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**SEX EDUCATION IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI
ARABIA: AN EXAMINATION OF HOW SEX
EDUCATION CAN BE IMPLEMENTED IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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by

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ABSTRACT

Sex education is an important topic for young children's development, values and protection. There is a significant need for sex education in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), a country whose culture is strongly based on conservative traditions and the Islamic religion. This research therefore investigates the importance of sex education for young children, appropriate sex education topics for children, and the approaches by which it could be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Saudi educational system. A mixed methods approach was used to collect the data from pre-school teachers via a questionnaire, and from supervisors and specialists through semi-structured interviews. The participants included 2,681 pre-school teachers surveyed in educational centres across 45 educational districts in the KSA, followed by interviews with pre-school supervisors and eight specialists from various sectors. The findings from both the interviews and surveys indicate that the majority of participants had strongly positive attitudes towards the importance of sex education for young children in the Saudi society. Influencing factors included the conservative culture, lack of knowledge and sex education resources, and the impacts of globalisation and the media.

The findings of this study suggest six key appropriate sex education topics that could be implemented in the pre-school curriculum. These are: relationships, body and gender, life cycles, health and hygiene, feelings and attitudes, and keeping safe. It further explains how the suggested topics could be implemented in the pre-school curriculum. This study is unique in this field because it presents findings that discuss the implementation of sex education for young children, which is a sensitive topic in most countries worldwide. Although this is a critical issue for people living in the conservative Saudi culture, traditional interpretations of Islam may prevent the development of sex education. Through careful consideration of the data, recommendations are made for policy makers, teachers, and parents, as well as suggestions for potential future research. This study will assist parents and educators to determine appropriate ways to approach sex education and child protection. The study is of significant interest to those involved in childcare and provides some ideas to inform policy, practice, and future research.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my beloved grandfather, Abdul-Aziz (God have mercy on him), who wished for me to obtain a Doctorate, and to everyone who I have met in my life who have showed me how we can all achieve the goals that we cherish and aspire towards through our kindness, patience and determination.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGFUND	Arab Gulf Programme for Development
CSE	Comprehensive Sex Education Programmes
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DfE	Department of Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department of Education and Skills
DKC	Developed Kindergarten Curriculum
ECE	Early Childhood Education
FOSEi	Future of Sex Education initiative
GASTAT	General Authority for Statistics
GPGE	General Presidency of Girls' Education
IEFE	International Exhibition and Forum for Education
IMB	Information, Motivational and Behavioural
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
KLAS	Kids Learning about Safety
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MOE	Ministry of Education
NFSP	National Family Safety Program
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
PAPSE	Parents as Primary Sexuality Educators
PHCCs	Primary Health Care Centers
PSHE	Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education
PBUH	Peace be Upon Him
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIECUS	Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the importance of sex education for young children between three and six years of age and how it can be implemented in the early childhood education curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This introductory chapter presents a brief outline of this research study. Firstly, I discuss the background of sex education and the study context, focusing on an appropriate sex education for children aged three to six. Following this, I set out the research aims and objectives, followed by the research questions. Then, I clarify the terminology used in this study. Moreover, in this chapter I explain the significance of this research and I demonstrate briefly my personal motivation and interest in this study. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background to study context

‘Sex education’ has been defined in an international study by UNESCO (2018) as “Comprehensive Sex Education Programmes (CSE) [to] help develop skills that are closely linked to effective social and emotional learning, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making” (p. 83). Similarly, Al-Ghazali (1975) and Al-Qadi (2006) argue that sex education in the Islamic paradigm is not just about the physical act, but includes related values such as morality, relationships, hygiene, and self-protection. Several studies have demonstrated, however, that sex education is considered a sensitive topic throughout the world (Kenny, 2009; Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013; Haberland and Rogow, 2015; Alldred et al., 2016). This is particularly true in Saudi society, which is considered a conservative society where discussions about sex are seen as taboo (Fageeh, 2008; Banunnah, 2013; Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2017). Saudi society’s resistance to discussing topics related to sex education can be notably significant in education. As Al-Ahdab (2010) and Almuneef et al. (2014) argue, advocating for sex education in such a context can be particularly challenging due to the strict societal guidelines outlined by Sharia law, which is the legal

basis within the KSA as well as other predominantly Islamic countries. Sharia law encompasses the rules and laws of the Quran, as well as the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed (Al-Ghazali, 1975; Kotb, 2004; Al-Qadi, 2006); however, it is widely recognised and a clearly defined set of rules is not provided. Consequently, different interpretations abound (Elwan, 1993; Banunnah, 2013; Tabatabaie, 2015), which impacts on every aspect of social life in the country. Nevertheless, most Muslim scholars argue that Islam encourages people to learn about sex education, because it addresses aspects of Muslim family life (Al-Ghazali, 1975; Elwan, 1993; Kotb, 2004; Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008; Ashraah et al., 2013). Although sex education is prevalent in the Islamic religion, some educators in Saudi society tend to avoid discussing it, which can be more broadly attributed to Saudi culture (Banunnah, 2013).

It can be argued that Islamic societies in the past did not view children and young people's sexual development as a serious matter. The Islamic world has, however, begun to place increasing concern on these matters (Tabatabaie, 2015) due to mass media, globalisation, and local traditional culture (Banunnah, 2013). Due to the lack of sex education information in the age of globalisation, concerns about sexual abuse are a rising in Saudi society (Almuneef et al., 2014; Almuneef et al., 2016; Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2017). For example, 89% of participating parents (500) and all teachers (36) and specialists (8) in my Master's study expressed their concern about child sexual abuse in Saudi society (Banunnah, 2013). One possible explanation for this might be the increased availability of inappropriate sex content on satellite TV channels and on the Internet (Banunnah, 2013), which may encourage perpetrators to exploit young children who lack good rapport with their caregivers, and are underestimated by adults in the society (Renold, 2005; Banunnah, 2013; NSPCC, 2018). Although the mass media may have a negative effect on children, it allows Saudi people to acknowledge the sexual abuse issue and share their experience and information through social media more openly than previously. It is important to note, for example, that there are growing concerns in Saudi society about child sexual abuse, a topic that was extensively documented in a research survey by Al-Zahrani (2004). This study investigated the causes and consequences of types of child abuse in Saudi society, such as physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect. The participants of this study comprised 519 undergraduate students over 18 years of age from various departments of King Faisal University (Dammam), Umm Al-

Qura University (Makkah) and Teachers College (Riyadh). Additionally, 304 householders participated in the Riyadh Region and the East Region (Dammam, Dhahran, Al-Jubail, Al-Khobar, Al-Hasa, Ras Tanura, and Qatif). Al-Zahrani (2004) reports that 22.7 % of participants claimed to have suffered some form of sexual abuse when they were between 6-10 years old.

The above findings corroborate the existence of a strong need for sex education as a method of protecting children from exploitation (Banunnah, 2013; Alsehaimi, 2016; MOE, 2018c). Sex education can help to protect children from sexual abuse (Banunnah, 2013) within a wider social system of rights and protection. Several empirical studies demonstrate that children who receive early sex education can avoid exploitation because such education provides them with relevant information to enhance their knowledge and promote their skills and values regarding sexuality (Kenny, 2009; Kirby, 2011; DeJong, 2012; Walsh et al., 2015; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). Sex education can promote children's skills, such as; confidence, self-esteem, relationships' skills, expression, responsibility, decision-making, self-management and social awareness (Goldman, 2011; Sex Education Forum, 2018; UNESCO, 2018). Children generally report increased feelings of safety following prevention programmes of sex education (Hazzard et al., 1991) and direct correlations have been shown between sex education and lower occurrences of sexual abuse in later life (Gibson and Leitenberg, 2000; Kenny, 2010; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). It is important to highlight that sex education is often contain reported or recommended to themes regarding, for example, keeping safe and looking after oneself; personal boundaries, rules about appropriate touch. It can also teach the child that the body belongs to an individual only, discuss the permissibly of touching, seeing or talking about the private/intimate parts and provide guidance on how to prevent unwanted physical contact (Martinez et al., 2012; Sex Education Forum, 2018; UNESCO, 2018). For example, in 2012, an American document on teaching sex education in the Future of Sex Education initiative [FOSEi] explains the sexual learning needs of students between the ages of 5-8 years. It advocates that sex education “explains that all people (including children) have the right to tell others not to touch their body” and “explains why bullying and teasing are wrong ... and how to respond” in such situations (FOSEi, 2012, p.13). Moreover, educating children about sex and body matters can help to prevent sexual abuse by raising their awareness of

sexual abuse and encouraging them to ask for help if they are worried about their own safety or the behaviour of others (WHO and BZgA, 2010; Sex Education Forum, 2018; NSPCC, 2018).

Although sex education can provide information and skills and values that can assist children to be safe, culture also plays a significant role in societies (Parker et al., 2009; Wiseman et al., 2013). For example, Al-Zahrani's study (2004) pointed out the strong effect of the conservative culture in Saudi society. He found that 77% of the entire sample avoided answering the questions in the questionnaires regarding sexual abuse and 62% declined to identify the perpetrators of sexual abuse, due to the sensitivity of the topic in Saudi culture. Arguably, children who live in conservative societies may not be able to report abuse because they may be under pressure from other family members, or from wider cultural beliefs and norms. Furthermore, due to the discrimination in some strict families, girls cannot talk about their abuse, especially if perpetrated by their relatives. Most of the sexual abuse issues in Saudi society stem from its culture, for example gender segregation, and the lack of sexual awareness from early childhood onwards (Banunnah, 2013). This, in my view, indicates that all forms of abuse need to be addressed at all levels in society – the government, schools, families, health and social care, because sex education alone cannot address the wider cultures in which abuse takes place. Additionally, the work of Alsehaimi (2016) clearly demonstrates that there is a noticeable lack of academic studies and government reports about child sexual abuse in Saudi society; thus, further research on this issue is required. Nevertheless, the few studies carried out on Saudi society with respect to sex education have tended to focus on the problem of child abuse (Al-Ahdab, 2010; Alsehaimi, 2016; Banunnah, 2017a). Therefore, there is a need for children, both girls and boys, to be granted their rights and voices equally in Saudi society. Protective measures surrounding sex are therefore likely to be a significant facet of any sex education that takes place in Saudi society. These issues, and the appropriateness of including them in any curriculum, will be looked at thoroughly in this thesis.

Despite the need for child protection, there are fears that sex education could promote undesirable sexual development in children, such as inappropriate sexual behaviour, which is largely recognised as one of the most important issues worldwide (Chrisman and

Couchenour, 2002; Alldred et al., 2003). For example, some parents and policy makers fear that when teachers attract children's attention to intimate body parts through sex education lessons, they may try to behave sexually. However, in the absence of sex education in the Saudi pre-school curriculum, some educators have concerns about sexual behaviours because young children may discover the private parts of their friends in games such playing the roles of doctor and patient (Banunnah, 2013). Therefore, it can be argued that children naturally may explore their own and other's bodies as part of their sexual development with or without sex education in the curriculum. Several research studies have demonstrated the importance of the early childhood sexual developmental phase (Bruce and Meggitt, 2002; Kirby, 2007, 2011; Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum, 2014; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2016), as it is a natural part of human development (Ketterman, 2007). Children therefore need to positively develop and grow sexually through accurate information and appropriate knowledge from sex education to promote their personal skills and awareness (Prymachuk, 1998; Goldman, 2013; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). Moreover, it can be argued that sex education should be provided during childhood in order to help children address a variety of issues about themselves as individuals, as well as their relationships with others, providing fundamental knowledge that will be of great importance to them as they mature (Halstead and Waite, 2001; Goldman, 2010; 2013; 2015).

Parents often experience anxiety and concerns about their children's questions regarding sex and gender and their sexual behaviours (Goldman, 2008; Sciaraffa and Randolph, 2011; Banunnah, 2013). Furthermore, teachers and parents still face significant concerns regarding how to educate children effectively about issues relating to sex and childhood development (Walker and Milton, 2006; Pop and Rusu, 2015). It has been suggested that there are a number of potential benefits to incorporating sex education into early childhood in ways that are appropriate to children's development; however, there is a significant lack of studies in this regard (Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002; Alldred et al., 2016). In addition, recent increased concerns about the sexual behaviour of teenagers has meant that most Western studies discussing sex education have focused particularly on the teenage years, particularly, on topics of puberty and early pregnancy (DeRose et al., 2011; Goldman, 2013; 2015). Al-Fadil (2009) recognised, however, that sex education

must be carried out in such a way that it is sensitive and age-appropriate for the stages of childhood development in different societies.

Literature in this area suggests that gender differences are present in relation to developing knowledge and understanding of sex and gender (Halstead and Waite, 2001). Culture has a great impact in this regard as one of the significant factors that can impact on the provision of sex education in different societies (UNESCO, 2009; 2018). Whilst in the Saudi educational system boys and girls are co-educated in pre-school, for example, later they are segregated (UNESCO, 2011). This can be seen as an immediate challenge for sex education in childhood. Moreover, the clearly delineated male and female roles within the conservative Saudi society, which come with strictly enforced societal rules about how each sex should behave in families and the wider society, pose a further challenge to building sexual awareness in children (Al-Ahdab, 2010). Any sex education provided in Saudi society would therefore have to take account of this culturally sensitive context. However, the challenge is not to reproduce or reinforce cultural norms, but to contribute to modernising change processes that are happening within Saudi society.

Accordingly, to understand the perspective and attitudes of Saudi educators regarding the importance of sex education for children, in 2013, I conducted my Master's research on the topic *Sex education in early childhood: A study to investigate parents' and teachers' attitudes towards its importance and potential introduction within education systems in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. The data for the dissertation was collected in two Saudi cities, Riyadh and Jeddah, from 500 parents surveyed by structured questionnaire, and from 36 pre-school and primary school teachers and four specialists by semi-structured interviews. My Master's findings (Banunnah, 2013) demonstrated a developing consensus among experts that sex education in the pre-school curriculum is an important topic for debate to help avoid some of the problems that are currently arising in Saudi society. It emphasised that sex education is an important topic in the early years curriculum and can be an effective source in protecting children from sexual abuse, as well as playing a part in developing appropriate behaviours and values in children (Banunnah, 2013). My data analysis showed that despite the fact that there is no early years sex education for young children in the Saudi Arabian school curriculum at the present time, 91% of parents participating in the study had strongly positive attitudes

towards the introduction of sex education for young children aged three to eight years of age as a compulsory element of the curriculum in the Saudi educational system (Banunnah, 2013).

Regarding appropriate sex education topics, it can be argued that much of what children learn about sex, gender, relationships, family, and reproduction in their early years is gleaned from their family life; from how their family members behave towards one another, and from the codes of morality and behaviour within the broader society (Kenny, 2010; Banunnah, 2013; Wight and Fullerton, 2013; Colarossi et al., 2014; Pop and Rusu, 2015). There is an inherent difference between the Saudi context and other societies that may not have such cohesive strength with respect to behaviours and expectations in relationships (Doumato, 2003; Gahwaji, 2013). It may be, however, that the nature of family life in Saudi society is problematic in that children may witness or experience abusive relationships and practices (Alsehaimi, 2016; Almuneef et al., 2016). Almuneef, Qayad, Aleissa and Albuhairan (2014) asserted that abuse is perpetrated in some Saudi families; therefore, these Saudi family ties may impact negatively on children, particularly those who live in a vulnerable or violent family context. For example, the National Family Safety Programme (NFSP) reported on the hospital-based child maltreatment registry in the Saudi health sector between 2011- 2015, and indicated that there are some cases of young victims registered at hospitals who were abused by members of their families and after treatment returned home to the same families, which may have affected children negatively (Almuneef et al., 2016). It has been suggested that the underestimation of children's rights and voices by some families in the Saudi society led children to accept the abuse as part of their upbringing and a way of correcting their misbehaviour. Therefore, it can be suggested that alleviation of this problems requires families and society to be more aware of childcare and protection, and children's rights.

However, it must also be acknowledged that there are possible ideological, ethical and personal counter-voices regarding sex education topics. These can be particularly emotive and controversial, regardless of the cultural context in which they exist (Campos, 2002). The power of Saudi culture is exacerbated by other negative influences, however, such as a lack of information and unsuitable materials for teaching sex education, which parents and teachers claim makes it difficult for them to teach sex education effectively

(Banunnah, 2013). There is some limited provision of sex education in secondary (Doumato, 2003) and upper primary schools; for example, at Level 5 (age 11) in primary education the topic of menstruation is introduced for girls through Religious Education (Banunnah, 2013). Many teachers in my Master's research reported that they avoided teaching this topic, however, providing it only as optional reading, due to their embarrassment and lack of confidence in facing students' inevitable questions (Banunnah, 2013). It can be argued that due the lack of knowledge and preparation to teach sex education topics which are considered to be a taboo in the conservative society, teachers may avoid teaching the subject of sex education. Moreover, an analytical study of sex education in the Religious Studies curriculum provided in secondary schools in the KSA concluded that there was a need for the curriculum at this stage of development to contain more sex education to meet children's sexual development needs, by providing relevant knowledge and skills for a healthy adult sexual life in the future (Al-Fadil, 2009). Although there are some sex education topics in the secondary school curriculum, some Saudi educators have been inhibited by the Saudi conservative culture. Riyadh Newspaper reported, for example, that topics about human reproduction had been added to the secondary school curriculum, but some teachers ignored the decision and refused to teach it because they felt it was not appropriate for this age group. Some Saudi teachers have refused to teach sex education topics in secondary schools due to embarrassment (Muaedh, 2011). An additional reason for this resistance is that educators have inadequate information about sex education themselves. This was shown by the fact that the majority of teachers and parents who participated in my Master's study expressed a desire to educate their children about these topics; however they expressed the feeling that they had insufficient knowledge of age-appropriate information about topics related to the human body and puberty (Banunnah, 2013).

Amongst the key issues to be addressed in this research are that parents are often uncomfortable when discussing topics of sex and sexuality, that teachers may not be clear on what is permitted in terms of sex education in the early school curriculum and that there are no clear guidelines for teachers as to what content is appropriate for them to provide in the early years curriculum (Dilworth, 2009; Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013; Goldman, 2015). Parents and teachers need accurate information and clear guidelines on

how they should respond to children's questions related to sex and gender in an age-relevant manner.

Currently, apart from scarce provision of sex education to older students, there is no such provision in early childhood education in the Saudi educational system and there is a general lack of research regarding sex education in early childhood in the Saudi context (Al-Zahrani, 2004; Banunnah, 2013; Alsehaimi, 2016). Implementing sex education in the school curriculum is a difficult task, as it involves conducting research in a sensitive area of study (Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013; Haberland and Rogow, 2015; Alldred et al, 2016). This is particularly true in Saudi society, with its strong traditional cultural dimensions and strict adherence to religious codes (Al-Ahdab, 2007). The study of Almuneef et al. (2014) demonstrates, religion and Saudi culture are highly conservative, which results in difficulties with holding open conversations about sex, especially with children and young people. Sex is simply a taboo in Saudi Arabia.

In contrast, Alsehaimi (2016, p.3) argues for placing "the needs for [sex education knowledge to feel safe] of children at risk of [sexual abuse] above the sensitivities of a conservative culture in which such matters have traditionally been hidden from view". Furthermore, the implications of my Master's research project (Banunnah, 2013) suggest that policy makers in the Saudi Ministry of Education should consider creating an age-appropriate sex education curriculum based on the input of specialists in this field. A positive outcome of my Masters findings is that they brought the attention of the Ministry of Education in KSA to this topic; they have encouraged this study to find out more about the topic of sex education from specialists' perspectives. This can be considered a step forward in acknowledging the importance of sex education in the educational system. Moreover, it has been argued that sex education in the Saudi society could be delivered as part of family life education, with particular emphasis on the religious dimensions and laws that underpin all aspects of society (Doumato 2003; Al-Ahdab, 2007; Banunnah, 2013). There have been calls for scientific studies on sex education for children to be conducted in different fields, to investigate new ways to protect children from sexual abuse in Saudi society (Alshebani, 2016). In 2018, the Saudi Ministry of Education issued a requirement for all schools to raise awareness in children by creating media tools such as videos, as well as educating teachers and families on how to protect children

from sexual abuse and provide self-protection strategies for children (MOE, 2018c). This is a significant step in recognizing that sex education is the responsibility of governments and agencies with responsibility for children.

Nevertheless, there is a clear lack of studies on sex education for young children, not only in the KSA, but also worldwide (Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002; Sciaraffa and Randolph, 2011; Alldred et al., 2016). In particular, there are research gaps in the areas of the value of sex education for young children, especially in the conservative Saudi society; relevant knowledge that could be provided within a compulsory curriculum, and appropriate approaches to delivering this topic to pre-school children. This research could potentially provide an important perspective in explaining when and how sex education should and could be taught to children of this age group and become a breakthrough in education in a very conservative society.

In the light of this existing research, and the context of sex education for young children outlined above, the next section highlights the aims and objectives of this study.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the study

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine how sex education can be appropriately and respectfully implemented in the pre-school curriculum for children between three and six years of age in the KSA. In order to achieve this aim, four objectives are pursued. Firstly, to examine the importance of sex education for pre-school children in the KSA. Secondly, to investigate which topics could be appropriately implemented in the early years curriculum. Thirdly, to refer to existing literature, both within the KSA and internationally, in order to compare potential sex education topics. Finally, to propose appropriate sex education topics to be taught within the KSA.

This research explores and discusses the possible benefits of sex education in early childhood based on a socio-cultural perspective, whilst also acknowledging that there are potential ideological, ethical, and personal contrasting views on this topic. Reported sexual abuse is emotive across the board, regardless of local culture and tradition, but the

KSA presents an even greater challenge due to its conservative culture and strict rules on social behaviour. It can be argued that this culture can be a barrier in child protection because social or family pressure may prevent victims from reporting abuse; consequently, the abuse could be continued. One of the goals of this research is to encourage government and policy-makers, parents, and teachers in Saudi society to provide a solid basis for early years sex education in order to achieve children's rights in sexual development, protection and gender equality. The desired result is that this will act as a future foundation for enhancing children's sexual awareness, promote personal values and skills, as well as contributing to gender equality and social development in Saudi society.

One objective of this research in light of the above introduction is to help clarify and increase confidence of teachers and parents in educating children on sex education topics. This will be done through exploring appropriate topics of sex education for young children and comparing them with existing literature. The gathered information and evidence will then be used in order to propose an appropriate sex education curriculum that would be acceptable both in terms of Saudi culture and a wider international context. This would allow teachers and parents to obtain relevant information and develop personalised strategies for addressing sensitive or difficult questions whilst still providing effective sex education.

Furthermore, the appropriate sex education topics investigated in this research could be provided proactively in the pre-school curriculum in the KSA based on the answers to the specific questions in this research. In the longer term, I would hope for this to become a positive approach to assist children, parents and teachers in promoting their knowledge and skills related to providing sex education and to combat the various problems with child abuse that are currently present in Saudi society.

1.4 Research questions

Based on the perspectives of three stakeholder groups (pre-school teachers, supervisors and specialists) the aim and objectives of this study are addressed through the provision of relevant answers to the following three questions:

- From the participants' perspectives, to what extent should sex education be included in the three-to-six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)?
- What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?
- How should sex education topics be delivered to children between three and six years of age?

It is important to highlight that this study has investigated these questions by using a mixed methods approach, with both quantitative and qualitative strategies applied. The research data was collected using two methods: 1) a structured questionnaire with 2,681 pre-school teachers, and 2) semi-structured interviews with 20 pre-school supervisors and eight specialists. This is explained in more detail in Chapter 4 on the methodology used in this study.

1.5 Terminology

This section provides some clarifications of the key terms used in this research. In this thesis, the term 'sex education' is used based on an Islamic term that has been used in all related studies because it is a familiar term for Saudi society and is more acceptable than Sex and Relationships Education.

This study also uses the term 'shame culture', which has come to be used in Saudi with reference to behaviours or beliefs that are not accepted in the culture and which are considered a stigma, particularly in the conservative Saudi culture; for example, talking about sex education topics, even between adults, is considered shameful. Another common example is that when girls play with boys it is considered unacceptable and shameful in most families in Saudi society, although this stance is not a requirement of the Islamic religion. In a 'shame culture', enduring feelings of shame is used as a means of controlling others' behaviours, while the fear of attracting blame and shame also causes individuals to censor their own behaviour, or to avoid speaking of topics considered shameful. Furthermore, it is important to clarify that this research uses the

term 'pre-school', referring to a stage which is similar to kindergarten (or nursery school in the UK) and is optional in the Saudi educational system. In terms of the age group that is proposed in this study, the focus is on sex education in early childhood, based on appropriateness for children between the ages of three and six and taking into account the Saudi traditional views and the cultural context. This research is relevant for all young children between three and six years of age, however, even if they do not have the opportunity to go to pre-school, because of the importance of sex education at this age. The next section explains briefly the significance of this research.

1.6 Rationale and significance of this research

This section demonstrates the importance of this study in the field of early childhood studies and sex education in the KSA, a conservative society.

This research presents a critical discussion of the main findings regarding sex education for young children in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The KSA is one of the most important and influential countries in the Middle East and the Islamic world, due to its holy places (Wiseman et al., 2008; Banunnah, 2013; Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2015). Several studies have proved that early childhood is an important phase in human life and that the experiences children gain during this stage will impact their future life and community (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004; Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006; Vogler et al., 2008). During the crucial early childhood stage, if appropriate measures are successfully taken to shape children's knowledge and understanding of sex education topics that are acceptable in their society, children should therefore become adults with knowledge and respect for sex, gender, and society as a whole. Consequently, sex education can provide correct information from trustworthy sources for children to promote their skills in such a way that they develop a strong sense of self-confidence and are less likely to commit sexual offences such as sexual assault or harassment (BMA Foundation, 1997; Banunnah, 2013).

The significance of this research hinges on three essential elements: firstly, early childhood as a significant phase in human life; secondly, the discussion of a topic that is sensitive worldwide, as it is related to sex and gender; and finally, the power of the KSA

in the Islamic world. Context-specific research into sex education for young children is of paramount importance to Saudi society due to its scarcity and sensitivity.

Presently in the KSA, there are few available studies that cover sexual abuse, and those attribute the causes due to lack of sex education. Furthermore, regrettably for this area of study, most research regarding sex education carried out in the West focuses on the teenage years (Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002; Parker et al., 2009; Alldred et al., 2016), a period when many behavioural and emotional issues around sex and sexuality tend to arise. Nonetheless, there are a few relevant studies on sex education involving the earlier childhood years, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK) (Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002; Alldred et al., 2003; 2016). As well as providing useful international comparisons, these studies could help further inform any knowledge gathered in the KSA; however, some aspects of these studies may be found controversial or modern for the Saudi society. Studies carried out in the UK have shown that teachers there also experience anxiety about teaching sex education (Alldred et al., 2003; 2016), which is probably a reflection of a culture of uncertainty regarding sex, which exists even in Western societies due to the sensitivity of the topic worldwide (Kenny, 2009; Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013; Haberland and Rogow, 2015; Alldred et al., 2016). In that study, teachers expressed even greater anxiety concerning the issue of sexual abuse (Alldred et al., 2003; 2016). Another study, carried out by Goldman (2007), gathered data from many research studies from the UK, the USA, Australia, and Asia. The results of previous studies showed that it is imperative that teachers are trained and have appropriate knowledge about sex education and develop their skills to deliver this topic in the classroom.

This research suggests that the provision of sex education at an earlier stage in life could help children to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that may prevent problems at future developmental stages. There is, however, no existing research into the provision of sex education in the early years curriculum in the context of the KSA, making this study the first of its kind. Of further significance is that this research addresses the pre-school educational level, because not only is it generally recognised as a significant phase in human life, it is also the only educational stage in which male and female children can study together in the Saudi educational system (UNESCO, 2011; Gahwaji, 2013;

Banunnah, 2013). As a result, from an early age boys and girls will gain the sex education knowledge to promote their skills and values equally, to encourage a positive and respectful attitude towards gender equality, which can bring enormous social benefits to Saudi society in the long term.

In the field of sex education, the findings from this research provide a helpful reference for specialists on how to acquire appropriate knowledge about sex education, as well as how to go about providing this to children in an appropriate manner. Of particular interest for sex education more broadly will be the focus on the implementation of sex education in a critical period in human life. This could have applications that reach beyond the Saudi society, thus potentially helping children beyond the society in question.

This research could be seen as a first step towards other empirical studies in sex education for young children. I hope that this will lead to better engagement with, and understanding of, the controversial issues involved in sex education in Saudi pre-schools. Ideally, this would lead to sex education gradually being provided as a compulsory part of the curriculum at all Saudi educational levels in the future, beginning with the pre-school level, so that children in homes across Saudi Arabia, including small villages, could benefit.

This section has presented the rationale for and significance of this study. The next section briefly demonstrates my personal motivation and interest in this study.

1.7 Personal motivation and interest

Two main personal factors motivated me to conduct this study, namely, my sense of academic and personal responsibility. Firstly, my belief that my position as an academic carries social responsibility encouraged me to do this study. I worked as a pre-school teacher for four years; therefore, I am well aware of the difficulties that teachers can face regarding children's sexual questions and behaviours in the absence of sex education topics in the current curriculum. Additionally, I am now working in the Early Childhood Department at Umm Al-Qurra University in Makkah in the KSA to prepare students to become pre-school teachers. Furthermore, I am a trainer in skills development and I have

provided training courses on childcare and on sex education in Saudi society. Based on my academic position and training capability, this experience has led me to identify some issues in the society related to the lack of sex education in early childhood, such as child sexual abuse. For this reason, I tried to find out the position of Islam towards sex education. I recognise that most Islamic books prove that sex education is the frame of Muslim family life. Because of my social responsibility towards Saudi society, I feel that it is important to provide sex education to assist parents, teachers and children in the society. I did my Master's research at Hull University in order to understand parents' and teachers' attitudes towards provision of sex education in the Saudi educational system. Surprisingly, 91% of parents who participated agreed with implementing sex education in the pre-school curriculum because they needed to obtain knowledge and skills from trustworthy sources. For these reasons, I conducted this study to provide appropriate topics to help design the pre-school sex education curriculum in Saudi education.

The second factor that interested me in the topic of sex education is that of personal responsibility and experience. I am the mother of four children; during their development, I noticed their sexual development through their behaviours and questions. When I looked for information to offer them knowledge and advice, I found it lacking in the libraries or on the Internet in the KSA. I therefore came to consider this lack of sex education an issue, since parents need accurate information in order to respond to their children's questions about sex. Due to my specialization in Early Childhood Studies, I tried my best to read Western resources to educate my children and follow their growth and development. In 2009, we moved to the UK to continue our study and my children had the chance to study in British schools. When my oldest son was in Year 11 and my daughter was in Year 10, I received letters from the school, asking permission for them to attend sex education classes. Indeed, I was very worried because of the cultural difference; we are Muslim and follow Islamic principles and values. I therefore discussed this with their school and I found the information was appropriate to prepare them for a healthy life and future potential parenthood. I felt comfortable because the school's programme provided accurate information from a trustworthy source. Afterwards, my children's skills, knowledge and attitudes improved, as they felt more confident to talk with me about any topic they needed to discuss and I respected their ideas. They encouraged me to do this study to help children who live in Saudi society and Islamic

countries and to improve their perspective on sex education. In fact, I appreciate my children's help in sharing with me their voices and needs regarding sex education, as a motivation to conduct both my Master's research and this research.

Finally, it can be recognized that from all the above discussion in this chapter, sex education is one of many changes that are needed as KSA modernises and that many government agencies and social institutions need to be involved in protecting and safeguarding children.

This section has demonstrated briefly my personal motivations and interest in this study. The next section clearly presents the structure of this study.

1.8 Structure of the study

In addition to this introductory chapter, the thesis consists of a further six chapters, which will be presented as follows:

Chapter 2 - Educational Context in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: This chapter presents brief information about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The educational context of the pre-school curriculum in the KSA and the pre-school educational context are explained; finally, Saudi early childhood curriculum policies are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review: This chapter provides a literature review of the issues surrounding sex education. The sociocultural theory and its relevance to sex education are highlighted. Then, the importance of sex education in an Islamic context is discussed. Furthermore, the importance of sex education for young children include the definition of 'sex education' is discussed. Following this, possible relevant sex education topics for young children are examined. Finally, the provision of sex education is explained under a number of headings.

