Participation in the study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It is completely your choice to whether decide to participate or not participate in the study. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be given a consent form to sign. This consent form is to indicate your voluntary approval to participate in the study and also is s a part of the university's regulations. Please note that you have the right to withdraw completely from the study

#### **4. The study procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following: classroom observations and interview. A convenient time will be arranged to meet with you to discuss the study in depth and answer your questions, if you have.

Your participation means your approval to: first, allow the researcher to observe your classroom for 10 weeks. The observations will be eight hours a week for each classroom. The eight hours will be divided between different times in your daily schedule at the kindergarten. The observations will take a place at the circle time, outdoor playing, corner time, and mealtime.

Second, following the observations, you will make an interview with the researcher to discuss the topic of the research and to reflect your personal experience with inclusion. The interview will be conducted once and will take between 40 to 60 minutes in duration. All of the questions will be open-ended flexible questions and will be related only to the topic of the study. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission.

Please note that the aim of the study is to explore and capture the experience of early childhood education teachers with inclusion. Thus, it is not my role to judge or evaluate your practices and performances.

#### **5. Participants' role:**

During observations the researcher aims to capture your experience with having children with special educational needs in your classroom. Then, you will be invited to an interview to further explore your experience with inclusion and to discuss the barriers that you have and to identify your needs.

#### **6. Possible disadvantages and risks of being in this study:**

Participating in this study does not involve any foreseeable risks. However, if you experienced any sort of discomforts or risks arise during the research, please inform me as soon as possible.

**7. Possible benefits of being in this study:**

There are no immediate benefits from this study. However, through the findings of the study, the researcher aims that changes may occur in regard to overcome the identified barriers and to meet the teachers' needs for implementing successful inclusion.

**8. Questions and report concerns:**

You totally have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered. I will be around all of the time to answer any question and to address any concern. Please feel free to contact me on [REDACTED] or on [nzalwadaani1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:nzalwadaani1@sheffield.ac.uk), before, during or after the study. If you have any further questions or concerns regarding your participation in this study, you can report them to my supervisors Pro. Elizabeth Ann Wood, at [e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk) and Dr. Elizabeth Chesworth, at [e.a.cheswoth@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:e.a.cheswoth@sheffield.ac.uk) if your enquiry has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the University's Register and Secretary.

**9. Confidentiality:**

This study is anonymous. All of your personal information and your inputs into the research will be securely stored and will be confidential. I will not include any information in any publication or report that would make it possible to identify you. And your information and inputs will be only used in this academic research. You will be given the opportunity to review and approve your inputs to the research. Also, after the completion of the PhD, all of the collected data and the audio recordings of the interviews, will be destroyed

**10. The results of the research study:**

This research is part of the fulfilment of a PhD degree. Thus, the findings of the research will be used for my doctoral thesis. The thesis will be available at the library's website of the University of Sheffield. Additionally, the research may be published in academic journals or may be shared at conferences. At any of those situations, your identification will be anonymous and you will not be identified as well as the name of your workplace will not be identifiable.

**11. The funding of the research:**

I have a full PhD scholarship from the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London.

**12. Ethical review of the study:**


This research has been ethically reviewed and has gone through ethical review process at the University of Sheffield.

**13. Contact for further information**

The contact point for further information: Pro. Elizabeth Ann Wood and Dr. Elizabeth Chesworth, the School of Education, University of Sheffield, 388 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2JA.

Email: [e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk)  
[e.a.cheswoth@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:e.a.cheswoth@sheffield.ac.uk)

**Appendix E**  
**Informed Consent**

<b>Informed Consent</b>		
<b>Title of Research: The Experiences of Saudi Early Childhood Education Teachers with the Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs.</b>		
<b>Name of Researcher: Nada Zal AlWadaani</b>		
Participant Identification Number for this study:		
<b>Please initial box</b>		
- I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research and have had the opportunity to ask questions.		<input type="checkbox"/>
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw myself at any time without giving any reason.		<input type="checkbox"/>
- I understand that my information and inputs will be anonymous.		<input type="checkbox"/>
- I agree to take part in the above research study.		<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Researcher: Nada AlWadaani	_____	_____
	Date	Signature
		

## Appendix F

### Summary of Good Practice for Early Childhood Education Teachers

The findings of this study revealed that the proper implementation of inclusion in kindergartens, which ensures that children are socially, emotionally and academically active and engaged, requires several practices. To support teachers' efforts to be inclusive, this summary focuses on good practices for ECE teachers that were identified by the research participants. The participants believed that proper implementation of inclusion can be achieved when the following take place:

- Kindergartens create welcoming environments for all children by respecting their diverse needs and by offering opportunities for a range of learning experiences
- Curriculums offer a wide range of learning goals, activities and teaching strategies that empower teachers and guide their practices to meet the needs, abilities and rights of all children
- Sufficient teaching materials and resources are available to assist teachers' practices
- Opportunities for professional development and training are available
- Clear plans, objectives and expectations are set for children's learning and development
- Kindergartens organise informational meetings with principals, MoE supervisors, SPE teachers, parents and ECE teachers to discuss the needs and abilities of all children and to set plans and goals for children's learning and development
- Parents are engaged and fully participate in their children's educational plans
- Regular meetings with teachers and parents and follow-ups are held regarding plans, needs and achievement
- A positive and supportive school climate is created, in which all school members and parents communicate and work together to reach the same aims for children
- There is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of teachers and teaching assistants
- Good communication is cultivated and facilitated between teachers, principals and parents
- Teachers' work is recognised by principals and their effort is rewarded
- There is an awareness of the rights of all children, and diversity and difference is acknowledged and respected
- Practices are based on mutual and respectful relationships among all.
- Teachers participate in decision-making processes