Chapter 4 - Research Methodology: This chapter explains the nature of the study and the research design. Explanations are provided for the mixed methods approach that was

used, which encompassed both quantitative and qualitative methodology for collecting data and the sample in this study. Following this, the data analysis procedure is explained. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the issues of validity, reliability and generalisability, as well as ethical issues that were raised in the process of researching this sensitive topic.

Chapter 5 - Results: This chapter presents the results gathered by quantitative and qualitative methods. It consists of two main sections. The first section provides the results of the structured questionnaire that was collected from 2,681 pre-school teachers from all 45 Saudi educational districts. The second section analyses the semi-structured interviews with 20 pre-school supervisors and eight specialists.

Chapter 6 - Discussion: based on the gathered data, this chapter discusses in detail the importance of sex education for young children in the pre-school curriculum, the appropriate sex education topics for pre-school children, and how such a curriculum should be implemented. In that regard, the data will be examined in relation to the common themes that have been discussed throughout this thesis, interpreting the data analysis with reference to relevant literature. This discussion forms the basis for the conclusion and recommendations chapter that rounds off the thesis.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion and Recommendations: This chapter is the final chapter, which provides a summary of the key findings of this study. Then, some recommendations based on the data extracted from the research are posited. The limitations of this study are also discussed. As well as this, suggestions are made to encourage other researchers to investigate this topic in their respective countries, for the benefit of young children's education worldwide.

The next chapter will look at the specific context of the KSA, the focal country and society of the present research, particularly in terms of its location, state and culture, and its early years education context.

CHAPTER 2

Educational Context in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

2.1 Introduction

It is important to understand the background of this study to acknowledge the impact of political, cultural and educational factors on early childhood studies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This chapter goes on to detail the specific context and status of the KSA, arguably one of the most influential Islamic nations due to the religious significance of several sites located within its boundaries. Additionally, as the majority of academic resources on pre-school curricula are of Western origin, the few examples from the Saudi context are drawn on extensively. This chapter demonstrates the educational situation in the KSA in order to conceptualise the context in which the present research study took place, as well as explain how the research fits into the existing literature and landscape, both nationally and internationally.

Firstly, I will explain the status of the KSA briefly in terms of its demographic profile, geography, economy, culture, and education. Then, I will describe the context of pre-school education in the KSA. Finally, I will explain the policies of the Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC) for Saudi pre-schools.

2.2 The status of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In this section, I discuss the status of the KSA in terms of demographics, geography, economy, culture, and education system to present the context in which this study was conducted.

According to the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) (2015), the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is positioned in the Arabian Peninsula, an area located in the south west of the continent of Asia. The location of the KSA is both physically and symbolically at the

heart of the Arab world. It shares borders with Jordan, Kuwait and Iraq in the North; Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and the Arabian Gulf in the East; Oman and Yemen from the South, and the Red Sea from the West. The KSA is acknowledged as the world's 14th largest state, covering a vast area of the Arabian Peninsula amounting to approximately 2,000,000 km² (GASTAT, 2015). The total population, including both Saudis and non-Saudis, is 32,552,336; the Saudi population is 20,408,362 (GASTAT, 2018). The geographical characteristics of the KSA thus lend my study importance and significance beyond the Arab world.

In terms of the country's geographical division, Riyadh is the capital city of the KSA, and the country is divided into thirteen administrative areas and five regions. Al-Shamal is the northernmost region of the country, while Al-Wosttah is the central region, which contains Riyadh. Al-Algharbiah, which is located along the Red Sea, is home to the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, while Al-Shargheyah is in the east, and finally, Al-Janoub is in the south of the KSA.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a strong economic reputation and it is well known as a land of wealth and luxury, characterised as being the world's largest oil exporter, with 85% of the country's income coming from the oil industry (GASTAT, 2015). The discovery of Saudi Arabian oil reserves in 1936 greatly changed citizens' lifestyles. They had previously depended on fishing and the sale of sheep, camels, and other cattle to boost their economy; the country is now seen as more 'modern' and provides free healthcare and education for its citizens (Elmadani, 1993; Yousuf, 1999; GASTAT, 2015).

This lifestyle change was significant, as previously many people had lived in simple mud huts without much technology. It also happened over the course of only a few years (Al-Abdulkareem, 2004). These changes affected social issues, health, education, transportation and almost every aspect of Saudi life at the time (Abdelal, 1994). These sudden and dramatic changes created a gap and tensions between different generations, between those pining for a nostalgic past and those rushing towards modernity (Al-Abdulkareem, 2004). One major change involved a significant demographic shift of

people who would have traditionally lived as rural tribespeople to urban settings, incentivised by promises of employment and a better life (Al-Abdulkareem, 2004).

While these changes were taking place, there was significant opposition from traditionalists in the KSA (Al-Abdulkareem, 2004). The influence of this traditional culture is still firmly rooted in the KSA and is something that needs to be taken into account in considering any issues in Saudi society, especially one as divisive as sex education (Banunnah, 2013). Abdelal (1994) notes:

...it is clear that the dominant relationships in the Saudi society are unique and personal. Allegiance to Islam, loyalty to family and loyalty to the tribe are the main and strongest bonds felt by the majority of Saudi citizens. The tribal structure is still intact among the nomads, and in several of the settled communities (p.26).

Family structures have played a key role in maintaining the traditional culture in the KSA, as has the strong influence of Islam. "Islam is not only integral to Saudi education but also serves as the very essence of the curriculum" (Al Salloom, 1991, p.9).

The main language in the KSA is Arabic, which is the language of the Holy Quran. The overwhelming majority of the KSA's residents are Muslim. Those who are not Muslim are mostly people from other countries who have moved to the KSA for work purposes, bringing with them their own religious beliefs and customs. Sharia law, which stems from the Holy Quran, is the basis of the KSA's justice system and constitution. The main assembly, The Shura Council, firmly advocates Sharia ideologies and is run by Muslim scholars. They are charged with suggesting changes to proposed laws according to an Islamic perspective (GASTAT, 2015).

Culture has an enormous role to play in the KSA, as Alsehaimi and Alanazi (2017, p.4) mention, "Saudi Arabia is a deeply conservative country, in which change is slow to come", and in a country that it is considered by some to be the 'birthplace' of Islam, religion forms an important part of this culture. Many Muslims go on pilgrimages to the holy places of Makkah and Medina, with Makkah being where the Prophet Mohammed (Peace be Upon Him (PBUH)) was raised and where he received his calling. In 2017, the

total number of pilgrims was 2,352,122, including Saudis and non-Saudis (GASTAT, 2018). It is therefore important to highlight that due to the significant impact of the KSA in Islamic world, the current study could also be influential in the wider Islamic world.

With regard to education in the KSA, the Kingdom's 13 administrative areas include 45 educational districts (GASTAT, 2015; MOE, 2018a). Due to the growing significance of education, the government of the KSA, under the slogan *Education for All*, has increased funding for the Ministry of Education (MOE) extensively over the past several decades, with rising budget allocations (MOE, 2018b). Compulsory education is the main focus of Saudi education, which involves three educational stages; primary, intermediate and secondary schools. Education throughout these stages is gender-segregated. The pre-school level in the Saudi Education system, named 'Kindergarten', is an optional stage, however, for children from three to six years old. This is the only stage where boys and girls can be co-educated, because of the traditions of the Saudi culture. Currently, parents are becoming more aware of pre-school's importance for their children.

In both developed and developing countries, pre-school education is undergoing a significant expansion (Olmsted, 2000). This is based on research that clearly shows both the short and long-term benefits of good quality education at this young age (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004; Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006). As this expansion has progressed, however, the issue of what constitutes 'quality', alongside issues of cultural context, have come to the forefront of the debate (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Specific to the KSA, the debate to improve pre-school education has tended to focus on five interrelated dimensions of pre-school education: staff qualifications and interactions, curriculum and pedagogy, physical environment, access, and children's needs (Gahwaji, 2006; 2013). Katz (1999) presents a similar model, noting four different identifiers of quality education: researchers and professionals in the field, parents, staff, and the children themselves. The KSA brings its own specific context in which this debate takes place. Officially the key objective of education in the KSA is:

...understanding Islam correctly and completely, implanting and spreading the Islamic doctrine, providing students with Islamic values and instructions, acquiring knowledge along with different skills, developing constructive behavioural tendencies; advancing society economically, socially, culturally, and

qualifying members in order to become useful in the construction of their society (Educational Policy Article 28, MOE, 1976).

However, the above-stated educational policy was adopted before the social situation was massively affected by a group of religious extremists in 1979. As a result of this political change, gender inequality permeated Saudi society, while the situation of women in particular was affected negatively due to the new strictly conservative regime. For example, Saudi culture socialises boys from an early age to have a sense of responsibility for the women in their families. Boys and men have the responsibility to give women permission to attend education, work, and travel. Arguably, the implementation of Islamic teaching and values achieved certain equality between genders (Al-Ghazali, 1975; Kotb, 2004). The Islamic doctrine admits gender equality in the rights and obligations for both males and females, which is proven in the Holy Quran: "*Women shall have rights similar to the rights upon them; according to what is equitable and just*" (Quran, 2, p. 216). It is further explicated by the statement that God says: "*for women are rights over men, similar to those of men over women*" (Quran, 2, p. 226). However, in 1979 the social status of women was changed due to a shift in power to religious extremists who considered that the right of women in Saudi society was excessively 'Western-influenced' (Hamdan, 2005). This seemed to be a similar turn of events to that experienced in Iran/Persia in the very same year. As a result, the rights of women in Saudi society were affected negatively because the government changed its policy regarding women's education, work and permission to drive (Hamdan, 2005). In reference to these events, the current Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who is the leader of the Saudi Vision 2030 plan and has more enlightened views in interview on the US channel, CBS News (2018), distinguished between Islam and Saudi culture regarding gender equality and explained the reason for the current situation, commenting;

In the year 1979, religious extremists in Saudi Arabia took over Islam's holiest site, the Grand Mosque in Mecca. In order to appease their own religious radicals, the Saudis began clamping down and segregating women from everyday life (CBSN, 2018).

Referring to Islamic rules, Mohammed bin Salman explained how this contrasted with the earlier approach to gender in Saudi society and expressed that the current goal of the

2030 Vision is to take Saudi Arabia back to a more moderate interpretation of Islam, which better reflects its real values and the example of the Prophet and early Islamic leaders:

We have extremists who forbid mixing between the two sexes and are unable to differentiate between a man and a woman alone together and their being together in the workplace. Many of those ideas contradict the way of life during the time of the prophet and the Caliphs. This is the real example and the true model (CBSN, 2018).

As a consequence, in 2018, Saudi women gained their rights to drive to participate in the Shura Council and to work equally with males in society (Mustafa and Troudi, 2019). Equality in Islam gives opportunities for genders, males and females, to take part in social, economic, cultural and political developments and to benefit equally from the outcomes (Kotb, 2004).

Despite official policy, several studies indicate that early marriage and childbearing, and the practice of not educating women, still exist within some families in the Saudi society (Hamdan, 2005; Al-Zahrani, 2010), due to the lack of clear rights for children and women in the society. There is evidence that girls who are married during their early teenage years (before 16), and those with a low income are most likely not to have been educated, either because they failed to attend or dropped out of or were withdrawn from school (Al-Zahrani, 2010; UNESCO, 2009). This low level of education may have an effect on their awareness of personal and sexual health (Al-Zahrani, 2010). Having children early and forced marriage/cohabitation violates fundamental human rights and makes girls vulnerable because of the power disparity between the young bride and her often older husband (UNESCO, 2018; p. 23). While young people in more developed countries and China will typically defer marriage until their late 20s (Goldman, 2008), puberty for girls in less developed countries usually signals an end of schooling and the transition to marriage and childbearing (UNESCO, 2009). It can be argued that early marriage and the ending of education can also happen in developed countries, for example, according to Reuter's news agency the marriage of minors, that is, girls under the age of 18, still occurs in Britain. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, teenagers

can marry at the age of 16, with parental consent. In Scotland there is no need to obtain parental consent for people of at least 16 years of age (Batha, 2018).

Currently in the KSA, for the first time, in 2019 the Shura Council approved a draft law that would ban marriage under the age of 15 and require a marriage contract involving a person under 18 years of age to be reviewed by a competent court (Shura Council, 2019). The Act of Eligibility Age for Marriage in Saudi society has not been passed yet; therefore, the problem of young marriage continues. Moreover, despite the existence of a legal marriage age, it is still under 18 years of age, so within the childhood phase, which is likely to affect negatively children's, especially girls', sexual health and future life.

Since this study is concerned with education at the pre-school stage in the KSA, it took these educational aims into account. The next section introduces the context of pre-schools in the KSA.

2.3 Pre-school educational context

According to Al-Ktilah (2000), in 1976 the first private pre-school was established in the city of Makkah. Since then, the number of pre-schools has significantly increased. The occurrence of various social changes in Saudi Arabian society can be seen to have led to the establishment of pre-schools in the country. One key change is the transformation of familial structure, with families becoming smaller, nuclear families. It is also believed that Saudi women entering the labour market has been a key component of this change (Gahwaji, 2013). Overall, there has been a noticeable cultural shift amongst the social classes in Saudi Arabia and the emergence of a strong collective belief in the significance of pre-school and the effect it has on a child's development, physically and psychologically. The importance of providing opportunities for children to enter the school environment is clear, as pre-school can help them develop positive manners and behaviours, enabling them to adjust better to the school environment and society. These reasons have been identified as key motivators behind the spread of pre-schools, both public and private, across the KSA (Al-Shahi, 2004).

Based on the 2004 statistical report of the Saudi Ministry of Education, there were 1320 pre-school centres in the country; 342 government-run (public) and 978 private. In that year, public and private providers combined served 100,032 children (MOE, 2004). The statistical report of the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT, 2018) describes the pre-school context between 2009-2015 in the Saudi Ministry of Education and indicates that there were 13,530 pre-school centres, divided into four sectors; 7,086 government, 5,355 private, 209 for special needs education, and 880 international pre-schools. Together they comprise 70,754 classes, 1,226,712 children and 121,660 teachers (MOE, 2018a). There has, therefore, been a remarkable development in the Saudi pre-school stage in only one decade.

The core aim of the pre-school stage is to assist and prepare children between three and six years old for compulsory education according to their readiness and potential (MOE, 2018b). There are three different pre-school years, KG1, KG2 and KG3, one for each year of the age-range. Pre-school education develops children's skills in various areas, such as physical, cognitive, emotional, moral, social, and religious aspects, which are intended to equip them for future education (Al-Khiribi and Ali, 2004). Attending pre-school remains optional and many children still join education for the first time at the primary school stage aged six, most children enroll at least for the last year of pre-school, KG3, particularly in cities.

Up until recent years, there was no official curriculum for early childhood education in the KSA. Previously, curricula were designed by individual pre-school institutions, and were mostly focused on academic pursuits. In 1988, the first official curriculum was established and newer approaches were introduced. These, which are discussed in detail below, are based more on Western theories that advocate a child-led, self-directed learning approach with young children (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 1991). This curriculum is named the Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC) or 'Self-Learning Curriculum', issued as a book, which is considered as a comprehensive source for pre-school teachers in the KSA and the trainers in this field. It is an educational template with specified goals, which integrates educational theories with daily life experience (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2006). Al-Samadi and Marwa developed the DKC who are the experts on this curriculum in the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND), which was developed in a strategic partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It clarifies the pre-school role in developing the self, academic concepts, and attitudes and the responsibility to apply the most effective teaching methods. It contains information, models, drawings and examples to assist teachers to transform the educational environment in the classroom to be an appropriate place for learning through searching, discovering and experiencing (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2006) (see an Arabic excerpt from the DKC in Appendix A). The current curriculum (DKC) emphasises children's self-learning needs and advocates that the child should have opportunity to choose the activities that they like, with teachers' guidance, which develops children's learning abilities and skills (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2006). However, it needs to be reiterated that sex education as a potential topic is not explicitly mentioned in the units of the DKC.

Many parents have misunderstood the concept of the DKC approach to children's self-learning in Saudi pre-school; however, as Al-Ameel (2002) notes, these newer approaches are not very well understood by parents of young children and there has been little effort to educate parents about the justification for this new approach. Specific issues with the DKC have also been examined. Gahwaji (2006; 2013) and Sabear (1996), for example, have both pointed out that teachers have difficulty explaining the objectives of the DKC to parents, as parents tend to continue to view pre-school in terms of reading and writing and preparation for the child's subsequent education. They note that pre-school centres often introduce reading and writing classes in response to parental pressure. This is despite teachers and directors in general opposing such a directed teaching approach, preferring a play-based approach. The possible reasons for this inconsistent implementation may stem from the inherent contradictions in modern Saudi society, where there is rapid change and modernisation alongside attempts to cling to tradition. Resistance to change and inconsistent adherence to a curriculum containing sex education can result from both parents and teachers, due to their preferences for more traditional methods of didactic teaching and learning as a preparation for the academic focus of primary school (Gahwaji, 2007; 2013). Hence, the focus for children has traditionally been placed on standardised academic topics, including English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, with 'well-being' topics often ignored (Goldman, 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Sex Education Forum, 2016a). Al-Ameel (2002) and Banunnah (2013) have demonstrated that there is a general lack of knowledge in the Saudi society

around the importance of the social and emotional development of younger children. This debate is ongoing in the KSA and is a topic for further study and research.

In terms of sex education topics, although there are rare studies regarding sex education in the KSA, the findings of my Master's study demonstrated that 91% of 500 parents who participated strongly supported the implementation of sex education in pre-school in the DKC, based on Saudi culture (Banunnah, 2013). However, it can be argued that in addition to the observable lack of sex education in the prescribed curriculum, the limited adherence to such topics, if provided in the curriculum, may occur due to the potential of parental pressure on the schools and the flexibility of teachers; therefore, the DKC can be affected negatively in terms of the implementation of sex education and this could be a significant challenge to the goals of children's learning. From the socio-cultural perspective, the customs that parents use in childrearing impart cultural goals and values to children. The cultural scripts, routines and rituals that they use all play a role in this (Harkness and Super, 2002). Arguably, it can be seen that from a sociocultural perspective of Saudi society, parents and teachers may feel embarrassed to discuss this sensitive topic with children, due to an incomplete understanding of the importance of sex education to child development. Therefore, it is important to consider the Saudi socio-cultural perspective when introducing sex education topics.

Several studies in socio-cultural theory prove that the benefits of interactive methods of working are supported widely in the literature, which shows that children learn most effectively through interacting with people and their surroundings (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1999; Wood and Bennett, 1999; Marginson and Dang, 2017). Marcon (1995) showed that curricula need to be designed around not only the acquisition of skills and knowledge, but also appropriate attitudes and feelings. The DKC contains descriptions of activities that can provide opportunities to engage children to have an active experience and acquire new knowledge (MOE, 2016a). For example, in the Water unit, children can experience water by sensation and through live experiments. On the same principle, teachers could use a doll to demonstrate topics such as body hygiene and keeping safe. This way of teaching can contribute to children's gaining knowledge, skills and attitude towards various concepts by continuous training and self-learning (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2006; MOE, 2016a). This might include topics like gender differences, child

sexual development, morality and values, hygiene, self-awareness, safety and protection, self-esteem, self-consciousness and bodily functions (Sex Education Forum, 2016a; UNESCO, 2018). Katz (1999), however, notes that a focused academic approach that neglects interaction and experience can undermine the ability to use acquired knowledge and skills, thereby undermining the entire educational process. It can therefore be seen that the approach of the DKC, based on self-learning for children with the guidance of teachers to promote children's knowledge, skills and attitudes, can be considered an appropriate approach for children's development (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2006). Most pre-school environments in the KSA, however, may not make adequate use of this multi-faceted approach.

Another important policy development in this area in the KSA came with the Children Act 2005. Prior to this, pre-school education was mostly based around informal centres, such as day-care centres, nurseries, and pre-school centres. This Act, however, stressed the importance of training, comprehensive career progression, and the inherent complexity of working with young children. The varied training backgrounds of teachers (and other staff in pre-school centres) prior to this Act led to a varied awareness of the role of teachers amongst practitioners. Other concerns prior to this Act included low pre-school enrolment rates; in 2002, only 8% of eligible children were enrolled in pre-school programmes (Gahwaji, 2007). There were also far more children in cities than in rural areas entering pre-school education (UNESCO, 2004), and this continues to be the case.

Despite the fact that teacher education is positively correlated to teaching quality, the level of education of pre-school teachers continues to vary greatly in the KSA, with teachers ranging in educational qualifications from high school diplomas to Master's level degrees (Gahwaji, 2007; 2013). It is widely acknowledged that there is a significant need for in-service training resources and programmes for pre-school teachers (Al-Noaim, 1996; Mahdly, 2001; Al-Ameel, 2002). In an attempt to remedy this issue, in addition to the introduction of new colleges for Early Childhood Education (ECE), the new Saudi educational policy emphasises that pre-school teachers should be expert in Early Childhood Education (ECE) (MOE, 2016b). Understanding the importance of childhood in the society, the Ministry of Education has emphasised Early Childhood Studies at universities to encourage specialisation in this field. Optimistically, this policy

would assist children to be educated by teachers well-trained in the early childhood field, who can provide education in a healthy environment. Yet, this situation has not been effectively resolved for the time being.

Currently, in conjunction with Saudi Vision 2030, and based on a belief in the importance of early childhood for Saudi society, the early childhood sector has developed significantly (MOE, 2018b). This can be seen in the vital efforts of the Ministry of Education in this regard, to promote pre-school teachers' knowledge and skill in order to benefit children and Saudi society. Official training programmes are provided to pre-school teachers in various subjects, such as Toward a Safe Environment for the Child (Personal Safety for the Child), and The Creative Curriculum (MOE, 2018b). Additionally, there is a training programme 'Home Education for Mothers and Children' that targets mothers of children that are not registered in pre-school to educate them in childcare (MOE, 2018b). Furthermore, in 2018 the Ministry of Education organised the International Exhibition and Forum for Education (IEFE), which considered the theme of early childhood. In this conference participated specialists from different childcare-related sectors. All these significant developments in ECE in the KSA have helped to encourage people to become aware of this stage, as well as to conduct studies on early childhood and to reflect positively on Saudi society.

The next section discusses the new official curriculum for pre-schools (DKC) that was alluded to above in more depth and how it attempts to tackle the aforementioned challenges.

2.4 Saudi Early Childhood Curriculum policies

In this section, the wider context of Early Childhood Education is introduced, followed by an examination of the newly-introduced Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC) and the associated debates that have arisen, as well as looking at relevant research and studies.

As was noted previously, there was no official curriculum for pre-school children in the KSA prior to 1988, when the Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC) was introduced. This was a joint effort of the General Presidency of Girls' Education (GPGE) in the Saudi Ministry of Education, the Arab Gulf Programme from the United Nations Development Organisation, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, which proposed and developed a new official curriculum for pre-schools in the KSA. This new curriculum was implemented in a gradual and systematic manner, with several empirical studies taking place in the main areas where it was initially implemented, and with training centres established around the country to educate teachers and prepare them to put the new curriculum into practice. The first comprehensive edition of the curriculum was produced in 1991 and a second edition was released in 2005 (GPGE, 1991; MOE, 2005). Official training guides for teachers have also been introduced (GPGE, 1997; MOE, 2005).

According to this new curriculum, the purpose of pre-school education is to take care of the early development of children through providing an appropriate environment and recognising their individual developmental characteristics and needs. In doing so, the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development of the child must be looked at holistically. The new curriculum suggests, therefore, that educational settings should be similar to the family context, where children spend enjoyable time with their teacher/s and peers and where children are provided with broad opportunities to interact with a variety of learning materials and experiences. Children are also encouraged to think independently and creatively. Another level to this curriculum is preparation for subsequent education; however, this goes alongside the other aspects of the curriculum, including learning about appropriate behaviour when interacting with teachers and other students (GPGE, 1991; MOE, 2005).

Learning in the DKC is structured around individual units (originally 10) (MOE, 2005), each reflecting a subject that is considered to be relevant to children's specific needs and interests, accompanied by a book of guidance for teachers a self-learning curriculum. The prescribed units are laid out in the original edition in seven distinct books:

- Book one contains guidance for teachers on the self-learning curriculum.
- Book two contains the Water unit.

- Book three contains the Sand unit.
- Book four contains the Food unit.
- Book five contains the unit 'Life in the Home'.
- Book six contains the unit 'Hands'.
- Book seven summarises the other units/themes, namely: Clothing, The Family, Friends, My Health and My Safety, and My Book. (MOE, 2005).

In 2016, the National Unit was added to the Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC), resulting in the document growing to 11 units in total. The DKC contains eight books: six detailed units: National, Water, Sand, Food, Life at Home, and Hands and one book summarising the other themes, namely: Clothing, The Family, Friends, My Health and My Safety, and My Book (see Appendix B). All these books are provided to guide teachers in providing information to children and developing their skills through the activities in the daily programme at preschool (MOE, 2016a).

Since the introduction of the DKC, additional units have been added to the national guidance by experts from the Ministry of Education to reflect more children's needs that were emphasised in further research (MOE, 2016a). The guide advises clearly that the different units can be approached and introduced on a flexible basis throughout the years of pre-school education and that teachers should present them based on the availability of materials, as well as children's needs and interests, which is ambiguous enough to leave room for potential inclusions and exclusions of topics. The guide itself explains the different conceptual and procedural frameworks of the new curriculum, while also containing some practical support, such as a reference guide and information on ways of dealing with various behavioural problems.

The apparent comprehensiveness of the guide causes confusion among its recipients. It is not just parents who do not understand this new official curriculum, however, but teachers themselves, who are on the frontline of implementation, also struggle with understanding its implications. Many schools, especially non-governmental ones, vary their application of the new curriculum, continuing to approach pre-school education from the previous, academic-focused perspective (Al-Ameel, 2002). Reasons for this inconsistent application include inadequate numbers of qualified teachers, no regulation of the teaching of young children, a lack of understanding, and inconsistent adherence to

the curriculum, all of which are exacerbated by a more general lack of resources and training programmes for working with young children (Al-Ameel, 2002).

Additionally, the guide provides specific information on how the classroom should be arranged, describing a room with different areas, with each area representing a different activity with all the requisite materials in situ. The different areas described include an arts area, a books area, a table play area, a blocks area, a reading and writing area, and a drama area (GPGE, 1997; MOE, 2005). The pre-school day is also described and outlined in detail, noting that it should be divided into five periods and varied between directed and self-directed activities, with a focus on the latter. Despite the apparent descriptive nature of this framework, teachers' professional discretion is respected and they can select different activities and ways of implementing them (GPGE, 1997; MOE, 2005). However, the encouraged flexibility could also result in teachers omitting topics that they potentially found inconvenient, which could be the case of sex education.

In the second edition of the curriculum (MOE, 2005), literacy and numeracy are given more focus. The reading and writing area of the classroom was introduced in this edition, along with appropriate worksheets and activities. This version identifies children's skills and practices in five distinct domains: religious conviction, the cognitive domain, the physical domain, the social domain, and the emotional domain. Reading and writing skills are recognised as falling within the cognitive domain (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2006). These guidelines are vague, however, and they do not provide an adequate base for teachers to work from. There is also a clear focus on literacy as opposed to numeracy skills (Khomais, 2007).

Individual learning was also emphasised more in this second edition (Khomais, 2007) and is re-affirmed in the content of the different units. The DKC defines individual learning as:

...learning that depends on the child's own activity, where s/he interacts with various educational materials and toys that are available in the educational environment, which assists him/her to discover his/her own abilities and improve them according to his/her own growth model (MOE, 2005, p.16).

Four aspects of this are described in the curriculum:

- (a) The child learns through continuous training in the skills,
- (b) The child learns through discovery and research,
- (c) The child learns and develops from one stage to another in his/her own manner according to the growth and development processes,
- (d) The child learns through receiving knowledge and information from different sources (adults, peers, and books), in addition to his/her own experiences (GPGE, 1991, p. 56; MOE, 2005, p. 45).

The teachers' role in this type of education is to answer children's questions that arise from their interactions with the materials and world around them, in order to encourage children to test, experiment and discover facts, properties and relationships of different things in the world (MOE, 2005). This represents a play-focused, discovery-oriented approach to learning that corresponds with child-centred approaches such as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Khomais, 2007). This approach was influenced by the work of Piaget and focuses on the children's individual development and learning in their environment, as opposed to broader socio-economic factors (Khomais, 2007). The objectives of educational policy for pre-school students in the KSA involve the maintenance of the innocence of the child, safety and protection from various dangers in school and society, such as sexual abuse (MOE, 2018c), modifying misbehaviour, and dealing with children's problems such as psychological, health or physical issues (MOE, 2005). However, children have been shown to be naturally curious about themselves and their environments (Davies et al., 2000). Children of all ages and stages of sexual maturity are curious and want to know what their bodies look like and later what is happening to their bodies. They are also eager to compare between themselves and their peers (Goldman and Goldman, 1982; Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013). It is clear that the lack of sex education could affect children's development negatively, such as by exposing them to inappropriate sexual behaviours. Most recent studies demonstrate that the provision of sex education topics is an important approach to protecting children and teenagers from inappropriate sexual behaviours and problems such as sexual abuse and to decreasing the rate of sexual crimes (Kirby, 2011; DeJong, 2012; Walsh et al., 2015;

Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). Additionally, most Western research studies proves that the provision of sex education taught gradually and within the parameters of appropriate age-based material not only prevents young people from engaging in early sexual relationships, but also postpones the start of sexual life and therefore prevents teenage pregnancies (Mueller et al., 2008; Lindberg and Maddow-Zimet, 2012).

Although in the DKC's aims there is a concern about the social and emotional development of children (MOE, 2005), there is a lack of focus in school curricula on sex education topics, particularly in terms of protection from sexual abuse (Al-Ahdab, 2010; Banunnah, 2013). Despite the fact that the Ministry of Education (MOE) emphasises the importance of pre-school in building society according to its goals, which include child development, safety and wellbeing (Al-Jadidi, 2012; Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2006; Gahwaji, 2006), there is a lack of attention to sex education topics in the pre-school curriculum (Banunnah, 2013). It can be argued that education in these areas would be of great importance in children's life in Saudi society (Banunnah, 2013). This study explores perceptions of sex education for young children in Saudi society, which is a unique study in this field.

Despite the dearth of research on sex education for young children, as already noted (Banunnah, 2013), it is important to highlight that there is some relevant research and literature that needs to be addressed in order to provide a complete picture. Most studies focus on the quality of early education in pre-school centres, the issues facing practitioners, and the obstacles to good quality services (Al-Khatheelah et al., 1999; Meemaar, 1998; Sabear, 1996; Sulaimaan, 1998; Zamzami, 2000; Gahwaji, 2006; 2007; 2013). These studies also bring attention to the need for improving teachers' competencies, adequate planning, and preparation of appropriate environments and activities for children (Khomais, 2007).

This lack of attention to sex education in the curriculum highlights many of the deficiencies in the early childhood education system in the KSA (Banunnah, 2013). Several studies have raised concerns and suggested that more research is needed into Saudi pre-school curricula in general (Al-Ameel, 2002; Khomais, 2007; Banunnah, 2013). Most studies on ECE originate in Western contexts, however. Specific and

culturally relevant research and tools in Western contexts that recognise diversity are thus extremely important to approach this area from an evidence-based and informed perspective (Penn, 2005).

2.5 Chapter conclusion

From the previous explanations, it can be concluded that the Saudi educational system has improved gradually. In general, however, there is a significant lack of early childhood studies in Saudi society. This chapter has briefly explained the status of the KSA in terms of its demography, geography, economy, culture and education. Furthermore, it presented the context of pre-school education in the Saudi Ministry of Education. Finally, it explained the policies of the Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC) for Saudi pre-schools.

A more detailed review of the current research and literature on sex education for young children is provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The Vision 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a significant part of a global movement to eliminate poverty through 17 goals by 2030 (UNSDG, 2016; UNESCO, 2018). Education is one of the most important targets of the Vision 2030 Agenda because it focuses on the appropriate response towards the various challenges worldwide in order to achieve human rights and gender equality through the education sector (UNESCO, 2018). In the Global Education 2030 Framework for the Action, one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is: “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” (SDG3) (UNESCO, 2018, p. 82). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which is the specialised agency of the United Nations leading the Education 2030 Agenda, provides guidance for sex education to achieve well being and encourage a healthy life for all from an early age. These international policy aspirations are directly relevant to this thesis, which discusses sex education, as sex-related topics are pertinent to the well-being and safeguarding of young children and the promotion of their knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, as well as healthy development. This chapter reviews the existing literature on which this research project was built. The literature is examined under three main headings: the importance of sex education for young children, appropriate sex education topics for children in the KSA, and the provision of sex education. These include the definition of ‘sex education’, the Islamic perspective, the significance of sex education, provision, and how sex education could be integrated into the pre-school curriculum. This chapter discusses previous academic literature, and relevant policies, that addressed sex education for children to answer the research questions:

- From the participants’ perspectives, to what extent should sex education be included in the three-to-six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)?

- What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?
- How should sex education topics be delivered to children between three and six years of age?

Due to the lack of research in the Saudi context, the majority of the research discussed stems from Western studies and I have dealt accordingly with cross-border and cross-cultural concerns. This study provides relevant and significant details about sex education topics and how they can be implemented in the curriculum in the KSA based on the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory.

3.2 Sociocultural theory and sex education

This section introduces the essential perspective of the interpretive paradigm for this study, which is sociocultural theory.

The significant interaction between sociocultural and biological influences can shape children's personality and development, as Vygotsky explains (Vygotsky, 1986; Marginson and Dang, 2017). Several studies have, therefore, interpreted sex education based on a sociocultural perspective, due to the "idea of humans as social" (Bakhurst, 2009, p.198). Vygotsky was "the first modern psychologist to suggest the mechanisms by which culture becomes part of each person's nature" (Cole and Scribner, 1978, p.6). Vygotskian theory is hence appropriate in research that investigates social transformation, which is affected by global developments (Marginson and Dang, 2017), which resonates with this research. Sociocultural theory maintains the significant impact of culture and social environments on children's development, as "[t]he true development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 36). Furthermore, from a sociocultural perspective, Rogoff (2003, p. 56) states that there are "three foci of analysis" that provide "a useful conceptual tool for analysing research" with young children in this area, especially in highlighting the contextual thinking of children, which is based on and integrated with signs and cultural tools. Shifting the focus from decontextualised individuals, the 'focus of analysis' varies

based on the fluctuating ‘participation of a child within an activity (personal focus of analysis)’, how the child interacts ‘with others (interpersonal focus of analysis)’, and on historical, ‘cultural, and institutional’ aspects (cultural ‘contextual focus of analysis’) (Rogoff, 2003, p. 56). When working with this theory, one of these foci is usually dominant, while the others remain in the background. All must be analysed within the context of the ongoing activity, however. The development of children’s culture starts on the social level, then moves to the personal (Vygotsky, 1978). It can be argued that this social-to-individual process is applicable to education of young children in topics related to sex education. For example, children imitate adults around them and obtain their cultural concepts, traditions, and attitudes, such as the Saudi society’s perspective on sex education as a ‘taboo’, which may impact on children. Such thinking can be continued through the generations. Consequently, it is clear that the society and adults in particular have great power to shape children’s culture through education. In other words, children’s identity and viewpoints are mediated by and modelled on the behaviour of their surrounding family, teachers and other members of their society. This process of ongoing interactions, mediated with various signs and tools, allows culture (‘being’) to be internalised so that the lower order mental processes that are available from birth are converted into higher order mental processes (Vygotsky, 1997).

Related to this are the concepts of developmental or cognitive developmental theories, which concentrate on childhood development and the physical and social settings in which that takes place. According to such theories, what children learn or gain from particular experiences is highly rooted in culture, and is strengthened or made redundant based on cultural factors (Gauvain, 2004). The customs that parents use in childrearing impart cultural goals and values to children; the cultural scripts, routines and rituals that they use all play a role in this (Harkness and Super, 2002). According to Vogler et al. (2008, p.8), “Vygotskian socio-cultural psychology has the advantage of recognising all aspects of childhood as shaped by social, cultural and economic processes”. “This also applies to children’s environments, whether these are within the home, the farm, or a pre-school setting” (Woodhead, 1999, p. 9).

Within this theoretical framework, Vygotsky (1978) viewed children as active in engaging with the world in which they live, and to some extent shaping the world and

circumstances in which their own development will take place. Vygotsky placed particular significance on the role of culture in the learning and developmental process. He argued that learning is a process that leads development. Explaining these concepts more succinctly, Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) note:

Of course, there are regularities in the ways that cultural groups participate in everyday practices of their respective communities. However, the relatively stable characteristics of these environments are in constant tension with the emergent goals and practices participants construct, which stretch and change over time and with other constraints. This conflict and tension contribute to the variation and ongoing change in an individual's and a community's practices (p. 21).

The concept of 'guided participation' shows how children, with appropriate guidance from peers and adults, can learn to possess more mature approaches to problem-solving (Rogoff et al, 1998, p. 227). Moreover, one of Vygotsky's main concepts is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which explains the space between what children can achieve independently and what they can achieve with adults' help in a sociocultural context (Marginson and Dang, 2017). The concept of the ZPD draws attention to what areas of learning and development are foregrounded in different sociocultural contexts, and what areas of knowledge are considered appropriate for young children. These issues are pertinent in contemporary contexts characterized by rapid growth and development and global influences reaching into peoples' everyday lives. Therefore, as Collier-Harris and Goldman, (2017b) pointed out, stress, lack of information and inexperience or simply ignorance can bring children and society many serious problems, often for a long time to come.

These concepts are particularly relevant to the issues being looked at in this study. Sexual development is a key part of childhood development (Kirby, 2007, 2011; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2016; Sex Education Forum, 2018; UNESCO, 2018), and as such it makes up part of sociocultural learning in childhood. Through this process, children's knowledge and behaviour change in the light of learning derived from novel social and environmental interactions. Children are exposed to a variety of personal, cultural and social thresholds that will not necessarily be in line with any official curriculum that is

adopted in education settings, but reflect their home and community experiences. The range of influences can depend on their sociocultural environment, as well as their own individual status within that environment. Hence, topics relating to sex education cannot be examined or understood without regard for the sociocultural context in which they take place.

Currently, learning seems to be undergoing a transformation as a consequence of the continuous change in social circumstances due to globalisation innovations, such as multimedia and the Internet (Wiseman et al, 2013; Marginson and Dang, 2017). It is clear that globalisation has had a profound influence on Saudi society (Wiseman et al, 2013), which is relevant to the sociocultural setting in which this research took place. Some in Saudi society are now frequently raising concerns about the potential influence that the international media may exert on children (Banunnah, 2013), particularly in relation to sexual content (Chandra et al., 2007). From this perspective, Saudi culture is in a unique position as it is pulled by both internal and external influences in relation to this topic. The KSA is integrated into Westernised global communities, and is experienced more media influence as a result (Gorman, 2019). At the same time, many of the topics being explored in the Western media remain taboo in Saudi society, since traditionalist perspectives still tend to dominate social and cultural interactions (Al-Zahrani, 2006). Moreover, it can be highlighted that the absence of legal authorisation for compulsory sex education can negatively affect sex education, as has happened in the USA (Schalet et al., 2014), and the UK (Ingham, 2016).

However, taking the sociocultural approach has the potential to raise awareness of these issues in Saudi society, thereby enhancing children's and educators' opportunities to acknowledge sex education and to participate in appropriate ways. For this reason, this research study takes place in the space between these internal and external sociocultural influences and attempts to bridge the gap and provide information about the perceptions of people living within this complex cultural framework. Economic, political, global and religious systems all form intersecting influences. Arguably, religion is often central to culture, and in an Islamic state like the KSA, where religion is key to all aspects of personal life and social organisation (Banunnah, 2013; GASTAT, 2015), it is an essential issue to consider when examining new educational policies. As explained in Section 2.2,

the Saudi educational system is based on Islamic teachings (MOE, 1976; Al Salloom, 1991). In contrast, it can be argued that the education system in Western countries is based on a secular concept (Tabatabaie, 2015), which separates religious institutions from state institutions. Due to those contextual differences, literature from Western sources needs to be interpreted in the light of the Islamic perspectives on sex education as much as possible.

Based on the above analysis and the clear benefits that this approach has for this area of study, this research is interpreted and presented from a sociocultural perspective in all sections of this thesis. Sex education thus needs to be well examined from an Islamic perspective. The next section explains sex education, as it exists in the Islamic context, in order to better understand the influence of Islam on sex education.

3.3 Sex education in Islam

Historically, the official religion in the KSA is Islam and the dominant language is Arabic, which is the language of the Quran. As revealed in the Holy Quran, and clarified by the Hadith (Sunnah), the sayings and behaviours of the Prophet Mohammed, Islam is considered the last divine religion (Al Qarni, 2005; Tabatabaie, 2015). The governance of the KSA and its constitution are based on Islamic Jurisprudence (Sharia) from the Quran. Hence, Islam has a great impact on the country (GASTAT, 2015). Its holy places such as Makkah and Madinah empower the KSA in the eyes of other Muslim countries, while Islamic rules and ideologies permeate every aspect of Saudi daily life and the state, from policies and politics to social life. Under Islam, health is considered to be a blessing from God (Al-Qadi, 2006).

Islamic sex education can be defined as a continuous educational process which involves educators providing accurate information related to sex depending on the developmental stage of the learner (Ashraah et al., 2013). Elwan (1993) views it as a process of developing individuals' awareness through adults' frankness about sex, gender, instinct, and marriage, in order to prepare them for a good life in future, including knowledge of what is permissible and taboo in sexual life. It is widely recognised that the more knowledgeable people are about sexual issues, the fewer problems they will face with

these issues in society (Ashraah et al., 2013). For this reason, schools of Islamic thought have described it as a type of education which is provided through scientific information and appropriate experiences and attitudes towards sexual issues, with regard to the physiological, cognitive, emotional and sociological development of the individual, within the framework of religious education, social standards and ethical values prevalent in society, intended to prepare individuals to deal appropriately with sexual issues in the present and future in a way that is conducive to physiological, mental and emotional health (Zahran, 1990; Al-Qadi, 2006).

It is important first to explore Islam's attitude towards sex and sexuality in general in order to understand its position on sex education. As represented in the Quran, Islam views sexuality in a privileged light, based on the harmony of sexual ecstasy and religious faith (Kotb, 2004). Sexual activity cannot be conceived of outside the context of marriage and family life; and all of these are viewed in the light of other Islamic principles that guide and control other specific behaviours (Kotb, 2004; Al-Qadi, 2006; Banunnah, 2013). Under Islam, sexual activity, except that between husband and wife, is a punishable sin (Kotb, 2004). Within marriage, a healthy sexual relationship is seen as of central importance to the love and joy of companionship, alongside other aspects such as financial and legal arrangements. Sexual activity in this regard is not seen solely as a basis for reproduction, in that Islam encourages marriage as a legal way to satisfy sexual desires (Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008). Given the importance of marriage in Islamic life, knowledge about sex is seen as equally important, since lack of knowledge in this area may lead to strained family relations, psychosomatic symptoms, or infertility (Al-Qadi, 2006). While Islam encourages marriage, it also allows for divorce in cases where a lack of mutual understanding can be demonstrated. It also allows the marriage of one man with up to four wives. Under Islamic law issues of perversion are taken very seriously, however. Crimes of adultery, deviation and rape can be punished severely (Al Fangari, 1996; Ashraah et al., 2013). It can be seen that sex is not a subject just for pleasure and it is never discussed obscenely or flippantly (Kotb, 2004; Elwan, 2002).

Historically, Islam did not condemn sex in the same way that it is often portrayed as doing. On the contrary, a positive attitude towards sex can be found in both the Holy Quran and Hadith. In Islam, however, a human being is viewed as both a spiritual and

moral being. This implies that sexual health education for Muslim students cannot concern itself solely with physical aspects, neglecting the spiritual or moral dimensions. There are numerous verses of the Quran that discuss sex and its significance in human life.

...Your Lord, who created you from a single soul. From it He created its spouse, and from both of them scattered many men and women (Quran, 4, p.1).

They are a vestment for you and you are a vestment for them (2, p.187).

Made tempting to people is the love of lusts, women and children, heaped up hoards of gold and silver... (Quran, 3, p. 14).

And of His signs is that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you might reside with them, and has put kindness and mercy between you. Surely, there are signs in this for those who think (Quran, 30, p. 21).

Sex is presented in a holistic manner in these writings, which is in line with current scientific thinking about sexuality (Al Ajlouni, 2007). These writings address what are considered to be the basic needs and instincts of a human being, which begin in adolescence and continue until a marital relationship is achieved, based on caring and love, which then attempts to build a family that has value in Islamic society (Al Ajlouni, 2007; Ashraah et al., 2013).

The importance that early Islam attached to sexual relationships is clear, but this also needs to be viewed in conjunction with social, humanistic and psychological concepts (Ashraah et al., 2013). As Islam takes into account all human needs, it views libido as a natural and physiologically given right, and attempts to suppress these instincts are viewed as a deviation from God's (Allah's) will. Apart from this spiritual dimension, Islam holds that suppressing these instincts may result in serious psychological complications and possible mental, behavioural and nervous disorders (Al Taheri, 1990; Qutob, 1983; Elwan, 2002). The sexual instinct is construed according to Islam teachings as the most important human instinct, as it perpetuates human existence. With this kind of strict marriage-based view of morality surrounding sex, the acquisition of knowledge about sex education may occur only in adulthood.

Although Islam has a positive perspective on sexual life, as it considers it a part of being a human (Kugle, 2003), at the present time it is difficult for Muslims to focus on sex education (Tabatabaie, 2015). It can be seen that sex education is a particularly sensitive issue, both from a cultural and religious perspective, in many countries, but particularly in countries that are greatly influenced by the religion of Islam (Almuneef et al., 2014; Alsehaimi, 2016). Since dialogues about sex punctuate our daily lives, a permanent struggle often ensues between integrating the religious and the sexual within these countries (Kotb, 2004). The dilemma about whether, when, and what to teach about sex reflects this difficulty. Muslim attitudes to sex and sex education can be discovered from the concept of natural modesty (*haya*), which is based on more than just the Islamic dress code and deals with the entire spectrum of behaviour, attitudes and etiquette: “Every religion has a distinctive quality and the distinctive quality of Islam is modesty” (Kazi, 1992, p.120). However, in Islam, much emphasis is placed on acquiring knowledge; therefore, Muslim men and women are seen to be encouraged to ask the Prophet Mohammed questions pertaining to any aspect of their lives, including private affairs such as sex and sexual life (Al-Ghazali, 1975; Tabatabaie, 2015). This was seen as a way of enlightening society about his teachings and rulings. Although shyness and modesty form key parts of Islamic teaching, it was also taught that there is no shyness in matters of religion. This belief extends to the more delicate aspects of sexual life as well (Kotb, 2004).

Accordingly, Islam encourages people to obtain sex education to maintain and protect their health (Kotb, 2004; Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008; Ashraah et al., 2013), and Saudi culture offers guidance regarding health-promoting activities and practices. For example, Islam forbids activities such as the consumption of alcohol and pork, gambling, smoking, adultery, or homosexuality (Elwan, 2002; Al-Qadi, 2006). However, it may be argued that some people believe Islam suppresses sexual instincts. This is a misunderstanding; Islam does not contradict human nature. It does not forbid monogamous sex, but it does disallow sexual release in certain forms (adultery and homosexuality) (Al-Qadi, 2006). Islam does not promote the total suppression of sexuality and sexual desires, but considers them within the context of Islamic values such as decency and modesty. The Islamic perspective on sex education encourages people to have awareness in order to protect themselves against sexual deviations and diseases

(Tabatabaie, 2015). It can be said that Islamic laws pertaining to sex do not change with the changing values of society, but are fixed and steadfast (Kotb, 2004). However, in many Muslim societies, problems relating to sex and sexuality are currently taking on new dimensions, including an increased prevalence of what are considered to be sexual deviations, such as homosexuality and sexual abuse (Ashraah et al., 2013). In the Islamic context, some people believed that “the weakness of sexual awareness and misinformation is one of the causes of sexual deviations, and that it is dangerous to lead children and youth to obtain this information from untrustworthy resources” (Zahran, 1990, p. 455). This is also emphasised by scholarly explications of Islamic morality.

As much as religious teachings influence sexual health education in Islam, so is the Islamic position on sexual health education seen as an avenue for religious teaching, exploring Islamic ideology, and establishing Islamic consciousness on these issues (Ashraf, 1998; Elwan, 2002). Sexual health education thus becomes a vehicle for spiritual development; therefore, such education should be seen as essential for every Muslim. In this way, the education focuses on the religious and moral concepts of unity and worship (Sanjakdar, 2004; 2009; Al-Qadi, 2006). Similarly, in the UK, many British Muslims are convinced that awareness about sex and gender should not be solely about health, but should be related to Islamic education (Tabatabaie, 2015). This point is significant, as many laypeople perceive aspects of sex education as contradicting the Islamic concept of family unity.

In the Islamic context, ‘sexual instincts’ are perceived as needs that require satisfaction within a specific relationship framework, as do other instincts such as socialising and forming groups. Islamic scholars have criticised what they see as a tendency in some ‘Western’ theories on sex to concentrate only on anatomical and biological factors, disregarding those aspects of sexuality that relate to human dignity (Ashraah et al., 2013). They assert that although the biological facts are important in Islam also, they paint an incomplete picture unless moral considerations are integrated (Ashraah et al., 2013; Tabatabaie, 2015). However, many studies demonstrate that sex from a Western perspective involves pleasure, satisfaction and partnership as highly important elements, which reflect the values of the societies (Sex Education Forum, 2016b; UNESCO, 2018), but they do not need to contract a formal marriage to have offspring. It is clear then that

there are some different concepts of sex education in various contexts due to sociocultural factors. Contemporary sexual health education in Western cultures is presented in a way that implies that certain acts that would be considered incongruent with Islam are acceptable. For example, terms such as ‘free sex’, ‘safe sex’, ‘boyfriend/girlfriend relationships’, are notions that directly violate Islamic law. Conversely, some Islamic practices can be considered as criminal offences in the eyes of Western legal systems, e.g. bigamy, polygamy or female genital mutilation (FGM). Given such sociocultural differences, some Muslims believe that the best way to maintain their identity and ‘escape’ from assimilation into Western cultural values is through strengthening family bonds and Islamic education (Islam and Rahman, 2008). This view makes Islamic sex education a delicate topic to implement. Under Islamic teachings, therefore, parents are warned against engaging in certain behaviours in front of their children, for example kissing, making jokes about sex or talking about it in a mocking fashion (Ashraah et al., 2013).

With this in mind, it is important to consider what the aims of sex education should be in an Islamic context. Al-Qadi (2006) enumerates the aims of Islamic sex education as follows:

1. To support accurate and essential information about sexual behaviour.
2. To provide information about reproduction as the method of maintaining human life on Earth.
3. To educate about the anatomy and appropriate terminology for the pudendum and sexual behaviour.
4. To correct misconceptions about sex.
5. To protect from bad sexual experiences.
6. To help to understand the individual’s responsibility towards society and acknowledge the negative impact of pornography on both the individual and society.
7. To develop self-control in terms of the individuals’ motives and instinctual desires.
8. To create correct orientations and attitudes towards sexual matters, sexual growth, human reproduction and family life that are aligned with personality development, human relationships and Islamic regulations.

9. To provide religious education within the framework of social norms and moral values.
10. To ensure good relationships between both genders based upon respect and personal and social responsibility for sexual acts.
11. To develop a human conscience, which guides behaviours in the light of religion.
12. To help achieve a healthy society by assisting in the protection of society from the perceived dangers of sexual deviations and disease.

Contained in the above list are many aspects that would be relevant to sex education in most contexts, including an understanding of reproduction and the importance of good relationships between genders. These points also extend to aspects of personality development, human conscience, and awareness of sexual deviations that are specifically relevant to Islamic beliefs.

It can be seen that aligned with the importance attached to appropriate education on sex and family life in Islamic culture, Islam tends to place on parents the responsibility for talking about sex issues with their children and for taking on the religious duties that result from such understandings (Al-Qadi, 2006; Ashraah et al., 2013). Discussions on these topics between parents and children are expected to begin at an early age and continue gradually in a contextually and developmentally appropriate manner, in order to counter any misinformation that may be received from unreliable and uncontrollable sources, such as the Internet. Considering the Islamic historical tenets, Islam arguably does not pose any barriers to the introduction of sex education, contrary to what some have asserted. Parents and children alike are free to benefit from Islamic information about sex (Kotb, 2004). Additionally, parents' knowledge about sex is a prerequisite for providing accurate and appropriate teaching to their children.

This section has given an overview of the Islamic position on sex education. The next sections demonstrate more specifically certain views on the topic, beginning with the importance of sex education for young children.

3.4 The importance of sex education for young children

This section aims to address the literature regarding the first research question, which considers the importance of sex education for young children. I discuss here the importance of sex education for children aged from three to six years old in particular. This section presents the literature relating to various perspectives on sex education, sex education and children's development and values, and child protection.

3.4.1 Perspectives on sex education

The topic of sex education is a broad one. This means that there are many different ways in which it has been defined by professionals and experts. Some definitions relate more to the health aspects of sex education, whilst others lean more towards the physical, ethical, or even biological dimensions.

It can be argued that some studies present that sex education as a biological study focused on biological differences and the physical act of sexual reproduction. According to Abdultawab (1988), sex education should be viewed as an educational process which involves particular knowledge about functions of a reproductive, sexual and biological nature, although he does build on this by stating that it should also involve information about certain 'correct' attitudes toward sexual behaviours. Another similar definition of sex education by Bebe (1999) explains it as an institutionally established arrangement that helps young people prepare for future sexual life; however, it focuses on sexual intuition or libido, and biological characteristics. The definition of sex education given by Robinson et al. (2002) builds upon this more basic view of sex education. They see sex education as being focused on sexual activity and avoiding the risks attached to issues of sexual activity and sexual health. This approach builds on similarly narrow views on sex itself by associating sexual activity with procreation only. It can be seen that all the above definitions focus on sexual activity, similar to the way Hornby (2003) defines sex in the Oxford English Dictionary, as being restricted to physical acts, involving people touching each other's sexual organs, for example, and potentially leading to sexual intercourse. Slightly less restrictive, however, Bristow (1997) notes that 'sex' does not connote only

sexual activity, but also concerns the biological differences between male and female bodies.

From this perspective, 'sex' and 'sex education' are often defined in a very narrow sense 'intercourse', rather than in the broader biological, psychological and social sense (Goldman and Goldman, 1988). For this reason, Milton (2002) recognized, there is pervasive discomfort amongst parents of young children in relation to sex and sexuality. It is not unusual, then, that some parents get anxious when terms such as 'sex' are used when speaking about young children; however, it has to be noted that these anxieties usually relate to this narrow use of the term (Goldman, 2008; Sciaraffa and Randolph, 2011). Similarly, for many contemporary Muslims, the term 'sex' is seen as a 'dirty' word because it is associated with defilement and impurity. Parents may, therefore, feel uncomfortable discussing sex with their children (Kotb, 2004; Banunnah, 2013). Kotb (2004) argues that parental discomfort about sex probably stems from their cultural upbringing, rather than from Islamic teaching. Arguably, this approach is reductionist in nature, as it dismisses a more holistic view on sex education. It must be noted, however, that in the context of this thesis, sex education is not solely concerned with sexual relationships, but rather relates to the broader aspects of children and their place in society, as well as awareness of one's body.

Currently, debates about children and young people are highlighted in the discussion of sex education topics (Robinson, 2013; UNESCO, 2018). Ketterman (2007) details a much broader definition of sex education, which highlights that its fundamental purpose is to develop individuals' confidence to make more informed and well-thought out choices on issues related to sex. Alldred et al. (2003), for example, describe sex education, set in a typically Western context, as a method of teaching children and young people about broader sex-related issues, as well as the act of sex itself and reproduction. A similar view is that of Al-Qadi, (2006) and Al-Ahdab (2007) who assert that sex education is the process of offering information to children whilst helping develop their ever-evolving outlook relating to sex in society. This broader approach is seen particularly in sex education in the UK, which focuses on familial and social awareness and how this can be developed effectively (DfEE, 2000).

Before going on to explore the definition of sex in these broader contexts, a common misconception needs to be addressed. When it comes to defining sex education, the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are often used interchangeably, which can understandably create some confusion. According to the World Health Organization (2006), the term ‘sex’ refers to the characteristics that define females and males as biologically different (WHO, 2006), whereas ‘gender’ refers to certain societal behaviours and qualities that are expected from a female or male person and how they identify themselves. According to Price (2005), gender roles are impressed upon us by external factors. She goes on to explain that “sex is defined not only as an act between partners but also as behaviours that help individuals to understand or reaffirm who they are” (Price, 2005, p. 47).

Of particular relevance to this debate about definitions was an international consultation held by The World Health Organization (WHO) on sexual health in January 2002. Here, sexuality was looked at reflexively and re-defined by experts in health field. It was concluded that sexuality plays a core role in what it is to be human and encompasses areas such as gender identities and roles, and sexual orientation, as well as sex itself. Also, it can be expressed in various ways, including internal factors such as “desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships”, which are also influenced by external factors such as “biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors” (WHO, 2006, p.5). Consequently, this led to the WHO defining sexual health as being “the state of an individual’s well-being related to sexuality, with regard to the physical, emotional, mental and social aspects, whilst also noting that sexuality requires a certain positive approach and that every individual has the right to feel that their sexuality has been protected and fulfilled” (WHO, 2006, p.5).

In contrast to the WHO definition, in some contexts such as Islam, sex education is defined in terms of specific morality and the accompanying issues. One Islamic scholar, Zahran (1990), noted that Islamic sex education should promote the provision of scientific information on sexual issues and that it should also focus specifically on righteous experiences and attitudes which contribute towards individual development physiologically, as well as psychologically, emotionally, and mentally. From his perspective, however, the most important aspect in sex education is to ensure that it all accords with the religious framework. Taking a similar approach, Elwan (2002) and Al-

Qadi (2006) describe sex education as essentially providing information to children to make sure that they are aware of sex, whilst also being able to have an open dialogue with them about issues relating to sex and marriage so that they are ultimately better informed and can ensure that they are living a life deemed to be in accordance with Islamic teachings.

In many cultural contexts, particularly in countries, which are heavily influenced by the teachings of Islam, such as the KSA, sex education is more likely to place emphasis on relationships within the family, and how certain gender roles should be carried out. Sex education within these countries is defined in ways that teach children specific roles related to family and gender, which are acceptable under Islamic teachings (Al-Qadi, 2006). Tabatabaie (2015) argues that through gaining understanding and abilities to do with decision-making in this area, children are empowered within societies. These perspectives highlight the fact that the cultural and moral context in which sex education is taught has a major impact on its aims, due to the standards and morals set by society. It also has to be noted that this is not an issue relating just to the Islamic context. In the USA, for example, the aims of sex education are defined by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) as:

1. Providing information on issues related to sex which range from mental to biological,
2. Helping to eliminate issues of anxiety related to sexual growth,
3. The development of appropriate attitudes towards the opposite sex,
4. Helping individuals gain insight on the ideal and appropriate relationship to be had between the sexes and,
5. Providing knowledge on sexual deviation and its downfalls (Abdultawab, 1988; Ashraah et al., 2013).

This approach is also clearly steeped in morality and a particular paradigm, focusing on ‘appropriate’ attitudes and relationships.

In 2018, UNESCO defined sex education as “Comprehensive Sex Education Programmes (CSE) that help develop skills that are closely linked to effective social and emotional learning, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills

and responsible decision-making” (UNESCO, 2018, p. 83). They also note that sex education provides valuable opportunities for children to develop their values and skills in this area, such as decision-making and communication, and to move forward in an informed manner. UNESCO (2009; 2018) describes it as a realistic and accurate approach that is age-appropriate for the children involved. According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child:

Age-appropriate, comprehensive and inclusive sexual and reproductive health education, based on scientific evidence and human rights standards and developed with adolescents, should be part of the mandatory school curriculum and reach out-of-school adolescents (UNESCO, 2018, p. 82).

These broad definitions are more useful than the restrictive ones outlined above, as they suggest that all people worthy of protection and present sex education in an age-appropriate manner.

Based on the previous analysis, it is evident that there is clearly no widely accepted comprehensive definition of sex education, as each culture, as well as every individual, can develop their own interpretation. Moreover, it is essential to notice that the term remains contested in different cultural contexts, where different aspects of sex education may be emphasised accordingly. Despite this, it is still important to be able to come to a general consensus on what constitutes sex education, particularly for the interest of this specific research. All contexts and definitions, as much as they may vary between and across cultures, are in agreement that in order to eventually achieve stability in sexual health, sex education for children must be an educational process that involves the provision of information and experiences related to sexual issues based on their age and developmental stage and taking into account their ethical and moral framework. This study will take this as the starting point for its definition of sex education, while also accounting for broader conceptual issues and different definitions.

This sub-section has discussed the definitions of sex education in detail. It has also provided an overview of Western studies and the Islamic perspective on the necessity of providing sex education for children. The next section builds on this discussion, moving

past definitional issues and towards an understanding of why sex education is an important and significant topic for children's education and sexual development more generally.

3.4.2 Sex education and child development

The sexual development of children is an ongoing process that begins at birth and perhaps even conception. Some issues related to sexual development could arise from an early age, due to cultural perspectives on sex and gender. Consequently, the topic of sexual education needs to be considered across the lifespan. As Levine (2002) and Goldman (2008; 2015) claim, children therefore need age-appropriate information and education during this time. This section outlines the important role that sex education plays in child development.

The important impact that the early years of a child's life have on their continued development is becoming more and more widely accepted (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004; Melhuish and Petrogiannis, 2006; Vogler et al., 2008). Researchers and writers in this area recognise now that sex education does not begin in adolescence, but is a significant right of all stages of development, up until death (Goldman and Goldman 1988; Haroian, 2000; Blonna and Levitan 2005; Goldman, 2013; 2015; UNESCO, 2018). The UK Department for Education and Skills recognised this point succinctly:

Every child deserves the best possible start in life and support to fulfil their potential. A child's experience in the early years has a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right, and it provides the foundation for children to make the most of their abilities as they grow up (DfES, 2007, p.2).

According to Islam, 'childhood' is the period from birth to puberty (Ashraah et al., 2013). The current debate on children's rights in Islam has two perspectives. On the one hand, there is a widespread secular view that Islamic traditions contravene children's rights, particularly in Muslim families (Rajabi-Ardeshiri, 2013). On the other hand, the latter view emphasises that the older traditions in Islamic law respect children's rights in

education, health, protection and care (Islamic International Centre for Demographic Studies and Research 2005; Tabatabaie, 2015). Despite this, sex education and issues around sex have traditionally been ignored in the education of young children. As a result of this, many Muslim adults have been brought up in a state of ignorance regarding sexual issues, resulting in a lack of confidence in dealing with issues around sexuality (Kotb, 2004; Tabatabaie, 2015). Similarly, in Western societies, sex education for example, may be neglected because, as Leach (1977) states, “adults prefer to believe that small children have no sexual feeling... because they either do not or should not have any” (p.447). It can be argued that the ‘discourses of innocence’, which attempt to impose sexual innocence on childhood are fictional, as this type of innocence seems to be a convenient parental fantasy rather than a childhood truth (Renold, 2005, p.22). This perspective could lead to several problems impacting on child sexual development, as Robinson (2013), explains:

Discourses of childhood innocence and protection, which have largely rendered children’s sexual subjectivities invisible, have often been the rationale for denying children access to relevant and important knowledge about sexuality and relationships (p.63).

Conversely, gender issues are immediately apparent in the lives of young children. Children at birth are quickly identified by their sexual organs and children learn at an early age to discriminate between the different genders (Renold, 2005). Adults who are involved in the lives of children thus play an important role during this time (Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002; Sciaraffa and Randolph, 2011; Pop and Rusu, 2015). For example, one of the first questions ever asked about a new baby is ‘boy or girl?’ Despite this widespread early introduction of gendered issues into the lives of even very young children, there is equally widespread disagreement on sex education provision for young children, who are nonetheless aware of these gender issues.

It can be argued that one of the main reasons why sex education is not widely implemented at the early stages of a child’s life is the lack of consensus on the actualities of children’s sexual development. Sigmund Freud, for example, noted that children are sexual beings from birth (Prymachuk, 1998) and he argued that children derive subconscious pleasure from different activities at different ‘psychosexual stages’ in their

young development: the oral stage (birth-two years), the anal stage (two-four years), the phallic stage (four-six years), the latent stage, (pre-puberty) and the genital stage (puberty) (Freud, 1905). It has been noted that children at very young ages can take an interest in their own and their peers' genitals, including showing them to each other (Duquet, 2003). All this emphasises the importance of relevant and appropriate early stage sex education that could provide age-appropriate information to promote children skills and protect them from sexual problems (Hickling, 2005; Lehmiller, 2014).

Another aspect pertinent to the early age is children's natural curiosity, which enables exploration and learning to be integral with the early stages of sexual childhood development. Children have been shown to be naturally curious about themselves and others (Davies et al., 2000). Children of all ages and stages of sexual maturity want to know what is happening to their bodies and to those of their peers (Goldman and Goldman, 1982; Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013). They tend to ask questions about their sexuality as a normal part of their development. Malinowski (1979) notes that one of the most basic and common questions of this sort, but one that is also far-reaching in its implications, is 'where do babies come from?'. This innocent question epitomises the natural curiosity of children, who can stumble onto very sexual topics almost by accident. As part of this discovery, children will tend to ask a large volume of questions. Failure to provide appropriate responses has been shown to be potentially harmful to the development of the child (Malinowski, 1979; Hickling, 2005). An example appropriate to this study is when children ask questions or are curious about their 'private parts', which could lead to inappropriate sexual behaviours that may appear through role-play. Therefore, if children are not afforded the appropriate knowledge and answers when these issues arise, it could have detrimental effects on their sexual development by depriving them of knowledge that could be essential to their sexual health in later life. As Ketterman (2007) notes that although sexual exploration is a natural part of development and children should not be reprimanded for this, it could lead to shame about sex and sexual issues and hinder future development in this area and others.

Play forms is an inherent and important part of the general curiosity that children have at a young age and its associated sexual childhood development. Vygotsky (1978) recognised play as a "leading factor in development" (p.101). Much earlier, Isaacs (1954)

noted the significance of play, stating that “play is the child’s means of living and understanding life” (p.23). Davies et al. (2000) recognise the significant role that pre-school has in this, in particular around the area of childhood play, such as role-play games. It is an important way that play interacts with sex education and sexuality is observable from a very young age (Davies et al, 2000; Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002). For example, children can pretend to be families, or professionals, such as doctors, and through this they develop a sense of how relationships work and the significance that different relationships have for them as they mature (Banunnah, 2013; 2016). Therefore, it can be seen that play allows children to develop socially and emotionally, and “may also contribute to unity of mind and personality through the development of self-esteem, as well as cultural, gender and sexual identities” (Wood and Attfield, 2005, p.64). This point is important, as despite disagreements on the content and provision of early sex education, the important role of play in the personal, social and sexual development of children cannot be ignored and should not be understated.

Additionally, professional opinions in the child development field are now more extensively recommending that children should have some understanding about sexuality before they form strong emotional attachments during the period of adolescence (Centrewall, 2000; Levine, 2002; SIECUS, 2004; Hickling, 2005; Goldman, 2013; 2015). It can be noticed that children worldwide have the same process of transition to puberty (Dorn and Biro, 2011; Tolman and McClelland, 2011; Fortenberry, 2013). There is no doubt that some biological, psychological and social changes can occur during the puberty process, which impact on children and their future lives (Blakemore and Mills, 2014). Therefore, children need to be reassured and have the knowledge that what they are going through in puberty is ‘normal’ and that there is nothing physically wrong with the changes that are happening to them (Goldman and Goldman, 1982; Hickling, 2005). Studies have proved that early puberty causes a shorter childhood phase and increases the incidence of physiological problems (Mensah et al., 2013; Viner et al. 2012; 2015). Recently, some studies have proven that the sexual hormones of puberty usually occur from ages 6–8 to about 26–28 (Collier-Harris, 2015). Additionally, girls' puberty is now often reached at age 8-9 (Goldman, 2011; 2013; Goldman and McCutchen, 2012; Goldman and Coleman, 2013), 15% of boys produce sperm by age 11, and a similar percentage of girls start their period at the age of 10 (Mensah et al., 2013). These

statistics on early experiences of puberty continue across the teenage continuum. While it has been noted that sexual change is experienced in many children younger than 10 years old, almost all middle adolescent teenagers are post-pubertal (Goldman, 2011; 2015). Since puberty can begin in girls from the age of about eight years, and in boys only slightly later, this view clearly supports sex education's inclusion in the primary school curriculum (Harrison, 2000; Blake, 2002; Parent et al., 2003; SIECUS, 2004; Hashemi, 2007).

The changing pubertal configurations create new challenges for educators at all levels that need to be accounted for in developing any sex education curriculum (Renold, 2005). For example, in the UK, boys often begin to have wet dreams and girls have periods before the sex education programme in primary schools begins (Sex Education Forum, 2016b). Implementing education of this sort only starting in the high school curriculum could therefore be considered "too little, too late" (Measor et al., 2000, p. 159). Similarly, although puberty has been linked to forms of worships such as prayer, fasting and hijab in Islam, it provides detailed instructions for obligatory washing after impurity and menstruation, as set out in the textbook in Islamic jurisprudence, only in secondary school (Al-Qadi, 2006). Educators have a responsibility to teach children Islamic rules; particularly those related to adolescence. Just as sex education was seen above to be subject to age-appropriateness, most forms of worship are also subject to age-related rules; for example, girls should not pray or fast during menstruation and should wear a hijab (Elwan, 1993). However, the late introduction of instruction on such matters shows a clear mismatch with the reality of children's physical development and a defeat of purposes regarding effective sex education to prepare children in advance to accept the signs of changes in their bodies and teach them the Islamic rules related to puberty.

Recent studies demonstrate that a lack of appropriate information can create a wide gap between emotional, cognitive and reproductive development for children experiencing early puberty (DeRose et al., 2011; Goldman, 2013; 2015) that can lead to many problems in children's lives. It can be argued that leaving sex education to a time when these changes have already begun to occur, and when the children involved are already in the midst of puberty, is not only unrealistic from a practical viewpoint, but could also be considered negligent on the part of education professionals, as well as harmful to the

welfare and health of students (Levesque, 2000; Halstead and Reiss, 2003; Lehmilller, 2014). For this reason, more recent attention has focused on the idea that sex education is most effective if its delivery begins before puberty, sexual activity and maturity start (Mueller et al., 2008; Collier-Harris, 2015; Sex Education Forum, 2016b). It has been shown that sex education is significant at all levels and stages of development, and that sexual issues and curiosity can arise at all ages. Sex education needs to be viewed as a continuous process that is relevant at all stages of development (El-Shajeb and Wurtele, 2009). Based on this, it is clear that age-appropriate sex education programmes need to start pre-puberty and at quite an early stage in the development of children, as well as continuing into puberty (Halstead and Reiss, 2003; Measor, 2004; Goldman, 2008; 2015).

Furthermore, the importance of systematic sex education has been recognised in an internationally comparative research study (Goldman and Goldman, 1982). In that study, which explored the situation in the USA, the UK, Canada, Sweden, and Australia, it was noted that those children who had received such systematic and gradual age-appropriate sex education were able to comprehend complex issues such as pregnancy and birth at early ages. That study also recognised that few topics in this area were beyond the comprehension of children before adolescence, although some of the complex details of gestation and genetic determinants did appear difficult for younger children to grasp. Children in Sweden, with long-standing compulsory sex education from 7 years of age, showed the most ability to grasp these more complex matters (Goldman and Goldman 1982; 1988). In fact, there is evidence that children are aware of sexueroetic thoughts and denying them access to sex education can damage them in later life (Pryjmachuk, 1998; Goldman, 2013; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). The importance of taking into accounts not only the age group, but also the comprehension and openness of each individual child is also necessary to ensure appropriate sex education, however (DfEE, 2000; Duquet, 2003).

This section has looked at the importance of sex education in the development of children and focused on the justification for early years sex education. The next section presents another argument for the importance of sex education in pre-school years: the critical role that it plays in the formation of children's enduring values.

3.4.3 Sex education and children's values

One of the United Nations' principles of education is to uphold the values of the wider society, as well as developing children's ability to construct their own frameworks and values (Halstead and Reiss 2003; SIECCAN, 2005; UNESCO, 2018). Values are therefore significant in all areas of education, but possibly most evident in sex education. This should not be overly surprising, as sexuality can be seen as potentially the most significant aspect of human existence, encompassing the basis for human intimacy, but also the source of new human life (Samia et al., 2012). Sex is, therefore, a very value-laden activity; as discussed above, it is far more than a physical act. Sexuality is about identity, as it forms a central role in communicating to the world and ourselves what type of person we are (Ellingson and Green, 2002). This section explains values in children as they relate to sex education as a further justification for early years sex education, irrespective of which part of the world they live in.

The substantial links of sex education to human development, described in the previous section, are significant for the intersecting influence of values. Duquet (2003), for example, has described sex education as being directly influential on numerous personal values, including self-worth, love, body-image, respect for privacy, personal modesty, and a sense of responsibility for sexual health. In this respect, there is a clear similarity between Islamic and Western views (Al-Qadi, 2006; Ashraah et al., 2013; Tabatabaie, 2015). Likewise, according to Goldman (2015) and UNESCO (2018) studies, a number of values are relevant to sex education that also relate to information and skills regarding body image, interpersonal values, social relationships, and decision-making. These values can support children to develop longer-term healthy lifestyles with appropriate understanding, as well as self-control and self-discipline (Rogers, 1974). Therefore, values should not be overlooked in sex education. As these values spread across the lifespan, it is also important that their influence and relevance for sexuality and sex education are addressed at all ages. Providing age-appropriate and accurate information on sex and sexuality is, therefore, of importance in helping children to better understand their emotions and feelings, equipping them with the self-confidence to form their own values around sensitive issues, and imbuing the confidence to seek mature guidance in the face of ambiguity or confusion (Buston et al., 2002; Haberland and Rogow, 2015; Alldred et al., 2016). These points around values are of particular importance in the

tumultuous adolescent years, when vast physical and mental changes are occurring. These changes can lead to rapidly shifting values (Goldman, 2011; 2015). It has been shown that healthy development of these values requires effective and relevant sex education on a systematic and age-appropriate basis (Eyre and Eyre, 1999; Goldman, 2013; Abril and Romero, 2008).

In academic studies, there is an increasing focus on values forming a key part of sex education. Definitions that include references to values are now becoming more prevalent globally (UNESCO, 2009; 2018). In numerous Western countries, values now form a cornerstone of sex education curricula, with attention to a broader range of issues pertinent to sex and sexuality, including fairness, gender equality and respect, self-esteem, protection and safety, freedom, truth and peace of mind (Halstead and Reiss, 2003; Sex Education Forum, 2015; UNICEF, 2014; UNESCO, 2018). Other relevant values that have been recognised include social justice, pluralism, peace and environmental sustainability (SIECCAN, 2005). These are not only social values that are of significance, but familial values should also receive adequate attention (Shtarkshall et al., 2007). These all need to be accounted for in formulating sex education curricula for any age group. Teaching these values as part of sex education is now even mandatory in some countries, such as Australia (Goldman, 2008; 2013).

Studies in the UK and Australia have noted that teenagers have expressed their desire to have values included in sex education as part of the curriculum, in order to make sound, values-based decisions in this part of their lives, as well as to help them view sexuality in a moral and emotional context (Goldman and Goldman, 1984; Halstead and Reiss, 2003). In a USA study, an overwhelming majority of high-school age students, as well as their parents and teachers, expressed support for this type of sex education (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2000). Similar results have been found in the UK (Sex Education Forum, 2006). Although these studies were based on older children, the results can be extrapolated to the present study. However, a study in the United Arab Emirates by Sharaf and Al Marzouqi (2011) found that although young people aged 18–25 felt that sex education should be taught in schools, more than 50% of over-25s disagreed with discussing this topic at all, mostly out of the fear of creating inappropriate attitudes towards sex that could conflict with Islamic values. This is despite the point that has

already been made, that sex education in the Islamic paradigm is not just about the physical act but includes other values such as morality, relationships, hygiene and self-protection (Al-Ghazali, 1975; Al-Qadi, 2006). Sex education that is in line with the Islamic values of modesty and decency of both sexes (Al-Ghazali, 1975; Elwan, 1993; Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008; Ashraah et al., 2013) can be provided. Values need to be viewed as part of a comprehensive sex education programme in schools that should also address other important aspects, like communication skills, decision making, managing relationships, understanding of social and cultural issues and norms, self-esteem, etc. (Centrewall, 2000; SIECCAN, 2005; SIECUS, 2004).

However, it is clear from the above discussion that the processes of learning and teaching are of seminal importance in Islam, sex education in schools is a contentious issue and there are mixed feelings among Muslims in Western countries about the parameters that should exist. It can be argued that Muslims in Western countries have struggled to some extent with some different values of sex education (Ashraah et al., 2013; Tabatabaie, 2015). For example, the secular sex education in the UK promotes acceptance of the LGBT community in society. Therefore, in the UK the law confers the right to choose to attend such lessons and the freedom to reflect diverse gender and sexual identities, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) at the age of 16, which conflicts with Islamic teachings and values (DfE, 2017). The British democratic system respects all differentiated values and cultures. For this reason, most Muslim families have withdrawn their children from these lessons. It can be seen that this issue should be considered beyond sex education, not only in the UK, but also in Muslim countries. Despite LGBT lifestyles not accepted in Islam or Saudi society, there is a need for further research about this issue in all societies. Nevertheless, this thesis considers children in the early years, between three and six in a conservative society that follows the Islamic values; therefore, LGBT issues are not discussed further in this study.

Alongside the discussion above about the importance of sex education to promote individuals' values across the lifespan, it would be impossible for values in sex education to not have relevance at all ages. This section discussed the importance of sex education in respect of children's values across cultures. The importance of sex education in child protection is explained in the next sub-section.

3.4.4 Sex education and child protection

Despite all the above-mentioned potential benefits of sex education, concerns have been raised about the impact of sex education on children, in particular very young children (Alldred et al., 2003; 2016), linking it with sexual issues such as sexual misbehaviours or teen pregnancy. Others claim that the topics that need to be covered are too complex and not really understood by young children, as well as raising the risk that all sexual behaviour will be pathologised for them (Finkelhor, 2007). In fact, such fears are contrary to the evidence. Walker and Milton (2006) found no academic ‘consensus’ that sex education encourages sex at a younger age. There is also no evidence to suggest that sex education correlates with subsequent ‘risky’ behaviour or sexually transmitted infections, some of the other frequently professed fears (Vivancos et al, 2013). Studies in the USA provide important data on this. The USA has one of the highest teen pregnancy and birth rates in the developed world, twice as high as in the UK (Singh and Darroch, 2000). However, no correlation has been found there between the provision of sex education and increased sexual activity (Kirby, 2007; 2011).

Furthermore, there is evidence that sex education can prevent young people from having early sexual experiences (i.e. it postpones sexual activity) (Mueller et al., 2008; Lindberg and Maddow-Zimet, 2012). Completely contradictory to the common feelings expressed by parents, failure to provide knowledge in this area has actually been claimed by some to lead to ‘immoral behaviour’ (Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002). Although this is one opinion, it suggests that, sex education should be viewed as another form of protective knowledge, akin to road safety or other standard child safety education, as there is now substantial evidence that “school-based sex education leads to improved awareness of risk and knowledge of risk reduction strategies, increased self-effectiveness and intention to adopt safer sex behaviours, and to delay, rather than hasten, the onset of sexual activity” (Wellings et al, 2006, p.12). Al-Qadi (2006) and Davies et al. (2000) recognise this also, stating that sex education, rather than leading to early exploration and sexual activity, actually assists in the construction of a young person’s identity and empowers them to express their feelings. However, although specific issues of protection are of concern, these differ across societies. In Islamic context, sexual relations are permissible only when teenagers get married (Ashraah et al., 2013). Therefore, it can be noticed that the rate of teen pregnancy is lower than other sexual issues, such as sexual abuse in Saudi

society (Banunnah, 2013). There are many such teen pregnancies because in some areas girls were married early to older husbands. However, in 2019, the Shura Council in the KSA approved a draft law that would ban marriage under the age of 15 and require a marriage contract involving a person under 18 years of age to be reviewed by a competent court (Shura Council, 2019). This reaffirms the culturally specific context of the KSA being looked at in this thesis.

Numerous research studies from Western contexts have shown how appropriate sex education can work not only to reduce instances of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, but also to safeguard children from other unwanted sexual experiences, such as sexual abuse (Bryan et al., 1996; Skinner and Hickey, 2003; Ketterman, 2007; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015). Similar to the problems around defining sex education, however, there is also no universally accepted definition of child sexual abuse (Reason, 1998). Schechter and Roberge (1976) present a concise definition thus:

...the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend and to which they are unable to give informed consent or that violate the social taboos of family roles (p. 60).

According to NSPCC (2018), child sexual abuse is defined as unwanted contact or non-contact sexual experiences perpetrated on a child. Contact experiences include kissing, fondling, oral sex, or penetrative intercourse while non-contact abuse encompasses sexual remarks, exhibitionism, voyeurism or the creation of pornographic images of children (Freeman, 2000; Johnstone et al., 2000; NSPCC, 2018). It has been claimed that most people who have been affected by sexual abuse in childhood go on to experience problems in their relationships in adult life. In many cases, those who perpetrate abuse have also been victims of abuse during their own childhood (Lalor and McElvaney, 2010; NSPCC, 2018).

Child sexual abuse is a recognised problem in most countries. In the UK, the annual study of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) organisation indicates that through one year between 2017-2018 the police recorded 3000 cases of sexual abuse on children (NSPCC, 2018). More than one in seven children between 11-18 years old were asked to send sexual images or pictures of themselves

(NSPCC, 2018). In Australia, over 40,000 cases were substantiated in just a two-year period (2002-2003) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005). Similar numbers were found in the USA, where in 2007, over 60,000 victims were reported to the National Centre on Abuse and Neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Children at any age can be at risk of this; however, the ages of 7-13 are associated with the highest risk (MacLennan, 1993). In 2010, a study by Lanning investigated the sexual exploitation of children and found that children are the most targeted victims of 'preferential' sexual criminals (Lanning, 2010). This prevalence usually leads to comprehensive government action. The fear of sexual abuse creates anxiety in children and their families (Aldred et al., 2003; 2016). The influence of such concerns, and legal mandates for the protection of children and the promotion of their sexual safety, thus have significant implications for sex education (Goldman, 2013; Renold, 2005).

The previous points are particularly relevant to the context being studied here. In the KSA, in 2004, there was a study on adults and students in higher education in three cities in the KSA to investigate their experiences of sexual abuse in early childhood (Al-Zahrani, 2004). This study investigated the causes and consequences of types of child abuse in the Saudi society, such as physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect. The participants of this study comprised 519 undergraduate students over 18 years of age and 304 householders in three regions in the KSA (Al-Zahrani, 2004). The author noted that over one fifth of them had experienced some form of sexual abuse in their early lives between 6-10 years of age. However, he demonstrated that 77% of the entire sample avoided answering the questions in the questionnaires regarding sexual abuse and 62% declined to identify the perpetrators of sexual abuse, due to the sensitivity of the topic in Saudi culture. Therefore, it can be argued that due to a limited number of cities used in the study and the actual number of participants, it is difficult to generalise the findings of this study to the whole Saudi society and further studies should provide the rate of sexual abuse more accurately. Furthermore, in 2016, the National Family Safety Program (NFSP) report on the hospital-based child maltreatment registry in the Saudi health sector between 2011- 2015 indicated 1769 recorded cases of abuse in childhood. The findings demonstrated that neglect and physical abuse made up the majority of cases; 45% and 34% respectively, followed by sexual abuse (14.2%) and emotional abuse (6.3%). Moreover, 82% of victims were aged less than 12 years (Almuneef et al., 2016). In this

report the findings also revealed the perpetrators who abused children sexually: 26.8% by other caregivers such as domestic workers and drivers, 17.5% by relatives, 13.4% by one of their parents and 1.2% by a stepfather/mother (Almuneef et al., 2016). It can be seen that most perpetrators who are around children are expected to be the source of the safety for them, but together form the largest group of abusers in domestic contexts. However, as it was mentioned in the report, it was difficult to gain this information to create an accurate picture of the prevalence of sexual abuse, and perpetrators.

With regard to the accuracy of these statistics, Almuneef, Qayad, Aleissa and Albuhairan (2014) indicate that religion and the Saudi culture are very conservative; therefore, it is difficult to talk openly about child sexual abuse, as it is a kind of taboo. Therefore, it can be argued that there are many reasons for not reporting sexual abuse in Saudi society. These include embarrassment, feeling guilty, lack of awareness, lack of trust and disbelief, which lead to difficulties in reporting accurate statistics (Lalor and McElvaney, 2010; NSPCC, 2018). For these reasons, most Saudi studies highlight the significant need for more studies to reflect accurate statistical data. They suggest that studies by well-trained specialists should cover all regions in the KSA to deal with this sensitive issue, and that public awareness and the availability of helplines for reporting child sexual abuse are needed (Al Eissa and Almuneef, 2010; Alsehaimi, 2016; Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2017). Alsehaimi (2016) points out the need to place the “needs of children at risk above the sensitivities of a conservative culture in which such matters have traditionally been hidden from view” (p.3).

The findings of my Master’s study clearly indicated that parents in particular were aware and concerned about issues relating to child sexual abuse (Banunnah, 2013). The findings indicated that 89% of the 500 parents in the KSA who participated in the study were concerned about child sexual abuse (Banunnah, 2013). It was hypothesised from there that this is a major reason for parents in the KSA being in favour of sex education. The study also raised concerns about domestic helpers as major perpetrators of child sexual abuse. A potential reason for this has been linked to the poor treatment that domestic workers receive from some families in the KSA (Al-Twaireb, 2010). Moreover, it is reported in the Saudi newspaper that 70% of the perpetrators who abused children were relatives, while 30% were outside of the family, often domestic workers, whose

employment is common in the KSA (Al-Abdullah, 2012). However, it can be argued that there is no clear evidence that proves this, and all existing news may be simply personal opinion. Therefore, it could be a case of ‘scapegoating’ because it is easier to shift blame on foreign domestic workers than expose a relative. Another reason for this might be the case of cultural misunderstanding, for example, behaviours that are acceptable in one culture can be perceived differently in another. The Saudi context is unique in terms of its widespread use of domestic workers, often from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Gahwaji, 2013; Banunnah, 2016). It can be argued that children may not understand the relationships of such employees with the family. The concept of relationships is an essential topic in the sex education curriculum, such as the roles of family, friends, helpers, and others. Recent studies indicate that young children need to know more about relationships and feelings in sex education (UNESCO, 2015; Pound et al., 2016; Sex Education Forum, 2018). This implies that relationship education should be provided for children in the sex education curriculum before sex and gender-related topics (Martinez et al., 2012; Sex Education Forum, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is widely considered that there is a lack of provision and significant information about children’s health and safety, particularly keeping safe from sexual abuse in most countries, though to varying degrees (UNESCO, 2009; WHO and BZgA, 2010; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015). In view of the potential for children to be exposed to such risks, it can be argued that “Beginning safety education with pre-school-aged children is important before children are targeted as victims” (Kenny, 2010, p. 982). For this reason, Ogunjini (2006) highlights the necessity of implementing suitable directives to protect children, as a component of any sex education curriculum. Most recent studies also indicate that the best approach to protect children and teenagers from problems such as sexual abuse is the implementation of a compulsory curriculum that includes sex education topics (Kirby, 2011; DeJong, 2012; Walsh et al., 2015; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). It has been recognised that including comprehensive sex education programmes in the school curriculum would be a proactive and preventative weapon against abuse of this nature (Goldman and Goldman, 1982; Goldman, 2011). Key concepts that could be looked at in this regard would involve teaching children about how to disclose certain information and ask questions when abuse may have occurred, even when they have been asked to keep the events secret. It has been shown that the

majority of cases of sexual abuse are not initially disclosed by the victim (Wyatt et al., 1999; London et al., 2005). Nevertheless, children as young as pre-school age have been shown to be able to identify potentially abusive situations (Sylvester, 1997; Boyle and Lutzker, 2005), to be able to understand to whom and when they should report an abuser, and recognise that they should not keep abusive behaviour a secret, even when they are told by the perpetrator to do so (Wurtele et al., 1992; Wurtele and Owens, 1997).

Children have been shown to be able to grasp complex issues even at a very young age, such as topics about keeping themselves safe from sexual abuse. Wurtele and Owens (1997) showed that children aged three were able to learn about personal safety skills, including being able to recognise potentially abusive situations, take responsibility for their bodies, and know that certain types of touch are not appropriate, as well as understanding how to say no to certain situations. This study showed the importance of including parents in the provision of this type of education, as the formal part of the teaching was very short (Wurtele et al., 1991). These results are consistent with other studies that show that young children have abilities to learn and adopt personal safety concepts and knowledge (Boyle, and Lutzker, 2005; Hébert et al., 2001). Furthermore, the current European standard approach to child self-defence is appropriate also to all children worldwide (Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017b). The statement by the WHO and BZgA (2010) declared that children aged 4–6 should have opportunities to improve their skills in responding to abuse situations, for example “trust [your] instincts and apply the three-step model [No, Go, Tell]”; and develop attitudes of “awareness of risks ... [exercise] choice, it is ok to ask for help” (WHO and BZgA, 2010, p. 41). In addition, in 2012, the American document on teaching sex education in the Future of Sex Education initiative [FOSEi] explained the sexual learning needs of students between the ages of 5–8 years, including understanding “that all people (including children) have the right to tell others not to touch their body”; and that “bullying and teasing are wrong ... and how to respond” (FOSEi, 2012, p.13). Similarly, a review of the literature on child abuse in Saudi society reveals similar assertions of the need to raise awareness by providing education for families by specialists and enhancing children’s curricula to add topics about protection from abuse (Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2015).

A good example of such protective education is the programme Kids Learning about Safety (KLAS), introduced in Miami in the USA (Kenny, 2009). This is a 16-hour psycho-social educational programme focused on teaching parents and their pre-school aged children, together, about personal safety. This is important, as an essential element of teaching safety in this area is reinforcement of concepts by parents (Boyle and Lutzker, 2005; Deblinger et al., 2001; Wurtele et al., 1992). While this programme discusses a broad array of issues, including road safety, responding to a fire, and safety around weapons, it also has a strong emphasis on personal skills relevant to protection against sexual abuse, including how to react to unwanted touch, assertiveness skills, and asking questions. It also gets more specific and discusses the correct names for the genital organs, although this is taught specifically as a tool for avoiding sexual abuse (Kenny and Wurtele, 2008). Accessibility for many different groups is enabled by use of a variety of resources, including photos, lesson cards, songs, books, posters and videos (Kenny, 2009). Parents receive complementary, integrated information, on important resources such as the sex offender registry, grooming tactics, and choosing caregivers (Kenny, 2009). Across all genders, ages and cultural backgrounds, children in this programme showed improvements in knowledge scores (Kenny, 2010). Although the focus of this programme is on personal safety broadly defined, it can be argued that the specific aspects related to sex and sexuality are highly relevant to the sex education curriculum and could potentially usefully be taken on board. Sex education can serve as a fundamental safeguard, through facilitating and supporting children's development of the skills and knowledge they need to avoid dangerous situations and to protect themselves (Buston et al., 2002; Haberland and Rogow, 2015). Meyrick and Swann (1998) recognise that this knowledge can also protect children from a wide range of stressors, such as bullying, stereotyping, or abuse and exploitation, all of which can be damaging to ongoing development. It can be seen that child sexual abuse is less likely to occur in children who have received information through sex education (Halstead and Reiss, 2003; Lalor and McElvaney, 2010; NSPCC, 2018), and there is evidence showing that high-quality education in this area is of significant value to children who may experience abuse (Finkelhor, 2007).

Kenny (2009) has highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive prevention programmes and has noted success when specific contexts are taken into account while

working with Hispanic families in Florida in the USA. The positive steps and programmes in the KSA have been noted in the literature of the field (Al-Mahroos, 2007; Al-Haidar, 2008). Nevertheless, implementing sex education in the curriculum is not a panacea for problems of abuse. Other areas, including legal recourse, have to be looked at. In the KSA, the legislation and government organisations in this area have been criticised by researchers as neither specific nor effective. Nevertheless, similar progress was achieved in 2018, in line with the Saudi Vision 2030 to improve human rights, when Saudi government established the ‘Law Criminalising Harassment’, which contains new regulations and punishments for sex offenders to protect children and adults from sexual abuse in Saudi society (MOE, 2018c). Moreover, the Saudi Ministry of Education requires all schools to raise children’s awareness by creating media tools such as videos, as well as educating teachers and families on how to discuss sexual abuse and self-protection strategies with children (MOE, 2018c). This information could be provided in a positive approach under a more acceptable name, such as ‘personal safety’, so as to provide more benefit for children and Saudi society (Banunnah, 2017a; b).

In the current technological age, most studies worldwide that have demonstrated the impact of the media on sex education implementation are more negative than positive (Pop and Rusu, 2015). Often, children have the freedom to access various websites on the Internet, which may include sexual (views, exploitation), emotional and physical violence (Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015). Smartphones can also be dangerous to children sexually, due to the sharing of personal information, such as location in chats and gaming sites (Collier-Harris, 2015), which is a privacy issue. The research findings of DeHart et al., (2017) explain that Internet-based sexual offences have increased; offenders can target children by using images or on chat apps. Unmonitored and unrestricted access to the Internet could thus put children at risk of sexual abuse (DeHart et al., 2017). It can be argued that similar concerns exist in the KSA. For this reason, conducting scientific studies in different fields for protecting children from sexual abuse is one of the recommendations of the ‘National Forum for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children via the Internet’, organised by Ministry of Interior and National Security of the KSA (Alshebani, 2016). This can be seen as a significant legal step, with the involvement of many specialists from different fields (Banunnah, 2017b). However, it is clear that

there is a need for further studies about this area to address the related issues in Saudi society.

It has been claimed that children generally report increased feelings of safety following prevention programmes (Hazzard et al., 1991; Kenny, 2010). Direct correlations have been shown between sex education and lower occurrences of sexual abuse in later life (Gibson and Leitenberg, 2000; Kenny, 2010; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). However, Vivancos et al. (2013) claim that better research and studies into the effectiveness of sex education are needed in order to provide an evidence base to convince individuals who are reluctant to accept this type of education. This critical attitude is reflected in the literature in different contexts. Bolen (2003), for example, criticises the approach of education around sexual abuse by forming an argument that it shifts the burden of protection onto children, whereas it should be society that is charged with their protection.

The above section on the importance of sex education for children has outlined in detail the importance of sex education as it pertains to sexual development, shaping the values of children, and supporting sexual abuse prevention programmes. The common criticisms of sex education have also been looked at and addressed. The next main section discusses the literature around appropriate sex education topics for young children. This relates to the second research question for this study.

3.5 Appropriate sex education topics for children

In this main section, I present studies that have examined appropriate sex education topics for children aged three to six and possible ways to design a curriculum of this nature.

3.5.1 Sex education topics for children

All the above theoretical underpinning, as well as looking at the important influences on sex education, will be of little utility if the actual topics being covered are not identified

and debated. These issues have been raised in other sections, but this section will look specifically at identifying culturally and age-appropriate sex education topics.

Sexuality is inherent in a person from conception to death, as are the interrelated factors like relationships and interpersonal interactions in society. Arguably, whilst existing curricula address physical development and health awareness, there is an absence of topics on children's sexual development (Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013), due to the lack of studies and resources regarding sex education for young children (Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002; Sciaraffa and Randolph, 2011). Pound et al. (2017) argue, however, that in order to make sex education effective, it should be set formally in the timetable of the curriculum and supported by appropriate activities, materials and events. However, often, sex education is timetabled as part of biology lessons, thereby making it health-focused instead of focusing on personal relationships (Sex Education Forum, 2016b). Therefore, the study of Collier-Harris (2015) has suggested that puberty education in primary and secondary schools should include various topics such as values, identity and gender, child protection, pubertal changes, health reproduction, sexual development and relationships. For example, in England, state primary schools teach the basics of sex education in the National Science Curriculum, including anatomy, puberty, reproduction, and infections and viruses; however, some topics are provided through non-statutory education including Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) (Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum, 2014). One drawback, however, is that some families tend to withdraw their children from sex education because it is optional (Tabatabaie, 2015; Alldred et al., 2016). It can be argued that withdrawing children from sex education topics can affect their knowledge, skills and attitudes towards sexual information and issues in society. There is also a risk that they may seek information from untrustworthy sources, such as the Internet or their friends.

With regard to Islamic teaching, Al-Qadi (2006) notes that children need to learn about relationships, family life and sex education. Islam teaches that sex topics need to be taught to children in an age-appropriate way within the context of Islam (Bucaille, 2003; Tabatabaie, 2015). Ashraah, Gamaian and Al-Shudaifat (2013) suggest that sex education should begin between three and six years of age, when children can be introduced to certain age-appropriate aspects, getting gradually more intricate and explicit, but still kept within the teachings of Islam. These views do not, however, aid in determining what to

teach, or at what age or stage of development a topic should be addressed or introduced. Moreover, there is no sex education curriculum for children in Islamic schools in the KSA.

Due the lack of sex education for children in the Saudi education, some examples from various contexts can provide some insight about this matter. For example, the UK Sex Education Forum suggests appropriate topics for a sex education curriculum for children from three to six years old as follows:

- 1- Theme: Relationships; Family, Friends and Other people.
- 2- Theme: My body; Girls' and boys' differences and their body name.
- 3- Theme: Life cycles; Delivering baby and Growth and changes.
- 4- Theme: Keeping safe and looking after myself; Private parts and Touch rules.
- 5- Theme: People who help me; Help or worry about something (Sex Education Forum, 2018).

'Laying the Foundation', a practical guide to sex and relationships education for young children, explained how to use the lesson plans to provide sex education topics under the above themes: "my body, life cycles, relationships, feelings and attitudes, keeping safe and looking after myself, and people who can help me" (Martinez et al., 2012, p.50). Within each theme "the key concepts are further delineated into two to five topics, each with key ideas and knowledge, attitudinal, and skill-based learning objectives per age group" (UNESCO, 2018, p.35).

For example, in Key Stage 1 (between five and seven years) the basic themes include:

1. Theme: My body; Male and female and Growing and changing.
2. Theme: Life cycles; childbirth and Caring for babies and children.
3. Theme: Relationships; Similarities and differences, Gender stereotypes, Caring, Friends and Families of all kinds.
4. Theme: Feelings and attitudes; Feelings and Managing our feelings.
5. Theme: Keeping safe and looking after myself; Keeping safe, setting personal boundaries, and keeping yourself clean and healthy.

6. Theme: People who can help me; someone to talk to (Martinez et al., 2012, pp.52-53).

Similarly, in 2009, UNESCO asserted that the objectives of learning should contain four elements: knowledge, rules of values and social attitudes, individual skills and relationships, and responsibility for one's behaviour. Comprehensive sex education therefore was said to focus on six core notions:

1. Relationships, 2. Values, attitudes and skills, 3. Culture, society and human rights, 4. Human development, 5. Sexual behaviour, 6. Sexual and reproductive health. Each topic is linked to specific learning objectives, grouped according to the four age levels (UNESCO, 2009; p.72).

Along similar lines, in Australia, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) designed a sex education curriculum for young children with six topics: "Knowing me and Knowing you, Growing and Changing, My Body, Belonging, Someone to Talk to? Where did I come from?" (DEECD, 2011, p.35). In the USA, the non-governmental organisation, 'Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States' [SIECUS] is one of the significant providers of comprehensive sex education programmes for children aged 5 to 18 years. The programmes include six main concepts containing many related topics such as human development, personal skills, relationships, sexual health, sexual behaviour, and society and culture (SIECUS, 2004). Arguably, sex education topics for children focus more on the relationship and emotional aspects, as a UNESCO study (2018, p. 83) stressed that "social-emotional learning is an essential part of learning and contributes to students' well-being and cognitive results".

It has been suggested that topics appropriate to Islam should be taught to children at a young age include gaze, purity and cleanliness (Al-Qadi, 2006). Islam and Rahman (2008) suggest a variety of topics to be included in the curriculum regarding sex education for boys and girls:

- a) Sexual growth and development including the physical changes during puberty and their timing, as well as the need for family life;
- b) The physiology of the reproductive system. Girls should be told about the womb

and ovaries, menstruation, and premenstrual syndrome. Boys should be told about the male reproductive system and the sex drive;

- c) Conception and development of the foetus, including birth;
- d) Sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS, with an emphasis on the Islamic perspective;
- e) The psychological, emotional and social aspects of puberty, including social, moral and religious ethics, and how to withstand peer pressure to engage in undesirable behaviour (Islam and Rahman, 2008).

These points need to be acknowledged throughout education and adapted to the development of children and adults (Goldman, 2011; Guse et al., 2012). A five-year-old asking “How did I get in my mom’s tummy?” would not require a full explanation of the process of reproduction. Similarly, Islam and Rahman (2008) suggest that it is not necessary for a 14-year-old to be told how to put on a condom. Connections with nature should also be acknowledged children can be shown the clear links between flowers and pollination and human reproduction, for example, which could also form a potential stepping stone towards teaching about human reproduction (Al-Qadi, 2006).

These themes recur in the Quran and are always linked to other teachings, as shown in the following example from the Holy Quran:

We created the human from an essence of clay: then We made him, a drop, in a secure receptacle (the womb). Then We created of the drop, a clot (of congealed blood) and We created the clot into bite size tissue, then We created the bite size tissue into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it another creation. Blessed is Allah, the Best of creators (Quran, 23, p. 12; 14).

Children can be taught some scientific information from an Islamic perspective. However, it can be argued that sex education in an Islamic context focuses more on sexual information to prepare young people for marital life, as the sexual act is prohibited before marriage, so learning about it may be considered inappropriate for young children. However, there is a lack of studies regarding sex education for young children, not only in the KSA, but also in the wider Islamic context.

A complete and comprehensive programme of sex education in schools should encompass knowledge about biology and reproduction, rational, moral and ethical values, communication skills, decision-making, managing relationships, understanding of social and cultural issues and norms, and the formation of a positive self-concept and self-esteem (UNESCO, 2009; 2018), while also taking place in the context of children being participatory members of a democratic society, as well as responsible citizens. A cross-curricular, multi-subject approach taught systematically and at all ages appears to be best suited for this (Centrewall, 2000; SIECCAN, 2005; SIECUS, 2004; Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum, 2014).

The global trend identified above, towards a greater focus on broader sexual issues like relationships and the psychosocial aspects of sex, has been shown to be welcomed by young people, who are in fact highly critical of the current focus on the biological and physical aspects of sex education (Macdowall et al., 2006; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). It has been claimed that, students desire educational discourse about relationships, values, and emotions, instead of warnings and awareness (Formby, 2011; Halstead and Reiss, 2003; Sex Education Forum, 2016b). However, a UNESCO (2009, p.19) study clarifies, “Effective curricula are focused curricula” that emphasise three key fundamentals: “content, approach and activities”. Based on this, teachers are encouraged to design sex education curricula that look at broad issues and themes, the approach to implement them, and appropriate activities. Moreover, authors advise integrating sex-related topics into all areas of the curriculum, including seemingly unrelated subjects like English and Information and Communication Technology (Goldman, 2010; Brady and Kennedy, 2003).

The next sub-section explains some of the main debates about the context of the sex education curriculum and the appropriate approach to design a sex education curriculum for young children.

3.5.2 Sex education and the curriculum

In the often contested and debated area of the early years curriculum, including sex education provision, the points made above in relation to the different philosophical

influences on education more broadly are highly pronounced. As Pop and Rusu (2015) acknowledge, “the debate concerning sexuality education continues to this day in terms of: what, how, when, to what and who better to provide it” (p. 396). School curricula need to cater for a wide variety of abilities in the children they educate based upon individual experience and needs. However, the focus for all children has traditionally been on standardised academic topics, including English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, with ‘well-being’ topics often ignored worldwide (Goldman, 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Sex Education Forum, 2016a). As was noted above (UNESCO, 2009; SIECUS, 2004) the importance of reproductive health and topics relating to sex and sexuality is now globally recognised. National policies throughout the globe are hence also taking account of these. Despite the benefits already discussed, however, most schools give sex education comparatively little emphasis relative to other subjects (Goldman, 2011). This is probably influenced by the political, cultural and societal powers that are at work when any new curriculum is drawn up (Lovat and Smith, 2003; Walker, 2003; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a).

There are many types of sex education curricula that present a range of relevant topics. In general, three types of sex education have been applied in schools: Abstinence-only, Abstinence-plus, and Comprehensive Sex Education (Kirby, 2002; Kirby et al., 2007). A comprehensive sex education provides inclusive and broad information on abstinence and sexual life development. It includes topics about beliefs, knowledge, values and skills that can enhance the quality of health and sexual life (Pop and Rusu, 2015). The contents of these programmes are extremely significant in terms of meeting the individual’s life needs (Haberland and Rogow, 2015). Comprehensive programmes combine abstinence and life skills with knowledge and values, which can start from early childhood. This type of sex education programme could be appropriate for young children in Saudi society. Children need information regarding sexual development, such as their own and others’ self-image, relationships, hygiene, and keeping safe, which will promote their knowledge, skills and values for a healthy life. Nevertheless, there are various factors that are significant for children, parents, teachers, curriculum specialists, and policy makers, which should be taken into account during the design of the sex education curriculum (Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017b). Collier-Harris and Goldman (2017a) in their study of Australian sex education found that significant factors that can play a major role in the

design of sex education programmes and affect their provision, include, for example, global framework documents, school factors (students' and teachers' needs), socio-biological factors, demographics, and technological factors.

Topics related to sex education are taught worldwide under different names that focus on cultures, ideologies and morals more than the sciences of sexuality and gender, for instance Human Development, Marriage and Motherhood, Baby Nursing, Moral Education, Family Life Education, Life Skills, Social Hygiene, Adolescence Education (Zimmerman, 2015). Currently, however, the name given to sex education differs according to its legal frameworks. It is named differently throughout the UK. In England and Wales it was named until 2017 'sex and relationship education' (SRE), in Scotland 'sex education' (SE) and in Northern Ireland 'relationships and sexuality education' (RSE) (Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum, 2014). In 2017, however, the name in England changed to 'relationship and sex education' (RSE) (DfE, 2017). Section 34 of the *Children and Social Work Act 2017* made sex education a statutory requirement of all primary schools in England from 2019, through 'Relationships Education' in PSHE (DfE, 2017), which a compulsory part of the foundation and primary school curricula in England (DfE, 2017). In the USA it is named 'sex education' (Ingham, 2016; Sex Education Forum, 2016b). In Australia it forms part of a comprehensive 'puberty education' programme, which is a special programme that is provided to students, parents and teachers containing topics about the transition, behaviours and issues of this phase (Fortenberry, 2013; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2016). In the KSA, the findings of my Master's revealed that most participants preferred the term 'Family Life Education', to respect the Saudi culture (Banunnah, 2013). In that study, 91% of parents who participated thought sex education in pre-school should be implemented with respect for Saudi culture (Banunnah, 2013). It can be argued that when sex education is reframed under other names, controversial discussion in the society can be avoided. However, in Islamic studies provided this topic with the term 'sex education'. The term 'sex education' is thus more comprehensive and accurate than other terms (Sex Education Forum, 2016b).

Sex education topics could be provided as a stand-alone subject or by integrating them with the current subjects of the curriculum (UNESCO, 2018). However, this is a debated

issue. Some assert that sex education should actually be a completely separate curriculum, whereas others believe that it is interrelated to most, if not all other aspects of childhood education. Topics such as health, physiology, awareness, protection can be, and often are, incorporated into Biology, Science and Health, for example. Similarly, topics relating to morals could be incorporated into Religious Studies in many curricula, and issues of customs, traditions and relationships could be implemented as part of Social Studies (Al-Qadi, 2006; Elwan, 2002). A cross-curricular approach to teaching sex education has “less emphasis on the discrete boundaries and more emphasis on integrated forms of knowledge”, thereby creating a more relevant and meaningful curriculum that is more child-centred and accessible (Goldman, 2011, p.78). However, UNESCO (2018) points out that the advantage of a stand-alone subject is that it is cost-effective because only one well-trained teacher is required to provide the materials and activities in school.

Arguably, some sex education topics are already integrated within a cross-curricular approach in Saudi secondary schools, where no specific curriculum on sex education exists. The subject matter is not explicitly highlighted as sex education, however (Banunnah, 2013). Al-Qadi (2006) notes that schools already have a lot of information and knowledge to impart within the existing curriculum, so the addition of a new curriculum based on sex education would only make these issues worse. This is why some considered a cross-subject approach preferable, as it allows teachers to introduce aspects of sex education without the potential embarrassment of raising it as an individual topic. UNESCO (2009) guidance promotes sex education preferably as a distinct and ongoing school subject, so that it is not sidelined by other priorities. That same guidance does recognise the practical fact that teaching across existing subjects is easier to implement and more likely to be adopted in the short term, however. This cross-curricula approach is therefore in line with international guidelines (Goldman, 2010).

Although most school curricula can be shown to have a theoretical basis, many do not appear to have one, or at least not one that is articulated (Blake, 2002; 2013; SIECUS, 2004; Measor, 2004; Goldman, 2005; Milton, 2003). This lack of a theoretical basis inevitably extends to the remit of sex education. There are numerous theoretical frameworks that could be drawn on for the provision of sex education. For example, according to Colpin (2006) sex education could draw on the Information, Motivational

and Behavioural (IMB) skills model, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the health belief model, the protection model, and the ecological model. Other important frameworks that could be drawn on when developing a sex education curriculum include sociological and evolutionary frameworks on sexuality and gender (Renold, 2005; Galambos et al., 2008; Barrett et al., 2002). Despite the lack of a theoretical framework, it can be argued that developing an appropriate and practical curriculum is essential in this process. Goldman and Goldman (1982) note three important criteria to assess material in this area:

- Accuracy – the quality of the information, lack of errors or omissions.
- Clarity – the accessibility of the information for the target age group.
- Appropriateness – ensuring that the information is accurate and explicit, rather than crude or coarse, and takes into account the age of the children being taught.

Despite international standards and ways of approaching sex education, the content of sex education varies greatly amongst different countries (Parker et al., 2009). These approaches can vary from traditional, formal classroom teaching to peer education, as well as using a variety of tools and materials. Although a didactic approach is still most common, it is widely acknowledged that children have a preference for a more interactive approach in all academic subjects (Milburn 1995; Ogden and Harden 1999; Irvine, 2002; Macdowall et al., 2006). Beliefs about the way the subject should be introduced have a significant effect on this. The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in the UK demonstrated that in European countries it is rare that sex education is taught across different subjects, which affects the content and management of the curricula in these countries (IPPF, 2006). As my Master's findings demonstrated, some Saudi teachers have high pressures regarding time management and the current heavy curriculum (Banunnah, 2013), which could influence the approach to sex education. Despite the advantages of having a separate unit for sex education topics, if there is insufficient time for providing it, this will be reflected in the effectiveness of its impact on children (UNESCO, 2018). In Britain and the USA, for example, sex education forms part of an already crowded curriculum in which there is not much room for in depth analysis and engagement with the topics and issues (Weis, 2000; Blake, 2002). Most children in primary schools in the UK are not given information about puberty and reproduction, although these topics are included in the Science curriculum (Sex Education Forum, 2016b). This inevitably leads

to insufficient information being imparted to children in these important compulsory school years (Brossmann, 2008; Goldman, 2011; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017b).

Australia provides an interesting example of the implementation of sex education, as it is in the process of a modern overhaul of its entire curriculum (ACARA, 2013). In 2008, the Australian Senate Committee recommended sex education as a compulsory curriculum across the country (Goldman, 2013). Recently, in Collier-Harris and Goldman's (2017) research, authors conclude that comprehensive and continuous sex education should be implemented for all students to strengthen their well-being, health, education and future life (Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017b). They also indicated that a specific focus on sexual issues was preferable to instead of using general phrases like health, well-being, choice, values, 'fair play' and 'safety' (Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017b). The authors concluded "Students everywhere in the world, and in this case, Australia, need and deserve continuous, comprehensive and compulsory puberty education, for satisfying and flourishing lives" (Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017b, p.69), also, there is need for educators to have knowledge about this important stage.

Many studies have mentioned that an effective sexual programme should be culturally appropriate, as well as should be family-centred and community-based (Prinz and Sanders, 2007; Tabatabaie, 2015; Pop and Rusu, 2015). This view is similar to the usual government provision of sex education that is usually intrinsically a reflection of the wider country's approach to the topics of sex and sexuality. Liberal perspectives are inherent in sexual education curricula in the Western world, and reflect the various circumstances regarding politics, legal matters and the economy of the country in which they are being implemented (Halstead and Reiss, 2003). In contrast, predominantly Arab or Islamic countries like the KSA have a distinctive prospective, which poses specific challenges to governments attempting to implement sex education programmes. These have to be balanced with distinctive social, economic and political development issues (Wiseman et al., 2008; Banunnah, 2013; Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2015). The research focus in these countries also tends to be different, aimed at the status of women (Abu Nasr et al, 1985; El-Sanabary, 1989; Peterson, 1989) or Islamic principles in education (Talbani, 1996). While these studies show education in these countries as being characterised by a refusal to go against traditional religious and cultural values, they also

show a unique method of adopting global trends around education in the light of these apparent barriers (Wiseman et al., 2008). As has been discussed previously, many studies have demonstrated the existence of a range of angles from which to approach sex education. Consequently, curriculum design and implementation should be based on these various dimensions (e.g., socio-culture, socio-economy, psychology, education, biology) to achieve the most beneficial outcomes (Pop and Rusu, 2015).

In Western contexts such as the USA, sex education frequently revolves around controlling sexual behaviour and desires amongst young people. Van Loon (2003), for example, argues that sex education in the USA should promote abstinence. David (2003), on the other hand, argues for a neoliberal approach that addresses health and education risks in relation to sexual behaviour. Western theories sometimes encourage liberation from chastity, bashfulness and purity, which contradict many of the values underlying the Islamic rules that govern sexual behaviour (Adan, 1995; Ashraah et al., 2013). Halstead and Reiss (2003, p.87) argue that in sex education there is a “lack of consideration of the religious views of students in the classroom and in the broader society”. According to Tabatabaie, (2015), Islamic sex education for children does not differ considerably from the secular concept regarding the provision of sex education in a gradual approach for children; however, the two approaches are contrasting in terms of their inherent values and methods of application (who, what, when and how), specifically, their views on the provision for the adolescent phase. As discussed in Section 3.4.3, there are differences in the content of sex education topics that result from Islamic teachings and values. It is clear that sex education in an Islamic context needs to be considered in a completely new light, which makes it difficult to borrow directly or solely from Western models. One of the great challenges to providing sex education for Muslims is the lack of research related to Islamic sex education for Islamic societies (Ashraah et. al, 2013; Tabatabaie, 2015). It is possible to implement Islamic rules in a coherent and holistic way and to create an accurate and informed sex education curriculum that is appropriate in the Islamic context. Al-Ghazali (1975), for example, contends that sex education in the Islamic context should be more theoretical than practical, due to certain rules such as not being allowed to see another person’s thigh or body. However, adults can explain sexual matters by drawing on the board. Integrated in this way, the Quran can act as a platform for teaching about sex and sexuality from a safe position. UNESCO (2018, p.96) emphasises that

“Changing some language, or images or cultural references to make the content more relevant does not impact on effectiveness”. It can be seen that there is a wide variation in the content and provision of sex education throughout the world and in different educational contexts. In the USA, for example, where sex education is compulsory, there is widespread difference in how sex education is taught, as well as where the emphasis lies (Darroch et al., 2000).

However, some of the concerns raised worldwide by educators were based on the specific vocabulary that is used or needs to be used when teaching sex education to children. Goldman (1990) recognised that a variety of language can be used across a given populace in relation to sex and the associated verbs and nouns. These include clinical language (often used by the medical profession and to name specific parts of the human body), common language (including slang usage of metaphors, colloquialisms, puns and swear words), familial sexual language (the language used amongst a family, often terms of affection surrounding acts like bathing and toilet training) and erotic language (that of lovers, including sexual words of endearment and excitement (Goldman and Goldman, 1982). Professionals often use a mixture of these languages. Children in the early years may copy the language that they hear; they will often be most familiar with common or slang terms. This should be taken into account by educators in this area in order to communicate with children at a relational depth (Goldman, 2008). Many educators have believed that many of the materials typically used in sexual education are visually pornographic and involve “gutter language” (Goldman, 2008, p. 49). This view tends to stem from those who find aspects of sex or sexuality, particularly sex organs, shameful or offensive. Objections of this nature tend to also include opposition to all terms of a sexual nature, whether clinical or common (Goldman, 2008). Children can only think and speak in the words that they have at their disposal, however. Children, who are taught to repress or have a dishonest representation of biological facts, can grow to be ignorant and inarticulate adolescents (Goldman and Goldman, 1982; Goldman and Bradley, 2004). It needs to be recognised that the materials in sex education are not there to corrupt or promote depravity, but to educate and enlighten. This links back to the dominant culture, which influences how sex education can practically be implemented in a given situation (Levine, 2002; Sex Education Forum, 2016b).

It can be seen from the above discussions that there is a clear lack of studies regarding the sex education topics, particularly in worldwide Islamic studies. The next main section presents studies about the provision of sex education, which relate to the third research question of this study. The next section also looks at the impact of parents, teachers, and the role of wider culture and society in the implementation and provision of sex education in the pre-school curriculum.

3.6 Provision of sex education

Even if it is accepted that children of a young age should be provided with sex education, UNESCO (2018) advises that effective comprehensive sex education needs to be delivered by well-trained teachers and involved parents (UNESCO, 2018). However, there is still likely to be significant disagreement about where responsibility for imparting this knowledge lies, as well as the appropriate context. These questions need to be addressed before any curriculum or programme involving sex education can be rolled out in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this section explores the roles of the three main players in this debate: teachers, parents, and the role that the wider culture plays in sex education provision.

3.6.1 Role of teachers and their beliefs

In conjunction with the family environment, schools, as centres for education and learning, potentially play a key role in educating children about sex and sexuality. The impact of this education is of paramount importance, as the messages about sex imparted in schools have been found to impact children's identity, morality and spirituality throughout their lives (BMA Foundation, 1997; DfEE, 2000). Implementing appropriate measures at a young age helps to ensure that children have a healthy respect for sexuality and the different genders, as well as wider society. Moreover, Silva et al. (2013) recommend that individual schools carry out studies and surveys of local sex-related issues and problems. The increasing importance of sex education can lead teachers to believe it is their responsibility to promote children's rights and needs to ask questions and to have accurate and correct answers (Goldman, 2008). On the basis of this rationale, it has been suggested that teachers should then develop their own pedagogical approach to integrating sex education into the current curriculum. Teachers are most familiar with

the current curriculum and method of teaching, thus they should be encouraged to be part of the development of change, thereby also promoting the democratisation of schools (Silva et al., 2013).

Samia et al. (2012) conducted a study with 797 Israeli-Arab parents (371 Christians and 462 Muslims), to investigate parents' attitude towards providing sex education for their children in school. The majority of parents in the study felt that sex education should be mandatory in schools. Moreover, this study demonstrates that there was difference on the type of sex education topics that should be taught, as Christian parents were more open than the conservative Muslim parents (Samia et al., 2012). According to Islamic teaching, sex education should be given only by parents or by teachers practising Islam (Al-Ahdab, 2007; Tabatabaie, 2015). However, sex education in schools remains a complex issue in most countries. For example, in the UK, it has been argued that sex education is not afforded adequate significance in the curriculum (Alldred et al., 2003; Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum, 2014). Walker and Milton (2006) have linked this to the varying (dis) comfort levels that teachers tend to have with teaching sex education. Some teachers have a lack of experience in teaching sex education topics and thus do not have the ability to deliver these topics effectively (Ofsted, 2013). This can lead to many teachers either not understanding or not accepting the important role of the subject, in particular when working with younger children (Milton, 2003). Due to other pressures and lack of time, teachers may thus ignore these topics because of the government's focus on the academic subjects and testing.

Based on the reservations held by some teachers, however, as well as the admitted lack of information and confidence around the subject matter, there is a concern regarding teachers' abilities. Although families and children trust teachers' abilities to provide the correct appropriate information for the students (WHO and BZgA, 2010), there is a view amongst some educators that teachers should not provide sex education to children, as they are not competent, both in terms of morals and values (Goldman, 2008; Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013). Similarly, Silva et al. (2013) recognised in a survey of teachers' attitudes in the UK towards sex education that 12.2% had raised concerns about the moral and ethical implications. In that same survey, however, 67% of teachers had agreed that

they would discuss sex if students had an interest in it, but only 21.8% actually put this into practice, while 10.8% admitted avoiding the topic altogether.

Australian studies in this area have shown a lack of teachers' knowledge and experience, leading to a lack of confidence and understanding, that begins from the student-teacher stage (Goldman, 2007). Making sex education compulsory should not be viewed as a panacea and any compulsory provision needs to be introduced in conjunction with sufficient training and information for educators to prevent subjective and personal opinions from shaping the discourse (Robinson, 2013). The provision of sex education is also very much reliant on adequate resourcing, with many programmes being under-resourced in this area (Kirby, 1999; 2007). In the KSA, due to pre-school having been newly established, the low level of most teachers' qualifications and teaching skills can affect the quality of pre-school education (Gahwaji, 2006). However, although steps have been made to create training centres and introduce Saudi Early Childhood Education (ECE) standards (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2001), there is still a high demand for more professionally developed and qualified early years practitioners. This is an issue that may have to be addressed alongside the issue of resources (Al-Dawood, 1997; Gahwaji, 2013).

Counterman and Kirkwood's (2013) study emphasised the significance of training and education to encourage educators' abilities to discuss sexual health development topics in a professional setting (Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013). For example, sex education can be introduced in a gradual way, in conjunction with other lessons, so as to reduce the discomfort and make the process seem more natural to all involved. A step-by-step process in introducing the topic could not only help in developing minds to understand the complex concepts involved, but also allow teachers to engage in the process in a way that is more appealing to them (Duquet, 2003; Al-Qadi, 2006). A way of ensuring that teachers have an enthusiasm and genuine interest in teaching sex education would be to allow teachers to volunteer to provide the curriculum on sex and sexuality. Many countries have a long tradition of successfully taking this approach (Milton, 2003). In Sweden, for example, only teachers that volunteer and are approved by the principal are accepted to be teachers of sex education. This has been shown to reduce the likelihood of prejudice and bias from teachers in the role (Centrewall 2000; Goldman and Goldman

1982). Teachers should not, therefore, be viewed as unconscious tools in the education system; their own attitudes and reservations need to be researched, understood and addressed in implementing any sex education curriculum (UNESCO, 2018).

For instance, teachers should have a good awareness of child protection issues, including an understanding of legal issues, like mandatory reporting and the role of different professionals, as issues could arise in the context of the information being taught (Goldman, 2007). This point is a significant as teachers have been shown to lack preparedness for dealing with issues of sexual abuse when they arise. Such inadequacy has been reported in various countries, including the UK (Baginsky, 2000; 2003; Baginsky and Macpherson, 2005; McCallum and Baginsky, 2001), the USA (Bonardi, 2000; Kenny, 2001; 2004; Hinson and Fossey, 2000) and in several countries in Asia (Briggs and Potter, 2004; Potter et al., 2002). This point has also been noted in the KSA specifically (Banunnah, 2016). Teachers thus need to be well-trained to deal with such cases based on the laws and policies to support those children who need additional assistance (UNESCO, 2018). Furthermore, teachers need to incorporate broad methods of learning, taking into account cognitive and affective learning as well as developmental, behavioural, and communication skills (Hodzic 2003; Krause et al., 2006; SIECCAN, 2005). The existing studies have demonstrated that teachers in the KSA are willing to take on this challenge and would be willing to teach sex education in the classroom (Banunnah, 2013; 2016). The issue remains controversial, however, and cultural influences in the Saudi society will undoubtedly shape the introduction of any curriculum, compulsory or otherwise. The next sub-section demonstrates the role of parents in the provision of sex education.

3.6.2 Role of parents and their beliefs

The important role that parents play in the sexual development of their children goes beyond sex specific issues and education. Parents have a significant role in teaching children about appropriate and inappropriate behaviours. It has been shown that parents have a key role to play in explaining to children that certain matters are private, such as sex education topics (El-Shaieb and Wurtele, 2009; Goldman, 2008; 2011; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2013; 2015). It has been shown that more general characteristics of the

parent-child relationship, including good communication, support, and future expectations, are a more effective approach for children than direct conversations about sex and sexual issues (Haffner, 2008; Markham et al., 2010; Parkes et al., 2011). Sneed (2008) stresses that the content and the messages imparted are of particular importance, as well as the quality of the overall relationship between the child and parent. In the Saudi context, one of the responsibilities of parents is shaping how sex is viewed and understood by their children within the remits of Islamic law. The Islamic perspective is that teaching this topic was the role of parents, rather than schools, as the Islamic view of sexuality is a core part of Muslim identity (Tabatabaie, 2015). Therefore, they are expected to educate their children in every aspect of their lives, including sexual life (Islam and Rahman, 2008; Ashraah et al., 2013; Tabatabaie, 2015), such as menstruation and wet dreams (Abod and Abdulaal, 1990; Mensah et al., 2013). This view is supported by research, as studies have shown that supportive parent-child relationships and parental monitoring and supervision are significant indicators in reducing early sexual problems in children (Miller et al., 2001; Alldred et al., 2016). This point underlies the following discussion on the role that parents play in sex education.

Despite evidence of the importance of parents, many parents lack the confidence to address issues about sex with their children (Berne et al., 2000; Haffner, 2008; Pop and Rusu, 2015). Parents therefore need support, for example, access to accurate and age-appropriate information on sex and sexuality. This would help them become more confident in protecting their children (WHO, 2007; Wooden and Anderson, 2012). Even in countries where at home there is a significant level of conversation about sex education, there is still a lack of active engagement with the topic. In Canada, for example, where 66% of children say that the sexual health education they receive from their parents is good, 80% still said that they did not encourage asking questions (Byers et al., 2003). It can be argued that parents usually apply their experiences and beliefs in dealing with their children, however. Parents may prevent children from paying attention to their bodies by ignoring their questions about sex and gender or changing the conversation (Banunnah, 2013). This may be because they interpret children's sexual development (such as sexual questions and behaviours) based on their ideas about adult sexual activity (Blaise, 2009; Sciaraffa and Randolph, 2011).

The difficulty in communicating on these matters is also the case in the Saudi society, as my Master's study (Banunnah, 2013) showed that the majority of the Saudi parents interviewed admitted that they did not feel they had sufficient information to discuss sex education topics with their children. The lack of sex education information was recognised as a significant barrier that affects the way parents educate their children. The specialists interviewed as part of that research all noted that parents need to be educated if any subsequent education of children is to be successful. Some parents have a lack of confidence in providing sex education for their children due to a lack of support in Saudi society (Banunnah, 2016; 2017a). Parents needed to be assured that teaching sex education does not in itself offend principles such as modesty, which is of significance in Islam, and that they should not feel embarrassed to provide important and appropriate information to their children (Halstead, 1997; Tabatabaie, 2015).

Another factor could be parents' perspective on children's abilities. In 2015, Tabatabaie's study demonstrated a cross-section of Muslim views in the UK through several organisations (such as the Sex Education Forum, Family Planning Association, Brook, etc.) on the one hand, and British Muslim organisations (SREIslamic, Islamic Academy, etc.), Muslim activists and parents on the other. He found that most Muslim families were opposed to sex education because they believed their children did not have adequate ability to make decisions about their sex lives, as per the concept of the 'weak child', who cannot cope with sensitive information at this age (Tabatabaie, 2015). Furthermore, culture plays an important role in presenting sex education, for example, parents in conservative societies such as the KSA cannot talk about sex and gender with their children due to the 'shame culture' and they deny their children an opportunity to discuss such topics (Banunnah, 2013). Hence, parents may ignore or silence the topics of sexual nature, which are considered a 'stigma'. Arguably, the factors of the lack of information and confidence underestimate children's abilities and the power of the 'shame culture' in the Saudi society, which can result in many problems in children and society, such as sexual abuse. Such a view is consistent with the international study by UNESCO (2018), which indicates, "silencing or omitting these topics can contribute to stigma, shame and ignorance, [and] may increase risk-taking and create help-seeking barriers for vulnerable or marginalised populations" (UNESCO, 2018, p.18).

For this reason, some studies mention that teachers do not feel that there is sufficient parental support for them to introduce even simple and relevant issues of sex education at home, not to mention the more explicit areas of body image, sexual values, and gender issues (WHO, 2007; Galambos et al., 2008; Goldman, 2010). On the other hand, my Master's study (Banunnah, 2013) found that a majority of parents in the study felt that teachers should take on the role of sex educators; however, at the same time teachers admitted they felt it should be the role of parents. Some parents even admitted advising their children to ask their teachers when they posed a question they found embarrassing. This may be the reason for parental reliance on an external authority in this area to this day. This confusion could lead to children not receiving any guidance at all. The influences of parents and teachers, therefore, clearly overlap. In Martinez and Cooper's study (2006), however, children showed a preference for receiving sex education from their parents rather than in a school setting. Therefore, both need to be given due consideration through their cooperation in teaching children about such sensitive topics in the conservative Saudi society and not looked at in isolation (Banunnah, 2013). Cooperation and mutual support between schools and families encourage the promotion of wellbeing and safety for children's future life (UNESCO, 2018).

For this reason, parents need to be well trained about sex education to gain information and skills to engage with this topic and communicate with their children confidently, especially with children's questions and inquiries. For example, 98% of the parents who participated in my Master's study claimed to need to attend training courses regarding sex education to deal with their children appropriately (Banunnah, 2013). Furthermore, 95% of them wanted a booklet that addressed common questions and provided information on age-appropriate sex education topics that could be raised with children (Banunnah, 2013). It can be argued that when evaluating the success of a programme aimed at improving the influence that parents have on their children's sexual behaviours, Wight and Fullerton (2013) argue that it is important to consider parents in the design of such programmes. In this way, the entire spectrum of parent-child communication can be accounted for. This means that intervention programmes that are designed to modify general parental processes could be as effective as sex-specific aspects of parenting in improving sexual development and knowledge (Chrisman and Couchenour, 2002; Pop and Rusu, 2015). In the effort to ensure the provision of effective sex education, families

should be encouraged to assist their children (Colarossi et al., 2014). In the USA, media campaigns have tried to encourage 'dual education' by stressing the importance of the child-parent relationship in communication about sex and sexuality. These programmes have utilised TV broadcasts, adverts, billboards, booklets, leaflets and postcards (Kirby and Miller, 2002).

It can be seen that parenting programmes can enhance the acceptance of sex education by educating parents about it and giving them capabilities and training to improve communication and support for their children (Pop and Rusu, 2015). This is dependent on social learning, however (Haberland and Rogow, 2015). In the UK, for example, a study by Alldred and colleagues (2016) investigated parents' attitudes towards sex-related books to develop sex education and Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) in primary school classes in the London Borough of Hillingdon's Healthy Schools programme. One of the main findings of this study was that parents indicated that they valued the advantages of understanding the sex education curriculum from children's books at school. Moreover, parents' confidence increased due to their trust in the content of the sex education programme, which covered all possible issues in sexual development (Alldred et al., 2016). Engaging parents with sex education materials in school improves the relationships between children, teachers and parents, which all contribute to effective sex education (Alldred et al., 2016). As Kenny (2010) pointed out, even over a relatively short time, appropriate sex education that takes into account the important parent-child relationship can vastly improve knowledge in this area. However, one of the challenges that schools may face is how they can ensure that parents can participate equally and that all of them engage (Alldred et al., 2016), though this challenge is less significant compared to the benefits of implementing an effective curriculum (Wooden and Anderson, 2012). Nonetheless, most programmes focus only on children and do not account for the significant influence of parents. Therefore, Pop and Rusu (2015) suggest that sex education training for parents should be an essential part of adults' learning and lifelong education.

A good example of this can be found in education about child protection from sexual abuse, which should be a key part of sex education more generally, as discussed above. Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman (1995) noted that only 11% of programmes designed

to reduce child sexual abuse sent materials home to parents in conjunction with classroom interventions. Plummer (2001) found more optimistic numbers, but still noted only half of the programmes sent information home to parents. Educating parents and children simultaneously about issues of this nature can allow for improved communication about personal safety issues by ensuring that both parties share a common understanding. This approach has also been shown to improve the important parent-child relationship discussed above (Deblinger and Heflin, 1996; Deblinger and Runyon, 2005). Burgess and Wurtele (1998) showed that this type of dual education can allow children to be repeatedly exposed to the material, as parents will reiterate the points covered on an ongoing basis. Moreover, it increases the chances of disclosures being made in the event of actual sexual abuse. Parents also reported benefits from these programmes, including increased ability to communicate with their children. They also noted improvements in children's behaviour, including increased eye contact, assertiveness, better expression of feelings and more confidence (Kenny, 2010). More broadly, Klein and Knitzer (2006) in the USA investigated the Parents as Primary Sexuality Educators (PAPSE) programme, a sexuality education programme intended to improve parents' confidence in talking about sex to their children (aged from infancy to 12 years). They showed that their programme targeting parents, as the main providers of sexuality information to children, may be effective in enhancing communication on health, sexuality and values, as well as improving parental ability to convey and discuss sexuality-related expectations and values, and to help children to make healthy decisions about sexual behaviour.

Investment in parents' information about sex education for their children, however, is both delayed and low, even in higher-income countries (Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). On the other hand, the investment in sex education curricula has recently been shown to be effective (Kirby, 2011; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2013; Bokova, 2014). In 2016, for example, I designed the training programme: 'Personal safety for children in pre-school' which has been rolled out by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND), and the Ministry of Education. I trained 60 pre-school supervisors from all regions in the KSA and prepared them to be trainers in child protection. These trainers in turn provide this professional programme to all pre-school teachers (Banunnah, 2016; Altyar, 2016).

The significant feature of the content of this continuing professional programme is that it is a comprehensive programme that not only targets teachers but also children and families, to help keep children safe from all type of abuse and neglect, to allow them to grow up in a safe environment (Banunnah, 2016). The programme has developed a very good reputation in educational settings (Altyar, 2017). However, children who are not registered at kindergartens cannot benefit from this effective programme.

From the above discussions in this sub-section, it can be seen that teachers and parents play key roles in sex education provision. The next sub-section explores the role that culture needs to play also in sex education, as a complement to the role of educators.

3.6.3 Role of society and prevailing beliefs

The role that culture plays in sex education is linked to the points made in the two previous sub-sections in relation to parents and schools, as culture has significant implications for both these areas. The world is made up of various cultures, many of which are, in turn, heavily influenced by religion, such the KSA. These factors need to be accounted for in introducing any provision for sex education. Cultural bias and social norms are central to how sex education is taught to children, so they need to be considered alongside other issues (Campos, 2002). Despite these important links to culture, in reality the influence of culture can act as a barrier to conversations about sex education, in particular amongst parents, whose discomfort is rooted in often-misplaced cultural perspectives (Kenny and Wurtele, 2008).

The dominant discourse as it pertains to sex education is important in recognising cultural influences on sex education. Parker et al. (2009) conducted a comparative study of sex education provision in 26 countries that will be drawn on heavily in this section to show how different cultures can create different environments for sex education provision. It was noted in that study that the terms used as part of sex education are reflective of the national ideologies on the topic. In most of Eastern Europe, including Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, it was noted that the term ‘family life education’ was being used, for example, reflecting the emphasis on social structures. Contemporary issues in a country can also affect the terms used. Parker et al. (2009) recognised that in the 1990s in

Portugal, when there was significant societal concern over HIV and AIDS, the term 'Programme for Personal Development' was renamed 'Programme for Health Education'.

Cross-border comparisons of this nature can be helpful in identifying best practice examples. In Sweden, for example, parents have been shown to be more knowledgeable and confident in discussing issues of sex and sexuality than in neighbouring countries. Clearly, sex education is considered as a fundamental part of human life in the Swedish society (Hodzic, 2003). This example from Sweden, where sex education is now taught at every school level and integrated into other subjects, can be looked at as an aspirational example for other countries (Goldman, 2008). Despite it being held up as a shining example, however, it has to be noted that there is limited information on many aspects of sex education in Sweden, including no information on variations between rural and urban provision. These issues need to be further explored before it becomes an international standard for good practice (Parker et al., 2009). Finland, which introduced compulsory sex education for certain grades only in 2001, has been recognised as having overcome these regional differences and is highly regionally consistent in the provision of sex education (Parker et al., 2009).

In France, 30-40 hours per year of sex education has been a compulsory part of the school curriculum since 1973 (Slater, 2000). Non-government organisations are involved in the provision of sex education, mostly religious organisations and HIV/AIDS organisations. Although generally considered quite good, the French provision of sex education does show the importance of adequate resources, as public finances, lack of materials and inadequate training all hinder the success of the programmes there (Parker et al., 2009). However, in the Netherlands, a country that has traditionally been noted for its liberal policies, sex education is unsurprisingly implemented in quite a liberal fashion (Valk, 2000). Despite the broad focus of sex education in the Netherlands, many topics related to sex education are frequently ignored. There remains scope to improve sex education provision there, even where such a human rights-focused and liberal approach is taken (Parker et al., 2009).

As has already been noted, compulsory sex education does not automatically lead to improved sexual health in any nation. For example, in the UK, there is compulsory sex education (although there is an option for parents to withdraw children from lessons of this nature). The curriculum is based on the reproductive system, foetal development, and physical and emotional changes during the teenage years. Despite this mandatory provision, the UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Europe. Sex education is a contentious topic of debate in government and in the media (Slater, 2000). However, contemporary issues can drive the discourse and political drive behind sex education. Continued poor statistics in the UK on sexual health and teenage pregnancy rates have led to more of a focus in schools on sex education, corresponding to the majority of British people expressing support for sex education in schools (Parker et al., 2009). The provision of such in Britain remains varied across different regions (Department of Health, 2006; Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum, 2014).

In countries with diverse populations, such as the USA and UK, another range of interrelated issues arise, as different cultures and values vie for their place in the national sex education curriculum. As a consequence, a primary limitation in developing sex education criteria has been an inability to accept any universal moral position (Muslim Women's League, 1999; Tabatabaie and Mofatteh, 2011). Furthermore, many Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries have struggled with implemented sex education due to Islamic values. Islamic sex education for Muslim children and young people is not provided in Muslim societies or Western countries. For example, Muslim families who live in the UK often have concerns with their children's schools regarding this issue (Tabatabaie, 2015). For this reason, some Muslim families have withdrawn their children from sex education classes (Islam and Rahman, 2008; Tabatabaie, 2015; Pop and Rusu, 2015). Therefore, it is important to understand the Islamic perspective. A useful starting point for this is the guidance from the Muslim Council of Britain (2007) on the Islamic perspective on sex education sessions:

Sex education should provide factual information objectively and educate young people to look forward to adult life with a sense of responsibility, accountability and confidence, ready to build a strong, stable family life. When devising sex education policies, schools need to take account of the aspirations and concerns of Muslim parents and those of the community that schools serve (Muslim

Council of Britain, 2007, [online]).

This stance suggests that various approaches to sex education are likely to be supported by Islam, provided that the moral standards of the Muslim faith are taken into account. In pluralistic contexts, however, this type of approach would presumably include references to other belief systems, as the Muslim Council of Britain recognises:

From an Islamic perspective, the aim of sex and relationship education is to prepare Muslim pupils to lead their personal and public lives in a manner consistent with their Islamic moral principles and values. It is also important to understand the different sexual values and behaviours that they will observe within a pluralist society (Muslim Council of Britain, 2007, [online]).

The above quotation clearly reflects the previous discussion, which stresses the need to complement sex education with other aspects of sexuality in line with the Islamic values of modesty and decency of both sexes (Al-Ghazali, 1975; Elwan, 1993; Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008; Ashraah et al., 2013). Tabatabaie (2015) demonstrates that young Muslims, who are living in non-Muslim countries, may not be able to meet their sexual health needs due to different cultural perspectives on sex education, which may bring them conflicts and difficulties. However, according to Coleman and Tesa (2008), however, their research findings indicated that young British Muslims engaged in sexual activities despite the absence of sexual health knowledge, due to their delayed awareness (Tabatabaie, 2015). It can be argued that the responsibility for sex education informed by Islamic values is even more pertinent when raising Muslim children in non-Islamic societies and countries, but should be taken into account in all settings, including the KSA.

Arguably, Western influence is increasing through globalisation in countries such as the KSA, not only in aspects of life such as eating habits, but also in the education system (Al-Ahdab, 2010; Wiseman et al, 2013). The impact of globalisation and Western media is of specific importance in this, as concerns are raised about the sexual content in Westernised media, where there is often little focus on issues of sexual responsibility and

the potential consequences of sexual actions (Chandra et al., 2007; Almuneef et al., 2014). These concerns are strongly felt in the KSA, where there has traditionally been a very conservative attitude towards sexuality and sex education. Several studies frame the point that sex remains a taboo subject in the KSA, where information on this topic is only really distributed through hospitals or Primary Health Care Centres (PHCCs) to married women (Al-Zahrani, 2006; Mobaraki and Soderfeldt, 2010; Almuneef et al., 2014). Fageeh (2008) found that most people in the KSA obtained their information on sexually transmitted infections from the Internet. Other important sources included books, TV, radio, friends, newspapers, magazines, and family. These points are a matter for concern, as these sources could be unreliable, particularly the Internet.

My Master's findings (Banunnah, 2013) showed that many Saudi parents, teachers and experts believe that the Western media is having a negative impact on Saudi society. These results echo previous academic work (Bahareth, 2011). Western influence on sex education is now an important issue in Saudi society, where there is growing concern that inappropriate material is not monitored or constrained. There are no restrictions on what can be shown on television at different times in the KSA, for example as there is in the UK (the 'watershed'). In my Master's research, Al-Ghamdi, the board chairman of Family and Child Protection Society in the KSA, raised concerns that children could imitate what they see on television and that what they are imitating could be harmful, particularly without appropriate censorship (Banunnah, 2013). One of the main concerns is that Western media will portray different beliefs and morals than those that are important in the KSA (Al-Qadi, 2006; Bahareth, 2011). This can lead to a dangerous dichotomy and confusion amongst children, who may not understand that they are expected to act differently from what they see on TV. All this leads to children being more likely to approach teachers and parents for answers (Banunnah, 2013), which in turn makes investigating the provision of sex education in Saudi society even more significant.

The Saudi culture affects studies of this nature in another key way also, as there is traditionally very little social science research in the country. Although it is a wealthy nation, it still has many of the characteristics of a developing country (Metz, 1993; Sara, 1981). Many Westerners "tend to think of Islamic society as backward-looking,

oppressed by religion and inhumanely governed” (Mazrui, 1997, p.118). This lack of social studies research makes it difficult to investigate accurately the effects of changes in civil society (Mazawi, 1999). The refusal to adopt Western systems of schooling, despite acquiring significant wealth, presents a unique opportunity to investigate an alternative school system, however (Al-Sharideh, 1999; Prokop, 2003). The rejection of Western, and in particular American, influences in social and cultural realms has contributed to the continued strong influence of the Islamic religion in the KSA, including in schools, despite Saudi society’s integration into Western dominated global economic and political communities (Massialas and Jarrar, 1987; Metz, 1993; Obeid, 1994; MacFarquhar, 2001; Gorman, 2019).

The changes in the KSA since the discovery of oil have also significantly influenced family life. Family dynamics are changing, with more women entering the workforce than before (Abd Alhaleem, 2010; Gahwaji, 2013). Stemming from this, widespread employment of foreign labour, in particular domestic helpers, in the KSA has had an influence on the development of children. Having a permanent presence within a home, as well as families’ perceived reliance on that help, has changed family members’ dependence on the extended family. A recent study in the KSA demonstrated that children living in extended families were 1.5 times more likely to be neglected and abused than children in nuclear families (Almuneef et al., 2016). Currently, however, children staying at home all day with nannies or house cleaners, many of whom come from different religious and cultural backgrounds, has raised concerns amongst families in Saudi society about the influence that they may have (Gahwaji, 2006; 2013). There are fears that this type of change will have influences on children, the country and society as a whole (Khalifa, 2001). Contemporary families have become more independent and the idea of a large, close extended family is in decline, while the family becomes a consuming, not productive, unit (Al-Sunbul et al., 1998). This change in the structure of families has shifted parameters in relation to child-rearing and child-care. It therefore raises questions as to who exactly is providing care to children in the KSA now and what standard of care is being provided (Gahwaji, 2007). This has made the focus on early years education even more significant (Abd Alhaleem, 2010).

Globalisation has also had a significant impact on society in the KSA beyond the media

influences discussed above. Globalisation theories can provide a unique explanation for why specific education systems are developing in certain parts of the world (Spring, 2008; Stromquist and Monkman, 2000; Wiseman et al, 2013; Banunnah, 2016; 2017a). In particular, the emphasis on transformation, both economical and institutional, can significantly affect education. These trends are not without conflict or resistance, however (Wiseman et al., 2013). Astiz et al. (2002) note that the creation of the modern school system has occurred only with considerable class, ethnic and political conflicts, which has led to significant variations across different school systems. The scenario in Saudi society shows that schools interact with their non-governmental environments to impact norms and structures in the school system. This forces a challenge for researchers to appropriately account for the influence of globalisation, as they would all cultural influences, when studying education systems (Wiseman et al., 2013).

Furthermore, it can be accepted that in Western countries, culture is more open and parents are more likely to share intimacy and intimate gestures, like kissing, when compared to countries like Saudi Arabia. As was noted above, however, there are important aspects of culture in Saudi society that should be looked at and researched before making broad assumptions of this nature. One is the influence of religion. Religion is often central to culture, and in an Islamic state like the KSA, where religion is key to all aspects of personal life and social organisation (Banunnah, 2013; GASTAT, 2015), it is an essential issue to consider when looking at new educational policies. These issues are more straightforward when teaching in a solely Islamic context, such as the KSA, but still need to be addressed as different influences continue to grow in the KSA and it is becoming more pluralistic. However, recently, one of the main challenges in education, especially in the Islamic world, is educating young people about sex and gender (Tabatabaie and Mofatteh, 2011). In the current global multimedia environment, Muslim children and adolescents might face difficulties with exposure to different cultures through advanced technologies, which they cannot deal with due to the absence of any images of Muslim sexuality (Tabatabaie, 2015). Therefore, it can be seen that sex education thus needs to be well examined from an Islamic perspective.

3.7 Chapter conclusion

As has been shown in this literature review, there is significant existing research describing the important role that sex education can play in various aspects of a child's life. In the Saudi context, however, there appears to be a noticeable lack of research that might inform parents and teachers, and underpin provision of sex education in ECE. Even in Western contexts, the existing research pays less attention early years issues. From the above discussion of the literature, it is clear that there is a lack of academic studies regarding sex education for children in both Western and Islamic societies in terms of the three research questions for this thesis. This study therefore aims to investigate sex education topics for children in the Saudi society, as well as explore how a sex education curriculum could be implemented within the pre-school curriculum. Other issues relevant to this topic are also explored, adopting a holistic approach to the subject. My hope for this thesis, therefore, is that it will help to close this gap in knowledge and understanding and possibly lead to future studies that explore cultural perspectives. The next chapter explains the methodology that was used to collect the data from pre-school teachers, supervisors, policy makers, and specialists from different fields that are interested in child care in the KSA to answer the three research questions.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology that was used to inform the research design and collection of data required to fulfil the aims of this study. Cohen et al. (2013) indicate that “it is important to clarify a distinction that needs to be made between methodology and methods, approaches and instrument, styles of research and ways of collecting data” (p.83). The methodology for this thesis is thus clearly framed to provide an insight into the means that were utilised to answer the afore-mentioned research questions:

- From the participants’ perspectives, to what extent should sex education be included in the three-to-six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)?
- What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?
- How should sex education topics be delivered to children between three and six years of age?

As has already been shown, there is significant disagreement, confusion and controversy surrounding the provision of sex education in Saudi society. Therefore, this study provides important information to help create more certainty in this area. This chapter begins with a discussion of the nature of this research, its ontological and epistemological position, and the interpretive paradigm. Following this, the research design and methods are discussed, including a justification for the mixed methods approach that was undertaken. The decision process behind the use of questionnaires and interviews for data collection and their implementation are also explained. Following this, the target population is identified and the process of sampling is discussed. The data analysis process is explained next. Finally, validity and reliability, and other key ethical issues that relate to the research are considered.

4.2 Nature of the research project

The nature of this study is explained in order to contextualise the approach used to answer the research questions. This section explains the paradigm of this research and the choice of a mixed methods approach for data collection and analysis, consisting of qualitative and quantitative methods. Methodology is the overall approach to research linked to the paradigm or theoretical framework, while the method refers to systematic modes, procedures or tools used for collection and analysis of data (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006, p. 211).

In line with the above quotation, it is accepted that the adopted methods/procedures of a study are an integral part of the theoretical framework utilised in research. Research can be categorised according to its purpose, application, or inquiry. Moreover, the purpose of research can be classified as exploratory, descriptive, or interpretive (McDougall, 2010). These purposes can correspond to differing approaches, referred to as research paradigms. Before moving on to look at the specific paradigm of this research, paradigms need to be addressed more generally.

4.2.1 Interpretive paradigm

Paradigms form an important part of research. They should be addressed in order to allow the researcher to approach their investigations from a non-biased standpoint (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006; Bryman, 2008). Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined a paradigm as a “basic belief system or world view that guides the investigator not only in choices of method, but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (p.105). Paradigms, therefore, have significant influence on the choice of a particular methodology, as well as the approach taken to ensure validity (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). Beyond this, paradigms also influence every aspect of the way that a researcher works; therefore, they can have significant effects on the outcome of a research project (Newby, 2010). Bryman (2008) notes that the paradigm of a study influences “what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted” (p. 605).

When considering research paradigms, two key assumptions that are frequently acknowledged are epistemological and ontological ones (Cohen et al., 2013; Bryman, 2008; 2016; Creswell, 2014). Epistemology is concerned with assumptions associated with knowledge; can knowledge be acquired by a detached researcher or is it predicated on involvement with others? Ontology takes a broader approach and looks at the very nature of reality; do phenomena exist independently, or is reality created by interaction? (Crotty, 1998; Creswell, 2014; Plowright, 2011). Alternatively, MacNaughton et al. (2001) argue that paradigms include three elements: the nature of knowledge, methodology and validity criteria. I take a subjective ontology in this study, assuming that participants have their own differing views of the ‘reality’ of sex education and individual development based on their individual perspectives and experiences. This leads to the epistemological position that these ‘realities’ can best be captured and understood by accessing participants’ perceptions and experiences, i.e. through getting close to them in an attempt to see the world through their eyes.

From my perspective, the social world can be understood clearly through dealing with many aspects of awareness, which include human interactions, perceptions, and motivations, not solely through facts. This study involves 2,681 pre-school teachers, 20 pre-school supervisors, and eight specialists; the focus of this research is on those participants’ experiences of the curriculum and sex education in pre-schools in the KSA; therefore, an interpretive approach seems most appropriate. One of the greatest advantages of the interpretive paradigm is its ability to expose the complex details of diverse hidden phenomena, such as individual perceptions and experiences (Delamont, 2012). Being able to identify these accurately in this study will allow for any potential bias to be identified and addressed. It is important to highlight that the participants involved in this study have lived their entire lives in Saudi culture and have particular experiences, which could affect the findings of this study. For example, it can be expected that the responses could be impacted by the ‘shame culture’ when discussing sex education. As Gray (2013) and Maxwell (2012) explained, the interpretive perspective is based on sociocultural theory, which looks at the impact of culture on the system of values; in this case, on beliefs about children, childhood, and individual development in Saudi society. In this paradigm, the discussions describe the context and participants’ contributions as significant parts of the research (Hatch, 2002). My research

interprets and describes the social worlds and experiences of the participants (pre-school teachers, supervisors and specialists), rather than being concerned with testing a theory or looking for causal relationships between variables. This provides a context and focus for approaching the research questions above by using appropriate methods to collect and analyse the data of this research.

4.2.2 Mixed methods

Within the interpretive paradigm, another consideration that needs addressing is whether to adopt qualitative or quantitative methods of data collection, which have evolved from entirely different philosophical underpinnings (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Both offer distinct advantages and disadvantages for a research project (Silverman, 2013). Gibson's (2017) study demonstrates that it is important to consider the data source because it clearly proves the original source of the information. It is therefore important to understand each method to clarify the appropriate approach for this study. Quantitative research can be described as a positivist, deductive model that focuses on generalisation, and "usually emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2008, p.697). This is considered a more scientific approach that involves the gathering of large amounts of data and enables interactions between variables to be explored (Gorard and Taylor, 2004; Saunders et al., 2003; Phillips and Burbules, 2000). Furthermore, "quantitative data are numeric representations of concepts" (Gibson, 2017, p.195). The main advantage of this approach is seen as the perceived ability of a detached researcher to gather large amounts of data impartially and free from bias (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The limitations, however, include the inability to address the complexities of human life and social worlds (Silverman, 2013).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is professed as a philosophical alternative to the quantitative approach, exploring individual phenomena within their context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2013). Hence, the flexibility of this approach allows researchers to uncover unexpected dimensions, as well as allowing data that is defined by the individuals being investigated rather than by the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Goulding, 2005). Qualitative research is then considered to be aligned "more

closely to a constructivist paradigm, which sees truth and meaning as constructed and interpreted by individuals” (Gray, 2013, p.191). The interpretive approach adopted in this study uses qualitative methods. As with other qualitative approaches, interpretivism has been criticised as being open to bias from the researcher (Silverman, 2013). That said, for an approach that seeks to emphasise exploration of a topic, and identify gaps in information, an interpretive approach is preferred (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2014). This is particularly relevant to this study on the provision of sex education, where significant gaps in knowledge have already been shown and individual beliefs and perspectives are central to the study.

Purely quantitative data would prevent new and unforeseen avenues of enquiry from being raised in this study on an area that has received very little research interest up to this point. There is, therefore, little existing theoretical basis for a positivist approach. At the same time, these would be limitations to the use of a purely qualitative approach as a means of changing policy and practice within the KSA, because qualitative studies are generally small scale and often do not involve a large enough sample (Silverman, 2013) to inform changes in policy and practice.

Due to the limitations and advantages of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study utilised a mixed methods or pluralistic approach. This can be fully exploratory, while also providing data for changing policy and practice (Plowright, 2011). ‘Mixed methods’ is a methodology that combines different types of data (qualitative and quantitative) or different methods to collect data, which allows the researcher to draw on a range of evidence instead of one data source or case (Cohen et al., 2013; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Shenton, 2004; Silverman, 2013). Although these two approaches are considered to be at opposite ends of the research spectrum, combining the two methods in a coherent manner can allow for the benefits of both to be realised in an individual research study (Cohen et al., 2013; Bryman, 2008). Utilising an integrated approach does not simply mean developing a study that has both components: a qualitative and a quantitative one (Kane, 1994). Furthermore, according to Gibson (2017, p.194): “Four major strengths of the mixed method design are illustrated-enhanced capacity for elaboration, generalization, triangulation, and interpretation”. Creswell (2014) discusses how a mixed-method triangulation design involves multiple methods in

order to get more reliable and valid information in a co-ordinated manner. The main purpose of this approach, however, is to discover complementary data that can overcome the weaknesses of a single approach, rather than confirmatory data (Morse, 1991; Smith, 2006; Harris and Brown, 2010). Several studies have stressed that mixed methods are appropriate for research that concerns multinational perspectives of understanding to achieve the critical objective (Gibson et al., 2012; Hurmerinta-Peltomaki and Nummela, 2006). Arguably, my study discusses a sensitive topic, i.e. sex education for young children in the conservative Saudi society. Using mixed methods in this study thus provides the opportunity to elicit different perspectives from pre-school teachers, supervisors and specialists from 45 educational districts in the KSA on the research problem and to integrate or converge the mixed data in a holistic manner.

4.3 Research design

This section explains in more detail the specific methodology that was employed in this research project, including the sample population and how this was determined.

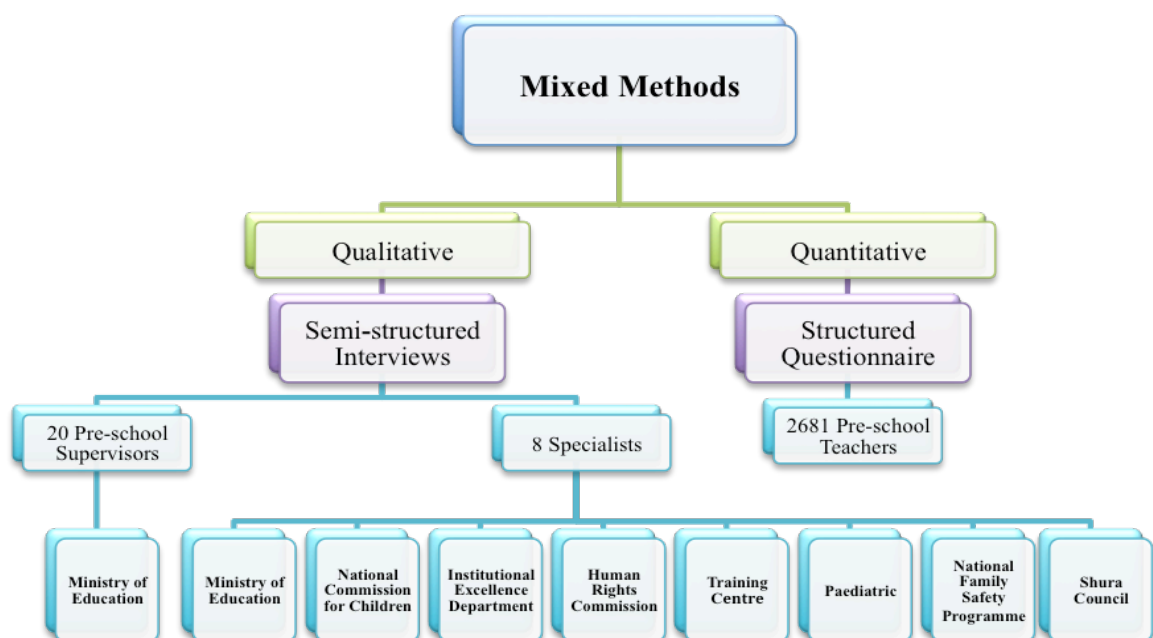


Figure 4.1: Research design of this study

It is important to note that research design is influenced by the researcher's interests, experiences and background (Creswell, 2014; Wellington, 2015). Similarly, Wellington et al. (2005) discussed that the methods in research are affected by many factors, such as "personal predilections, interests and disciplinary background of the researcher" (p.99). For this reason, Wellington (2015) stressed that the position of the researcher should be presented briefly along with content-specific information that relates to the research objectives. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) aptly state, "A tenet of mixed methods research is that researchers should mindfully create designs that effectively answer their research questions" (p. 20). Therefore, I designed the research to meet the objectives, as shown in Figure 4.1. Further details about the design of this study are explained below.

4.3.1 Methods

According to Gibson (2017), selection of the appropriate research design requires consideration of many factors, such as the area of the research, the research questions and the research objectives. I therefore designed the appropriate methods to address the objectives of this study in order to answer the research questions from the perspectives of the teachers, namely whether sex education is important for pre-school children in the KSA, what are appropriate sex education topics for pre-school children, and how can sex education be implemented in the curriculum. It can be seen from Figure 4.1 that the specific methods utilised to gather data for the research consisted of a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data, obtained through questionnaires, provided measurable data and results. This approach is considered more objective and less subject to bias or self-interpretation. Using multiple sources of data is a useful approach if the mixed methods are well designed (Gibson, 2017). This is important in this topic, as in the KSA the subject of sex education is ambiguous and can be open to subjectivity by all those involved in the study. Qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews complemented the quantitative data. This allows the results to be considered within the context, including the personal perceptions and interpretations of the participants involved (Goulding 2005). Unlike the quantitative questionnaires, only a small number of interviews were conducted within the groups of 20 pre-school supervisors and eight specialists; however, these allowed for more discussion and

explanation, as well as a more in depth look at sociocultural influences as they were perceived by the target population. These two methods will now be looked at in more detail.

a) Structured questionnaire

It has been argued by some authors that it is preferable for socially sensitive studies to use a structured questionnaire “if a topic is felt to be socially embarrassing to discuss face to face and [this method] has been used, for example, in surveys of sexual behaviour” (Phellas et al., 2011, p. 202). For this reason, the first method utilised in this study was a structured questionnaire to ensure a culturally sensitive approach. There are many types of structured questionnaire, such as postal, electronic, telephonic and personal questionnaire (Phellas et al., 2011). Out of all the types, the electronic questionnaire seems to guarantee the highest levels of privacy, which is important for sensitive topics. The electronic questionnaire can be provided to a large number of participants, which may provide a large volume of results, which may be persuasive to decision makers. Furthermore, it does not require obtaining personal information, telephone numbers or postal addresses of teacher participants from the Ministry of Education, as would be in the case of Saudi Arabia.

Conversely, this kind of questionnaire can prompt the respondents to specific answers. Hence, an electronic structured questionnaire may affect the actual responses, because the participants’ opinions, attitudes and values cannot be explored (Phellas et al., 2011; Brace, 2018). I used Google Drive to design the structured questionnaire, which created a link for the questionnaire in the Internet. This application helped me save time and allowed sufficient time for me to conduct interviews and facilitate the study to obtain the data while I was in the UK. As Phellas et al. (2011) state, in addition to the saving of time and cost of the email and electronic survey, the online questionnaire can also contribute to honesty on sensitive topics such as those related to sexual behaviour.

In order to address the research questions, I designed the questions to include nine individual themes: (1) children’s development and curiosity, (2) concern about sexual

problems, and (3) sex education and child protection. (4) current curriculum and sex education, and (5) sex education topics. (6) role of teacher, (7) role of parents, (8) role of society, and (9) training courses. Furthermore, I provided one question containing a list of six choices of sex education topics that could potentially be implemented in the curriculum, based on the literature review. On the one hand, such a question can prompt the participants to produce relevant responses based on accurate information (Oppenheim, 2000); however, the limited choice of topics presented could be influential on the participants' responses and could therefore affect the research results by preventing the opportunity to gain other perspectives (Brace, 20018).

There are three types of questions that can be used in a questionnaire: closed, open-ended and open response-option questions (Phellas et al., 2011; Brace, 2018). I chose closed questions because this is an approachable method to encourage participants to open up with sensitive topics, because the response is quick; it is time-efficient and requires less dependence on participants' memory (Oppenheim, 2000). In addition, closed questions allowed me to organise the answers into categories and analyse them efficiently (Phellas et al., 2011). To address this potential problem, I added an optional open-ended question for any comments regarding the topic. The open-ended question allowed the participants to respond in their own words, without any influence from the researcher. Such questions can provide different perspectives that may reveal results that were not expected when the questionnaire was designed (Plowright, 2011; Brace, 20018).

While I designed the questionnaire, I organised and worded the questions carefully to encourage accurate information from the participants to meet all my research objectives (Brace, 2018). Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, I paid attention to phrasing the questions according to the accepted discourse of the topic and in a manner that was polite and not embarrassing for the participants. It can be clearly seen that using a mixture of types of questions in the questionnaire can assist the research to gain relevant and valuable information. I used clear and direct wording to ensure that the questions responses were fully understood. Researchers are advised to formulate simple questions with relatively few words to prevent the common problems that could occur with questionnaires, such as respondents ignoring or leaving some questions (Oppenheim,

2000). Focusing on one item in one question can significantly minimise the researcher's influence on the responses.

The questionnaire consisted of questions with a choice of five levels of agreement arranged in a Likert scale to provide insight into the extent to which participants agreed with a certain idea. It can be argued that this method can make the responses less accurate, which can impact on the results due to the misinterpretation of data (Brace, 2018). However, pre-school teachers were asked to provide categorised data, including their experience, residential area, and educational level, to ensure the objectives of the study were carefully covered (Phellas et al., 2011).

The structured questionnaire used in this study can be found in Appendix C. All documents that are presented in the Appendices of this thesis I translated into English, with an exception of the formal letters to the Ministry of Education. However, although the questionnaire was written in Arabic (in order to allow for maximum penetration of the target population), the translation to English could create some issues with the accuracy of the information, which is further explained in Section 4.3.2.

The questionnaire was circulated to all pre-school centres in 45 different educational districts to be completed on site by teachers via the central email of the general pre-school department in the Saudi Ministry of Education. This route was chosen as a result of my conversations with Mrs. Aldabass, the General Director of Pre-school in the Ministry of Education in the KSA, who recognised the significance of the topic in Saudi Arabia and was willing to support my research. The questionnaires were completed anonymously to encourage a greater number of teachers to participate and increase honesty and openness, as well as allowing the avoidance of embarrassment, a frequent barrier to research in this area (Phellas et al., 2011). This anonymity was combined with using the ballot method to ensure the anonymous handling of responses. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires during their break or at the end of their classes, in order to further increase participation and validity.

b) Semi-structured interviews

The second method used was interviews with specialists in the social sciences, education, health, law, childhood studies, and religious fields and policy makers (pre-school supervisors). This method assisted in addressing wider perspectives based on experiences of the social reality of the Saudi context in depth. As Perakyla (2005, p. 869) mentions, interviews enable researchers to “reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes”. I used one-to-one interviews with specialists from various fields related to Early Childhood education and well-being in Saudi Arabia to present multiple perspectives on sex education. This one-to-one dialogue was designed to extract specific information from the interviewees about the topic (Delamont, 2012). The customs and culture of the KSA are such that individuals tend to be uncomfortable discussing sex education as sex is generally a taboo (Almuneef et al., 2014). One-to-one interviews allowed me and the participants to interact and create a more detailed dialogue on the research questions (Glaser, 2005).

Furthermore, I used a focused discussion group interview with pre-school supervisors (who are considered as policy makers). Group discussions have the potential to provide even deeper exploration of topics (Silverman, 2013; Glaser, 2005). The interviews were semi-structured, utilising a pro-forma containing open-ended questions to afford direction to the discussion while also allowing exploration of the topics raised (Silverman, 2013). I worked with a list of questions, but was not committed to the specific sequence and had the flexibility to ask further questions, or for clarification, depending on the content of the responses (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2008). According to Robson (2011), in the interview, usually the researcher changes the order of the questions based on the conversation and sometimes adds unplanned questions to continue the interview. I therefore dealt with the questions based on the developing conversation and I asked the questions in a variety of ways to confirm my understanding of the answers and to what extent the interviewees believed on their knowledge based on their information. The collection of data from the interviews was less straightforward. Therefore, as both Robson (2011) and Wellington (2015) argue, it is beneficial to repeat the same question in several ways to distinguish any inconsistency in the information and variety participants’ belief in their information.

The interviews in this study were based around similar topics to the questionnaires: participants' perspectives on sex education, the importance of this topic, social problems, sex education in Islam, teachers' and parents' roles in the provision of sex education, appropriate sex education topics, and a possible implementation in the curriculum. Interviews were recorded to enable them to be reviewed and revisited (Lapadat, 2000). As advised in literature, I made efforts to make the setting comfortable and open, increasing the likelihood of participants speaking openly (Bush, 2002). The translated semi-structured interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

4.3.2 Translation issues

With regard to translation issues, using the local language of participants can encourage them to express their experience and enable the researcher to gain accurate information. Hennink (2007) demonstrated the importance of using appropriate interpretation for social studies that look for human attitudes and social contexts to understand their background in a natural approach. Although there are advantages of translation within qualitative research, it is significant to consider carefully the process of translation of the findings, as in the case of Arabic (Regmi et al., 2010). Conducting a study in a different language and then translating it into English for many purposes, such as publication, creates many lexical and linguistic issues (Regmi et al., 2010). Not only is a time consuming, but also the analysis of findings will be affected by the researcher's influence (Halai, 2007; Sunol and Saturno, 2008). For example, while the researcher transcribes the findings from the recording, the ideas can be summarised or some vocabulary might be ignored. Additionally, translation to another language is a core process from the socio-cultural perspective, as it concerns crossing cultures (Torop, 2002). It can be argued that it is difficult to convey participants' perspectives accurately in translated findings (Khan and Manderson, 1992); therefore, the researcher should use an accurate and valid translation (Jootun et al., 2009). Accordingly it is important to highlight that this study was conducted in Arabic out of necessity and the results were translated with the assistance of my supervisor to check the accuracy and minimize misunderstanding.

Therefore, it is explicit that there could be translation issues that need to be taken into account. A basic dilemma is whether to translate literally or whether to interpret the meaning (Bassnett, 1991; 2012). Literal translation is not always possible due to differences in conceptualising the world in different languages and cultures (Bassnett, 2012; Torop, 2002). Such an example in this study could be the word 'boyfriend' which has Arabic equivalents for both 'boy' and 'friend', but the Western concept of 'boyfriend' as an intimate friend is not applicable to Muslim cultures. Therefore, literal translation could lead to misinterpretation, as a 'boyfriend' could be understood as a male friend of a man. Consequently, I chose to translate the meaning as accurately as possible. I was aware, however, that by doing that I could lose some of the nuances of the original meaning. It is noteworthy though that there seemed to be fewer translation issues in the questionnaire than in the interviews, possibly due to the use of a Likert scale.

4.3.3 Pilot Study

According to Oppenheim (2000) and Brace (2018) it is important to pre-test the questions before asking the participants, to ensure clarity and identify any possible inaccuracies in the questions that need to be corrected. A pilot study is a standard method that provides a significant opportunity for a researcher to examine the questions, the process, and recognise any possible bias in the questions (Shenton, 2004). Consequently, it is important to highlight that I tested all questions in the questionnaire and interviews with my colleagues (some of whom are in the field of early childhood and others from different specialisations) before I conducted the study, to ensure the questions were comprehensible. This was a good opportunity to talk about my research and obtain some ideas. As Silverman (2013) points out, it is important to talk about and discuss the data with others outside the research, to promote the credibility of the study. Therefore, I piloted the questionnaire by sending it to various Arab groups from different fields, which had a developmental effect on the questions. The pilot study was a significant opportunity to improve the questions, to enhance their clarity, to aid the achievement of the research objectives, and thus, to obtain the accurate information. This also allowed me to improve the clarity of the Arabic wording of the questionnaire and interview questions. For example, the initial version of Question 3 in the questionnaire read: "some

sexual behaviours could be displayed, and could raise teachers' concerns". The feedback from my colleagues clearly suggested the need for more explanation regarding the context. Therefore, I decided to rephrase the question to the following format: "When children play with their friends in adult roles (father, mother, doctor and driver) some sexual behaviours could be displayed, and could raise teachers' concerns". Furthermore, I had the approval from my supervisor and the ethical review process at the University of Sheffield of the final English version of the questionnaire and interview questions.

4.3.4 Sample

In this study, the target population consisted of pre-school teachers and supervisors (curriculum policy makers) and specialists involved with children in the defined age group (three to six years). However, engaging and recruiting the entire population was unfeasible, and, therefore, a sample had to be taken. Theoretical sampling was adopted for this study. This refers to:

Sampling carried out so that emerging theoretical considerations guide the selection of research participants. Theoretical sampling is supposed to continue until a point of theoretical saturation is reached (Bryman, 2008, p.700).

In quantitative research, the sample is usually chosen randomly and should be of a sufficient size to represent the entire target population as accurately as possible. Conversely, qualitative data collection stresses the importance of building a purposive sample in order to obtain relevant data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2013).

This research was concerned with two sample groups: (1) pre-school teachers teaching children in the target age group and (2) supervisors (curriculum policy makers) in the Ministry of Education and specialists from various sectors in Saudi Arabia. The specialists worked in the Ministry of Education, National Commission for Children, Human Rights Commission, and Children's Curriculum. They held roles and specialisms such as Trainer and Author in Protection, Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics, the National Family Safety Programme, and Religion, to present multiple perspectives on sex education. It can be stressed that in social science studies, it is important to carefully consider the communication with participants (Robson, 2011, p. 188). In order to

enhance the perceived authority of the study and increase participation, a copy of the consent letter from the Saudi Ministry for Education (see Appendix G) was thus sent to the target group when recruiting participants for this study.

This research was wide in its scope. It looked at pre-school teachers and supervisors in 45 educational districts of five geographical regions of the KSA (see Appendix H). These five key regions in Saudi Arabia were chosen to be representative of the views throughout the country; Al-Shamal, in the northernmost region of the country, Al-Wosttah in the centre, containing Riyadh, Al-Algharbiah, located in the West along the Red Sea and home of the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah, Al-Shargheyah to the East, and Al-Janoub in the South. The inhabitants of these five regions have slightly different cultural backgrounds and I expected that looking at all five would allow for the identification of possible differentiation of attitudes across different areas of Saudi Arabian society, including any rural/urban divide. It can be seen that this geographical spread contributes to the understanding of the perspectives on local culture in many areas. The data collected from all participants in this study through the two phases, both quantitative and qualitative, presents different perspectives on sex education for young children from all local regions in Saudi society.

In the quantitative phase, the questionnaires were distributed via district education centres to pre-school teachers in schools across the 45 educational districts. Their opinions were investigated with a focus on what type of sex education is needed and how it should be provided. It was important to obtain permission from the Ministry of Education to conduct this investigation. The structured questionnaire was distributed online to 3,543 pre-school teachers via a link from the Ministry of Education's central email to these centres, in order to increase the ability to generalise the results and not be too restrictive (see Appendix I). All completed responses to the online questionnaire were received in my Google Drive email directly. Despite the selective aspects, participants were chosen at random and constituted a sufficient number to represent the target population. The collected data was based on responses from 2,681 pre-school teachers from 45 educational districts, which presents a clear perspective of beliefs on sex education and the children's curriculum in Saudi society.

In the qualitative part of this research, it was important to develop a purposive sample (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2013). The first sample selected for this phase was 20 pre-school supervisors, who were considered as curriculum policy makers in the Saudi Ministry of Education. Their views were investigated through a focus discussion group interview, exploring the same themes as the questionnaires. Supervisors were chosen randomly from an identified group of people fulfilling key roles in curriculum settings for the target age group. The second sample in the qualitative phase consisted of eight specialists: Dr. Alduhaim, Former Judge and Member of the KSA Shura Council; Dr. Alsheddi, Council Member of the Human Rights Commission in the KSA and Children's Rights Advocate; Dr. Alshamrani, Asst. Prof. Consultant of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics; Dr. Alsaleh, the General Secretary of the National Commission for Children in the Ministry of Education; Mrs. Aldabass, General Director of Pre-school at the Ministry of Education in the KSA; Mrs. Alghamdi, Head of Institutional Excellence Department and Specialist in Children's Curriculum; Mrs. Zaher, Trainer and Author on Protection from Abuse; and Mr. Almuhamid, Counsel Member of the National Family Safety Programme in the KSA. It must be emphasised that I obtained individual permission from participants to reveal their names and positions in this study (see Appendix J). They were selected because it is important to consider multiple sources of data from both inside and outside the centre of any unit (Gibson, 2017). It can be argued that those specialists within education, social, health, law and religious expertise in early childhood and a strong voice in the Saudi government would give value to the data of this study in Saudi society. Of particular importance was the inclusion of a religious expert, which was done in order to include the Islamic religion's viewpoint on sex education and as a protective measure in order to discuss what topics would be appropriate in this religious context.

This section has looked at the methods of data collection and the sample of this study. The next section explains how the data was analysed.

4.4 Data analysis

The different data collected in this mixed methods approach required different data analytics tools. The principles of analysis were chosen to be in line with established

principles that are trustworthy, reliable and applicable to practice (Silverman, 2013). It is important to highlight that the Google Form was used to create an online questionnaire. A secure link was created on the Google Form and then this link was distributed to the participants. The questionnaire package included a list of questions that were intended to measure teachers' responses to sex education as well as demographic information, such as the number of years of experience and class level taught. All teachers' responses were obtained in Excel file in Arabic (see Appendix M). However, prior to the main analysis of the quantitative part of this research, the data were screened for any missing values and few participants were excluded from the analysis due to leaving most of the items unanswered. The main analysis was done based on 2,681 participants. As to statistical tests, I reported descriptive statistics that included percentages and frequencies for all questions in the online questionnaire to obtain a firmer understanding regarding the characteristics of the sample on the given questions in terms of weighting their opinion in relation to the number of pre-school teachers' responses in specific categories.

As the given questionnaires were divided into the themes, percentage and frequency statistics were also reported for each of the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress that some themes contain complex ideas may need to be divided into separate themes for clarification. These were then ascribed a certain level of meaning and compared to the themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis, as seen in Chapter 5. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 92) state that "names [of themes] need to be concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about"; therefore, each theme was named carefully and clearly.

With regard to the qualitative data, in reality, data analysis began at the point of data collection, particularly with the semi-structured interviews (Glaser, 2005). There are numerous qualitative analysis techniques; however, this study utilised an interpretive approach, aiming to investigate the practitioners' personal perspectives and experiences of sex education and the sociocultural issues that they had experienced (Richards and Morse, 2007; Delamont, 2012). Since interpretive analysis looks for significance within the data provided by respondents related to the phenomenon being investigated (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Delamont, 2012), this was practically done by coding the transcripts (an extract including example of coding is exhibited in Appendix K) and

categorising them based on an interpretive analysis. This approach is classified as inductive reasoning and exploration; identifying what themes and ideas frequently occur within the data and relating these specifically to the research aims and questions (Goulding, 2005; Silverman, 2013). In order to reduce bias that could develop in this type of approach, aspects relating to these different emergent themes were ascribed and presented in different categories, drawing significant influences from the quantitative data in order to delineate distinctive categories. Through this type of integration, the two types of data were holistically complementary. As each theme was defined, I then re-examined all the other data previously reviewed to compare it to that theme (Glaser, 2005; Goulding, 2005). The analysis of this study considered the most relevant findings related to the research questions that could also be addressed in the literature review of this thesis. As Braun and Clarke (2006) mention, it is important to make links between the most significant information related to the research questions and the relevant studies in the literature. It can be noted that I analysed and discussed the quantitative and qualitative data in depth, based on the sociocultural perspectives of Saudi society.

The above discussion outlined the approach taken to analyse the data from this study. It is also important to consider the validity and reliability of the data, however; so these are explained in the next section.

4.5 Coding process

The coding process used to analyse the qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, with both the focus group and specialists, followed six steps, based on Braun and Clarke's study (2006, p. 87). Figure 4.2, shows the six stages in coding the data for analysis. All the response data in the interviews were analysed based on this process.

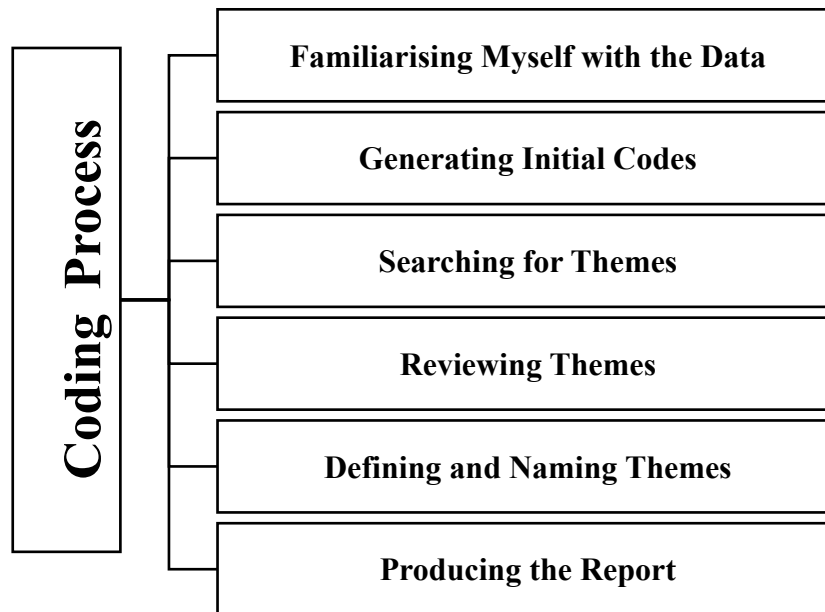


Figure 4.2: Coding process based on Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87), it is important to “immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content”. In the first stage, therefore, I listened to the recordings of the interviews and took notes. Then the lengthy process of transcribing took place. This initial step is a significant process in qualitative analysis. While I was listening many times in order to be able to interpret the data, I identified frequent patterns and also emerging contradictory patterns of the ideas. I understood the messages that participants tried to convey in answering my research questions. I wrote first drafts then I read them and went back to listen again to make sure all related information was included in this draft verbatim. While transcribing the data, I identified initial codes, which assisted me with an in-depth understanding of the data.

In the second stage, in order to generate initial codes, I identified interesting codes related to the data based on the research questions. I wrote individual transcripts manually in a Word document for the focus-group interviews (supervisors) and individual interviews (specialists) (see an example in Appendix O). This allowed me to write down all interview transcripts and save them on my computer. In each transcript, I

collated the ideas based on the codes. For example, I used the Word tools to highlight the data in various colours, a different colour for each code.

The third stage of the analysis involved searching for the themes when all the data were coded. I considered how to allocate groups of codes under a theme to find related themes and sub-themes. I identified the main themes and sub-themes that were supported by evidence. However, there were some themes I was not sure about.

In the fourth stage, I reviewed the related themes and broke them down into sub-themes. In this process, I re-read all the data extracts to ensure the coherence of the patterns. Furthermore, if I noticed new data in themes, I re-coded them to provide a clear picture of the data. As a result, some changes were made in themes based on the new and different data. This stage enabled me to clarify the themes that I was not sure about.

In the fifth stage, when the themes were set, I defined and refined the themes and sub-themes to make sure the data addressed the research questions. I gathered each theme's story and named it appropriately in relation to my research questions. I explored the themes to carry out more detailed analysis, which assisted me to write about them. I chose brief and relevant theme titles to give the reader a clear view of each theme (see an example in Appendix L).

Finally, most related themes and examples were identified, based on their significance in relation to the research questions and the literature review. When the analysis was completed and themes and sub-themes identified clearly, significant examples were selected to present in the findings chapter. The significant data in each transcript was integrated on the same theme within two files: supervisors and specialists. Therefore, it can be noted that each theme contained the significant data from all specialists. It was advantageous to present these themes and data analysis in table to provide visual summaries. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that all pre-school teachers' comments in the open question in the questionnaire also followed all these five processes of analysis. This helped me to select the most significant findings from participants and report them in relevant sections. This approach enabled me to present the qualitative and quantitative data of individual responses gathered under similar themes.

4.6 Validity, reliability and trustworthiness

It is important to discuss the validity and reliability of the study. ‘Validity’ stems from accurate findings that provide an effective portrayal of a phenomenon or topic (Robson, 2002). Wiersma (2000) recognises two kinds of validity, internal and external. Internal validity is based on using the appropriate methods and using concepts correctly, whereas external validity concerns results’ generalisability to different people, conditions and contexts. ‘Reliability’ is based on presenting the results accurately. Consequently, this study could be validated using different approaches to the statistical and content analysis. The results had to be analysed carefully and accurately. External validity, though, was a more complex issue, due to the high number of pre-schools and cities involved. However, I took care to categorise all related data in a single theme in the study accurately, to ensure its validity.

Through the quantitative method in this study, as was already stated, samples were taken from 45 educational districts in the Ministry of Education in the KSA, allowing for consolidation of results and greater validity. The internal validity in this method of this study is ‘face validity’, which is a judgement by informed individuals as to whether the questionnaire is clear and suitable for its purpose. This was achieved by submission to referees (e.g. supervisors) and piloting. Furthermore, the internal validity of this study was achieved by ‘content validity’, which is a more detailed scrutiny of whether the questionnaire appropriately encompasses the relevant issues and concepts, achieved by the above methods and careful comparison with the relevant literature. Additionally, the external validity in this method considers ‘generalisability’. The large number of questionnaires distributed increased the ability to generalise the data collected across the entire population. The anonymous questionnaires were intended to provide the participants with an opportunity to be more honest in expressing their opinions. This point was extremely important due to the sensitivity of the research topic in Saudi society, as otherwise there was a possibility that respondents would give the answer they thought they should for moral, religious, or social reasons, or in line with societal or cultural expectations. The reliability of responses was assessed by their consistency within the questionnaire or over time.

The qualitative method in this study was interviews through a focus group discussion with pre-school supervisors and individually with specialists. The interviews were carried out in a private and comfortable setting to allow participants the freedom to express their opinions without being judged. This was important, because in qualitative research, validity and reliability are frequently seen as problematic issues that are difficult to overcome (Hartley and Chesworth, 2000; Bryman, 2008; 2016). Internal validity does not apply in qualitative methods due to their subjective ontology (i.e. participants' views rather than a single 'truth'). The issue is more how well the research reflects the experiences and perceptions of participants, while external validity is problematic because interpretive research is context-specific. Furthermore, reliability is also problematic because it implies measurement. Moreover, subjective perceptions are not expected to be stable. The quality of qualitative research is usually judged based on its trustworthiness, which can be reduced to four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of research data in qualitative enquiry, a researcher can use different types of data, such as quantitative and qualitative data (Wellington, 2015). Additionally, using different methods (i.e. questionnaire, focus group and individual interviews) to collect data from various participants such as pre-school teachers, supervisors and specialists in all educational districts in the KSA enabled triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Wellington, 2015). This assisted me to gain a fuller understanding the phenomena explored. Hence, it enhanced the trustworthiness of the research (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Furthermore, detailed description of the research context and data can help other researchers make informed decisions on whether the points raised can be transferred to different contexts, such as the Islamic context, due to the similar issue of lack of sex education in the early years (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This thesis provided a rich contextual background to facilitate such judgements. Additionally, the data and interpretation from participants' perspectives do not depend on my own preferences and viewpoints, as described in the findings analysis in Chapter 5. All data were audited by my supervisor, who is an expert in educational research, which can clearly assist the dependability and confirmability of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Interviews were audio-recorded to ensure no important information was missed and to obtain full, accurate answers (Shenton, 2004). The data can be traced also to its

sources, in the form of recordings. Moreover, the questionnaire and interview questions were translated from English to Arabic in order to ensure that questions were clearly understood. However, translation may trigger many issues, such as loss of meaning in translation, which is described in more detail in Section 4.7 of this chapter.

In addition, the questionnaire and interviews were conducted with participants, including 2,681 pre-school teachers, 20 supervisors, and eight specialists in various sectors, such as in Education in the Ministry of Education, health, law, and training centres, in order to ensure a sufficient mixture of responses from different members' perspectives. The large size and diversity of the sample created triangulation, as it gave me opportunities to obtain and evaluate data from different perspectives and positions and which were collected by different methods. Consequently, this assisted me to obtain a better understanding of the research phenomena and improved the study's trustworthiness (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Furthermore, I attempted to use a neutral interpretation in all responses from outside the research. It can be also seen that through gathering the feelings and opinions of the respondents anonymously, in a way that ensured that their responses could not be linked to them, validity was further increased.

Whilst these different methods of collection and analysis formed the central focus of the research undertaken, they cannot, however, be considered in any meaningful way without also acknowledging and addressing both my own positionality and the ethical issues that were raised. These are discussed in the next two sections.

4.7 Positionality

According to Milligan (2016, p.240) the researcher's position relates to "how researchers view themselves in the research process". Sikes (2004, p. 18) mentions that the term 'positionality' refers to someone's position as a researcher, and his/her previous knowledge 'in terms of philosophical position and fundamental assumptions concerning social reality, the nature of knowledge and human nature and agency'. Clearly, the identity of the researchers can impact on cross-cultural educational research based on their position as an insider or an outsider regarding the social and cultural context

(Thomson and Gunter, 2010). Arguably, it can be seen that my positionality in this study is influenced by my academic and personal circumstances, which were explained in Section 1.7 of my thesis. My academic background is BA and MA in Early Childhood Studies. I worked as a pre-school teacher for four years, then, in 2006; I worked as a lecturer at Umm Al-Qura University in the Early Childhood department, where I trained higher education students to be pre-school teachers. I supervised them when they were practising at pre-schools and thus supported them and evaluated their teaching practice. Therefore, as an insider to the culture and Saudi pre-school teaching, I fully understand the difficulties that could be faced by teachers and postgraduate students regarding the gap in the pre-school curriculum in the KSA related to sex education topics and the struggle with children's questions about sex and gender. Furthermore, what I shared with teacher participants is my educational background and experience of Saudi schooling system, which clearly position me as insider.

Furthermore, as an academic and a trainer and within the capacity of my social responsibility, I provided training courses in Early Childhood in Saudi society. I noticed what I considered to be the strong impact of 'shame culture' on adults in dealing with children's sexual development. Therefore, I recognised the importance of filling the gap in the curriculum and information regarding sex education. I subsequently conducted my Master's research on parents' and teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of sex education in the Saudi educational system. I found significant results that encouraged further research on sex education. Consequently, all these experiences led me to contemplate the potential of the implementation of sex education in Early Childhood Education in KSA. Moreover, at the time of collecting data, I also provided courses in child safety and protection for the Ministry of Education in the KSA. Additionally, I contributed some information about the necessity of sex education in Arabic publications and in social media, such as Twitter or Snap chat.

From another perspective, as a mother of four children who asked me sexual questions during their growth, I am insider. However, since we lived in the UK and I encouraged them to attend sex education classes because they provide accurate information to promote their skills and values, I am likely to be perceived as an outsider in this debate in Saudi society. Furthermore, being a Muslim, in other words sharing the religious background with the participants and some parents in the UK, I was utterly surprised

when I realised that most Muslim families I know in the UK withdraw their children from sex education classes. This made me realise that my approach is not necessarily in line with Saudi traditions and hence I can be viewed as an outsider because, although Islamic teachings dictate certain things, local traditions may follow a different route, which I disregard. As explained in Section 3.3, although Islamic teaching encourages Muslims to obtain information about sexuality, there is a considerable lack of studies regarding the availability of Islamic sex education, whether in Muslim or other countries where Muslim communities reside. This made me think that this struggle is related not only to Saudi culture as such, but could be an issue within Muslim communities worldwide. This impression was a motivating factor in my concern in this study to find the appropriate sex education topics for young children in the Saudi conservative society, which seemed most accessible for me. This was because as an insider I knew how to provide appropriate explanations and was better able to interpret participants' views. On the other hand, the disadvantage of my background could be the resistance of participants to reveal information if they saw me as an outsider. Nonetheless, being seen as one could allow greater objectivity and flexibility in analysing data.

From the above discussion, it can be argued that my academic and personal experiences contributed to my approach to designing the research and using appropriate methods to collect sensitive data in a conservative culture. As an insider, I fully understand the nature of Saudi society and the sensitivity regarding sex education. For example, I preferred to choose a sample of adults instead of observing children, because dealing with children may be unacceptable due to the sensitivity of the topic. Furthermore, the wording of questions was considered carefully to be acceptable and to encourage participants to openly express their opinions.

According to Hellowell (2006) it is difficult to limit the position of the researcher as either inside or outside their research in educational studies. Milligan (2016) describes this type of positionality in studies considered as socio-cultural by calling such a researcher an 'inbetweenner'. This approach combines the insider-outsider positionings of the researcher, which provides an in-depth perspective regarding studies in a cross-cultural context (Milligan, 2016), particularly, with sensitive social topics, such as sex education. Therefore, as a researcher originating from a conservative Saudi society and conducting my research with the use of Western literature, I certainly feel an

‘inbetweener’. This relates to having an insight into the culture in question as an insider and having potentially greater objectivity and flexibility as an outsider.

4.8 Ethical issues

Due to the fact that this study investigated the views and opinions of people, ethical dimensions to the methodology and research need to be considered in depth (Kane, 1994). The nature of the research and the context of the Saudi society and Islam, as discussed previously in Chapter 3, meant that moral dilemmas were likely to arise when conducting this research. The belief within Islam that it is important to educate people about sex and sexuality was emphasised in order to address these issues if they arose. Sensitivity in relation to the topic and context were central to the research undertaken. Despite the challenges to obtain ethical approval in sexual research, there could be some serious ethical dilemmas (Goldman and Padayachi, 2000; Sikes and Piper, 2010), such as unwillingness to talk about sexual abuse, especially in the conservative Saudi society. As Sikes and Piper (2008) and Halse and Honey (2007) point out, the ethical committee may seek to avoid debates in a potentially sensitive and risky study. Ethical issues are broader than this, however. It is important to consider the dilemmas, challenges and benefits of the analysis of qualitative data in sexual research (Goldman and Padayachi, 2000; Boesten and Henry, 2018). For example, most of sexual abuse victims cannot talk about their experience and therefore keep silent (Goldman and Padayachi, 2000; Baaz and Stern, 2014; Boesten and Henry, 2018), due to their personal or cultural factors.

Official permission thus had to be gained from the ethics committee at Sheffield University in the UK (see Appendix E). Then I sent the consent letter to the Ministry of Education and all participants to inform them to participate in the study and allow them to understand the topic (see Appendix F). Furthermore, I obtained official letters from the Ministry of Education in the KSA to allow access to potential participants and conduct this study legitimately in all five geographical regions (see Appendix H). Additionally, the main aims and research questions of the study were explained and justified in the letters, for greater transparency and to make sure that participants’ consent was informed (Plowright, 2011).

The participants (pre-school teachers, supervisors and specialists) also received full information in the consent letter, assuring them that their involvement in this research would not be disclosed and that any identifying information would be removed before data were analysed and reported. As Cohen et al. (2011, p. 81) stress, informed consent “refers to the voluntary consent of an individual to participate in research”. Information, along with the approval of the school, was given to teachers in advance before they participated, so that they had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the study and to ask any questions or raise concerns. All pre-school teachers, supervisors and specialists who participated in this study agreed to be part of this study by choice. As Robson (2011) stated, the initiation for all participants into any research should include their agreement to participate and understand that they have the right of access to the data of the study. This meant that during the data collection, participants were fully committed and comfortable with entering into the research sample.

The Declaration of Helsinki (1964) requires research to be properly planned and prepared, as well as having ethics committee approval. The Nuremberg Code (1949) similarly addresses the issues of potential harm to vulnerable people when they take part in studies such as this one. Risks of potential harm were reduced by ensuring that interviews were conducted at a place and time convenient to the participants. The potential misuse of recordings was also considered, and confidentiality was maintained, with all data stored in a password-protected computer. Anonymity was of central importance, due to the potential for voice recordings to be identifiable, particularly with the small sample in the interview section. These points are linked to the validity issues discussed above. Strengthening the ethical underpinnings of the study thus also increases the validity through improved trust in the undertaking. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that this study was conducted in Arabic out of necessity and the results were translated into English as accurately as possible. That said, there could still be translation issues that need to be taken into account.

4.9 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has explained in depth the mixed methods approach that was adopted for exploring the research questions. The reasoning behind the philosophical approach, and

the specific methodology were addressed. The procedures followed and the reasoning behind the methods used for the data collection, structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, from pre-school teachers, supervisors and specialists in the KSA were also explored. Juxtaposed with this discussion was a discussion of validity and reliability, as well as the ethical issues pertaining to the study.

In the next chapter, the study provides a valuable insight into the research results and highlights some challenging and controversial issues within the context of the KSA. The analysis is provided in order to answer the research questions and identify whether supporting young children in education through a formalised sex education curriculum would be possible in the KSA.

CHAPTER 5

Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of the data collection obtained from the qualitative and quantitative research. Firstly, it provides the quantitative data collected from the survey distributed amongst pre-school teachers in 45 educational districts in five different geographical regions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Secondly, it explains the results of interviews with pre-school supervisors in the Ministry of Education and specialists from various childcare-focused institutions in the KSA.

It is important to highlight that in order to aid participants' comfort, at the beginning of the questionnaire and interviews, comprehensive sex education was explained as not just relating to intercourse or sexual abuse. I therefore clarified the general definition of sex education for young children, based on the literature, as an educational process that involves the provision of information and experiences related to sexual and relationship issues, based on their age and developmental stage and taking into account their ethical and religious framework. This definition was given in appreciation of Saudi participants' culture and the lack of understanding of sex education and in accordance with the previously drawn conclusions from my Master's study (Banunnah, 2013). A limited understanding about the concept of comprehensive sex education was prevalent before the commencement of this study, but after I explained the definition, all participants expressed belief in its importance for children, families and Saudi society.

The following sections explain the quantitative and qualitative findings related to sex education for young children in Saudi society, in order to address the following research questions:

- From the participants' perspectives, to what extent should sex education be included in the three-to-six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)?

- What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?
- How should sex education topics be delivered to children between three and six years of age?

5.2 Results from the questionnaire

In this section, the quantitative data is analysed based on the results of the structured questionnaires. The pre-school teachers who participated in this study were drawn from pre-schools in all regions of the KSA, encompassing 45 educational districts (2,681 teachers). The questionnaire included questions regarding participants' general information and their experiences in relation to sex education for young children in order to address the three research questions of this study.

5.2.1 Participants' general information

With regard to the general information, the questionnaire contained demographic and general questions, such as participants' residential area in the KSA, work experience with children aged three to six years old, and the current classroom level in which they were working in pre-school. I collected these data partly to demonstrate the representativeness of the sample, which would have implications for generalizability and support the validity of the findings. Furthermore, this information was useful for further analysis. For example, the region was of interest in order to see if local culture affected views regarding implementing sex education in the pre-school curriculum. Teachers' work experience may indicate their knowledge regarding children's needs and the curriculum (DCK) and help also to understand their attitudes towards sex education. Furthermore, the age of children taught helps to present a clear picture about the registration of children in non-compulsory education and, hence, the potential reach of pre-school sex education. The results regarding these variables are presented in Table 5.1 and statistics (e.g. frequency and percentage) in respect to each of the variables is presented in detail in the following subsections. In general, most of the participants had less than five years of

experience (48.44%), with the highest response from the Western region (27.23%) and from teachers in a supervised class of children aged 5-6 years old (63.26%). These statistics will be detailed in the following subsections.

Table 5.1: Frequency statistics of participants' general information

Variable	Range / location	Frequency	Percentage
Years of experience	Less than 5 years	1272	47.44
	5-10 years	679	25.33
	11-20 years	416	15.52
	21 and more	314	11.71
Residential area	Northern region	254	9.47
	Central region	675	25.18
	Western region	730	27.23
	Eastern region	443	16.52
	Southern region	579	21.60
Classroom level	3-4 years old	260	9.70
	4-5 years old	725	27.04
	5-6 years old	1696	63.26

a) Pre-school teachers' residential areas

In this sub-section, the statistical findings from 2,681 pre-school teachers are reported based on their current residential areas in the five geographical regions of the KSA. As frequency statistics were reported in Table 5.1, here I only present the percentage of the sample participants by residential areas in each region.

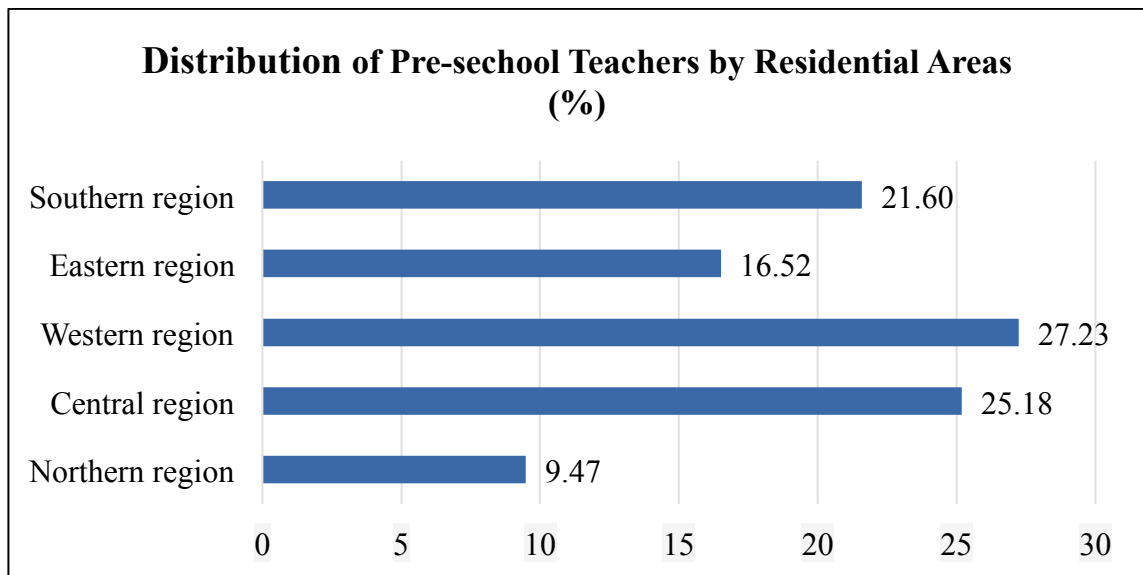


Figure 5.1: Residential areas of pre-school teachers in the KSA

Figure 5.1 above shows the residential areas of the 2,681 pre-school teachers who participated in the questionnaire, from five geographical regions in the KSA. It can be seen that teachers who participated were predominantly from the Western region (27.23%), with the next highest concentration being in the central region (25.18%), followed by the Southern region (21.60%), Eastern region (16.52%) and Northern region (9.47%). Arguably, participation from all regions in the KSA allowed this study to obtain a clear prospective on sex education for young children from local cultures in Saudi society. It can be argued that the varying percentages could reflect the numbers of pre-schools in the areas. For example, from Figure 5.1, the Northern Region was relatively under-represented because it is a relatively small and less populated area, with few cities and even fewer pre-schools. Furthermore, the high number of participants by teachers in the Southern Region may be due to the number of pre-schools there and their interest in the topic. However, some rural areas do not have pre-school education, therefore, this may show an uneven access to pre-school education in different areas and regions.

b) Pre-school teachers' work experience

It is important to understand the levels of experience of the participating pre-school teachers in working with children in pre-schools. This sub-section highlights therefore the work experience of the participating teachers.

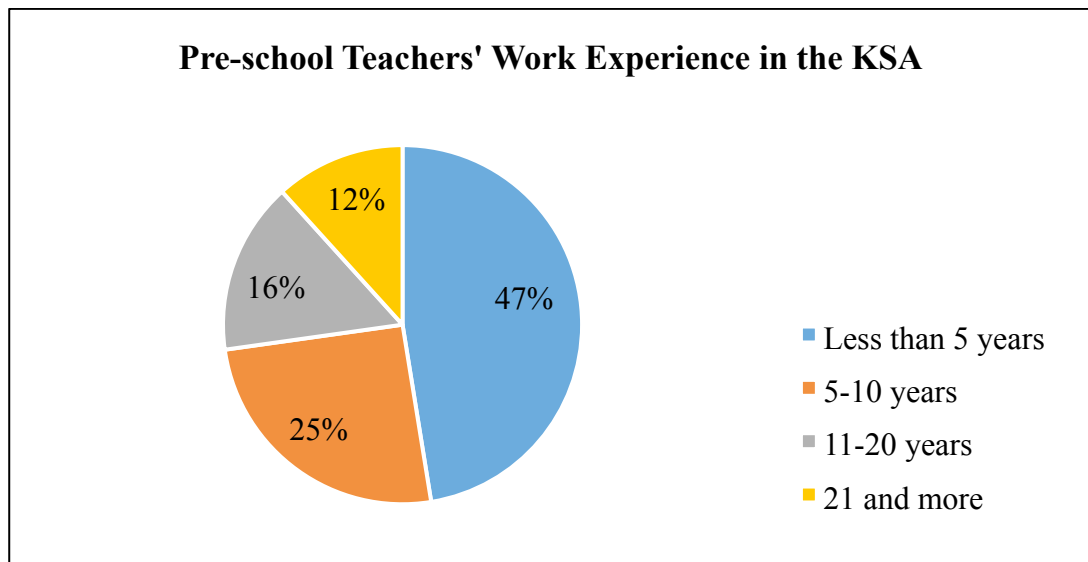


Figure 5.2: Participating pre-school teachers' work experience (%)

The number of years of work experience the participating pre-school teachers is illustrated in Figure 5.2 in order to recognise their knowledge and experience of working with children aged three to six. This may assist this study to understand teachers' attitudes towards children's development and the difficulties that they could face with children regarding sex education. The experience variable was split into four categories: less than 5 years, 5 to 10 years, 11 to 20 years and 21 years and more. In Figure 5.2, it can be seen that nearly half of the teachers (47%) had less than five years' experience of working in pre-schools. 25% of the teachers had five to 10 years of experience, 16% of them between 11 and 20 years, and 12% of them had more than 21 years' experience of working with young children. These results suggest that the majority of the teachers had relatively little working experience as pre-school teachers. One reason for this may be that pre-school education was established relatively recently. Another reason is that there is an aim in the Ministry of Education to employ specialists in Early Childhood in pre-schools, and this is a new field in higher education in Saudi universities. However, despite their relatively little experience, as recent graduates they have had more ECE specialist training than more practically experienced teachers who graduated in different fields such as history, maths, etc.

On the other hand, the experience factor could impact on the teachers' ability and confidence to answer children's questions. Therefore, arguably, policy makers would

have to take into account the large number of inexperienced teachers and non-specialists when they introduce sex education topics for young children.

c) Current classroom level

As explained in Chapter 2, the pre-school stage contains three levels. This sub-section clarifies the percentage of participating pre-school teachers who were teaching at each classroom level.

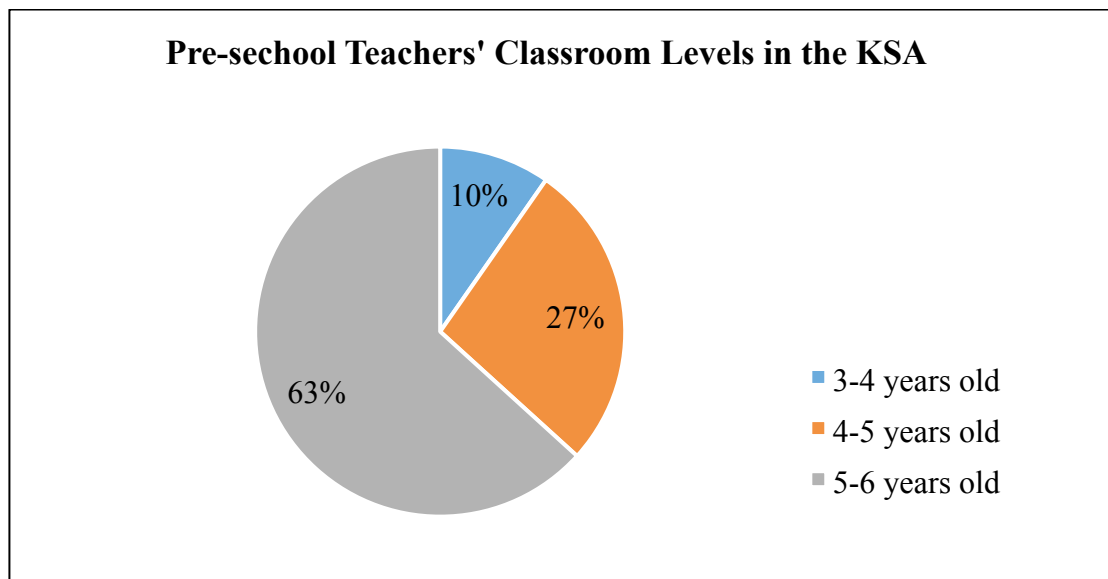


Figure 5.3: The pre-school classroom levels of participating teachers

The percentage of pre-school teachers who participated is presented here according to the classroom level that they worked with KG1 (3-4 years old), KG2 (4-5 years old) and KG3 (5-6 years old). The majority of teachers (63%) in this study were teaching children between five and six years old at KG3 level. 27% of them were teaching children between four and five, at KG2 level, while 10% of the participating teachers were teaching children at KG1 level, between three and four years old. From these results, it can be noted that by far the highest percentage of teachers, nearly two-thirds were teaching at classroom level KG3. This is to be expected because, as it was explained in Chapter 2, families are usually keener on enrolling children in pre-school at this age in

order to prepare them for compulsory education in primary school. In contrast, few children are enrolled at KG1. This distribution is representative of the general situation in pre-schools, as demonstrated in the description of the Saudi pre-school educational context in Section 2.3 of this thesis.

This sub-section has briefly presented general information about the participants' residential areas, experience, and classroom levels taught. Additionally, the questionnaire elicited findings related to the research questions. The statistical analysis of participants' responses to the 31 questions is based on 5-point Likert scales (Strongly Agree 'SA', Agree 'A', Unsure 'U', Disagree 'DA', and Strongly Disagree 'SDA'). One question contained a list of six choices and there was also one optional open-ended question about their comments and suggestions regarding the topics (see Appendix C).

5.2.2 Teachers' responses towards implementing sex education

This section presents the findings of the participating teachers' responses towards sex education for children in pre-school, appropriate sex education topics for those children, and the possibility of implementing sex education topics in the pre-school curriculum in the Saudi educational system. This report is presented in two sub-sections. The first part contains descriptive statistics for the questionnaire responses overall. The second part contains the analysis based on the individual themes.

5.2.2.1 Descriptive statistics for overall responses

Table 5.2 below provides the overall responses to the teachers' questionnaire in terms of the number of responses and percentages of 2,681 responses in each category within the Likert scales (SA, A, U, DA, SDA). Furthermore, in Q29, participants could choose more than one of the six options (multiple choice) depending on their views.

Table 5.2: Results from the Saudi pre-school teachers' questionnaires

Q	Items	N/%	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
1	The importance of pre-school	%	57.25	39.69	0.86	1.98	0.22
		N	1535	1064	23	53	6
2	The role of the pre-school teacher	%	70.20	29.32	0.11	N/A	0.37
		N	1882	786	3	N/A	10
3	Play and sexual behaviour	%	19.21	50.21	7.16	20.66	2.76
		N	515	1346	192	554	74
4	Early sex education may lead to problems	%	20.29	41.81	14.58	21.00	2.31
		N	544	1121	391	563	62
5	Negative global multimedia	%	52.29	40.95	4.18	1.75	0.82
		N	1402	1098	112	47	22
6	Children's questions	%	48.15	48.34	1.31	1.83	0.37
		N	1291	1296	35	49	10
7	Embarrassment and difficulties	%	17.68	40.32	3.02	32.97	6.01
		N	474	1081	81	884	161
8	Lack of adequate knowledge	%	29.06	54.68	7.35	8.36	0.56
		N	779	1466	197	224	15
9	Provision of wrong information	%	15.26	42.00	11.34	26.04	5.37
		N	409	1126	304	698	144
10	Ignoring children's sexual questions	%	13.20	45.06	7.27	28.24	6.23
		N	354	1208	195	757	167
11	Old socialization 'culture of shame'	%	18.65	38.19	2.50	32.34	8.32
		N	500	1024	67	867	223
12	The role of society's traditions and customs	%	31.22	54.46	1.64	10.29	2.39
		N	837	1460	44	276	64
13	Islamic education provides sex education	%	38.05	43.79	6.23	10.22	1.72
		N	1020	1174	167	274	46
14	Sex education helps to be prepared for puberty	%	40.25	44.68	7.12	6.83	1.12
		N	1079	1198	191	183	30
15	The main reason for providing 'sex education' is to make children aware of religious, health, and social guidance regarding the undesired consequences of illegitimate sex, for example sexual abuse.	%	57.03	37.86	1.90	2.69	0.52
		N	1529	1015	51	72	14
16	Lack of sufficient awareness can lead to children being harassed and exploited	%	60.95	36.22	0.90	1.83	0.11
		N	1634	971	24	49	3
17	Lack of information in the curriculum and teachers' advice.	%	41.10	51.81	3.84	2.95	0.30
		N	1102	1389	103	79	8
18	I trust any information that is provided regarding children being harassed and exploited.	%	22.04	35.84	11.04	28.38	2.69
		N	591	961	296	761	72

19	I am against providing information about sexual harassment in our society.	%	3.17	11.19	5.67	58.19	21.78
		N	85	300	152	1560	584
20	Non-organised awareness of sexual abuse and feeling unsafe	%	26.04	48.94	8.06	13.76	3.21
		N	698	1312	216	369	86
21	Curriculum contains some interesting topics about Human Physiology	%	12.27	37.93	13.84	29.95	6.01
		N	329	1017	371	803	161
22	External sources of sex education.	%	14.73	50.35	12.72	18.99	3.21
		N	395	1350	341	509	86
23	The need of information and materials to support the curriculum.	%	47.59	43.08	3.69	4.59	1.04
		N	1276	1155	99	123	28
24	The need of appropriate knowledge that can be provided to children of this age.	%	54.57	40.54	2.05	2.28	0.56
		N	1463	1087	55	61	15
25	Compulsory sex education curriculum	%	59.64	33.68	2.05	3.88	0.75
		N	1599	903	55	104	20
26	Sex education and respect for traditions	%	55.95	36.67	1.90	5.04	0.45
		N	1500	983	51	135	12
27	The cooperation of family and schools	%	64.90	32.90	0.90	1.20	0.10
		N	1740	881	24	32	4
28	Sex education topics should be taught through all the current units of the curriculum.	%	34.13	37.60	5.93	20.48	1.86
		N	915	1008	159	549	50
29	a – Gender	%	56				
		N	1501				
	b - Life Cycles	%	23				
		N	617				
	c – Relationships	%	51				
		N	1367				
	d - Personal Hygiene	%	58				
		N	1555				
e - Expressing Feelings	%	63					
	N	1689					
f - Keeping Safe	%	80					
	N	2145					
30	The current curriculum covers all the previous topics	%	7.60	23.00	6.70	51.90	10.90
		N	203	616	179	1391	292
31	Training courses and programmes to educate teachers	%	57.60	37.20	1.50	3.10	0.60
		N	1543	997	41	83	17
32	A guidance booklet for teachers	%	67.40	29.60	1.00	2.00	0.10
		N	1807	793	26	53	2
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

Table 5.2 shows all the statistical findings in response to each question in the questionnaire, to address the answers to the research questions for this study. It can be noticed that there is a considerable variation in the response patterns for different items. Some show very high agreement, others very high disagreement, while some are more mixed. For example, the strongest agreement was for pre-school teachers' belief in the importance of their own role to educate children, to which 99.5% agreed. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice the level of unsure (U) responses. There are some items for which there were no such responses, which suggests that teachers were clear and confident in their views for those topics. At the other extreme, there are items where U was as high as 14% for the idea that sex education can encourage children to engage in sexual behaviours. This could mean that for those topics, the situation was less clear, or some teachers were less confident in understanding these ideas. However, it can be highlighted that the comments in the questionnaire showed that the majority of pre-school teachers were grateful for the opportunity of this study to give them a chance to discuss this important sensitive topic about Saudi society. Table 5.2 also indicates that the majority of teachers (80%) wanted the topic: *keeping safe and looking after myself* to be added to the current curriculum while they were less keen for *life cycles (e.g., pregnancy, birth, care of the new-born)* to be included to the current curriculum, this being favoured by only 23%.

In the next Table 5.3, the positive (SA and A) results and negative (DA and SDA) results from Table 5.2 are combined into categories (labelled A and DA respectively). I have done this to clarify the total numbers of agreeing and disagreeing responses to each question according to the themes. The results showed that the statement eliciting most agreement (99.52%) was *the significant role of the pre-school teacher*, while the least agreed statement (14.36%) was *I am against providing information about sexual harassment in our society*.

Table 5.3: The results of teachers' questionnaires in the KSA (A, U, DA).

Q	Items	Agree		Unsure		Disagree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	The importance of pre-school	2599	96.94	23	0.86	59	2.20
2	The role of the pre-school teacher	2668	99.52	3	0.11	10	0.37
3	Play and sexual behaviour	1861	69.42	192	7.16	628	23.42
4	Early sex education may lead to problems	1665	62.10	391	14.58	625	23.31
5	Negative global multimedia	2500	93.25	112	4.18	69	2.57
6	Children's questions	2587	96.49	35	1.31	59	2.20
7	Embarrassment and difficulties	1555	58.00	81	3.02	1045	38.98
8	Lack of adequate knowledge	2245	83.74	197	7.35	239	8.91
9	Provision of wrong information	1535	57.25	304	11.34	842	31.41
10	Ignoring children's sexual questions	1562	58.26	195	7.27	924	34.46
11	Old socialization 'culture of shame'	1524	56.84	67	2.50	1090	40.66
12	The role of society's traditions and customs	2297	85.68	44	1.64	340	12.68
13	Islamic education provides sex education	2194	81.84	167	6.23	320	11.94
14	Sex education helps to be prepared for puberty	2277	84.93	191	7.12	213	7.94
15	Awareness of religious, health and social guidance regarding the undesired consequences of illegitimate sex, for example sexual abuse	2544	94.89	51	1.90	86	3.21
16	Lack of sufficient awareness can lead to children being harassed and exploited	2605	97.17	24	0.90	52	1.94
17	Lack of information in the curriculum and teachers' advice.	2491	92.91	103	3.84	87	3.25
18	I trust any information that is provided regarding children being harassed and exploited.	1552	57.89	296	11.04	833	31.07
19	I am against providing information about sexual harassment in our society.	385	14.36	152	5.67	2144	79.97
20	Non-organised awareness of sexual abuse and feeling unsafe	2010	74.97	216	8.06	455	16.97
21	Curriculum contains some interesting topics about Human Physiology	1346	50.21	371	13.84	964	35.96

22	External sources of sex education.	1745	65.09	341	12.72	595	22.19
23	The need of information and materials to support the curriculum.	2431	90.68	99	3.69	151	5.63
24	The need of appropriate knowledge that can be provided to children of this age.	2550	95.11	55	2.05	76	2.83
25	Compulsory sex education curriculum	2502	93.32	55	2.05	124	4.63
26	Sex education and respect for traditions	2483	92.62	51	1.90	147	5.48
27	The cooperation of family and schools	2621	97.80	24	0.90	36	1.30
28	Sex education topics should be taught through all the current units of the curriculum.	1923	71.73	159	5.93	599	22.34
29		N	%				
	a – Gender	1501	56%				
	b - Life Cycles	617	23%				
	c – Relationships	1367	51%				
	d - Personal Hygiene	1555	58%				
	e - Expressing Feelings	1689	63%				
	f - Keeping Safe	2145	80%				
30	The current curriculum covers all the previous topics	819	30.60	179	6.70	1683	62.80
31	Training courses and programmes to educate teachers	2540	94.80	41	1.50	100	3.70
32	A guidance booklet for teachers	2600	97.00	26	1.00	55	2.10
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

Regarding the ‘unsure’ statements, it can be seen that participants were most uncertain about the *early sex education may lead to problems* (14.58%) whereas they were least unsure about *the role of the pre-school teacher* (0.11%). Concerning disagreed statements, the majority of the participants (79.97%) disagreed with *I am against providing information about sexual harassment in our society*.

The above sections have illustrated the general information of participating teachers in terms of their residential areas in the KSA, work experience in pre-school and the level of classes in which they were working with children. Furthermore, the results of the questionnaire related to the topic of sex education for young children were presented clearly in the two tables. In the following sub-section, the individual themes that led to finding the answers to the research questions are discussed separately.

5.2.2.2 Individual themes

As I explained in Chapter 4, it is important to code the results by individual themes, which facilitates addressing the answers to the three research questions from 2,681 pre-school teachers' perspectives. Furthermore, this sub-section presents the results from the open-ended question, which was an optional item part in the questionnaire that allowed teachers to write down their comments and suggestions regarding sex education for young children. Seven hundred teachers wrote comments in the open section of the questionnaire. All responses for the comment section were delivered in one section in the first phase of the analysis through the link of Google Drive (see Appendix N), as explained in Chapter 4. Therefore, it can be demonstrated that the second phase of coding these comments was reading and re-reading the data to recognise and note initial ideas. I generated initial codes for the interesting data that gave the participants' broad views. Then, all data codes were collated and gathered within each related theme. I checked the relations between themes and codes and generated the related comments and designed a mind map so that the themes that were in the questionnaire emerged by using the Word tools. I gathered all the ideas under each relevant theme. For example, I identified most pre-school teachers' comments expressed greeting and gratitude. Additionally, I reported the interested relevant comments that addressed the research questions. Finally, I gathered these comments with related themes in the questionnaire. Therefore, illustrative examples are quoted throughout the section, under the relevant themes to build the discussion and to have more clarification of their personal views. It can be demonstrated that all themes were derived a priori from the literature and built into the questionnaire items. Furthermore, although the data contained a huge amount of information, it could not all be included in this chapter. The selection of illustrative quotations was based on relevance to the research questions and the themes derived from the questionnaire and the literature. Moreover, conflicting points of view were represented, in order to reflect the complexities of the issues in reference to a wide range of opinions.

The results of the questionnaire are divided into nine individual themes that were identified based on responses' relevance to the three research questions as follows:

a) The importance of sex education for children, based on (1) children's development and curiosity, (2) concern about sexual problems, and (3) sex education and child protection.

- b) Appropriate sex education topics, divided into (4) current curriculum and sex education, and (5) sex education topics.
- c) Provision of sex education, including (6) school's role, (7) parental role, (8) cultural role, and (9) training courses.

In this sub-section, the statistical results are therefore presented according to these individual themes in order to obtain a better grasp of the implications that they present.

1) The importance of sex education for children

This section presents the responses from pre-school teachers to items regarding the importance of sex education for children's development and curiosity, teachers' concerns about sexual abuse of children in the Saudi society and the need for sex education for the purpose of child protection.

Children's development and curiosity

The findings regarding pre-school teachers' experience of children's sexual development and behaviours during the pre-school day are presented in this theme. Table 5.4 below demonstrates the findings for the three items included in this theme of children's sexual development in terms of behaviours, problems and commonly raised questions related to sex education.

Table 5.4: Children's development

Q	Items	N / %	SA	A	U	DA	SDA
3	Play and sexual behaviour	%	19.21	50.21	7.16	20.66	2.76
		N	515	1346	192	554	74
4	Early sex education may lead to problems	%	20.29	41.81	14.58	21.00	2.31
		N	544	1121	391	563	62
6	Children's questions	%	48.15	48.34	1.31	1.83	0.37
		N	1291	1296	35	49	10
14	Sex education helps to be prepared for puberty	%	40.25	44.68	7.12	6.83	1.12
		N	1079	1198	191	183	30
Note: N = frequency, % = percentage							

These items reveal agreement in recognising aspects of children's development and sexual problems, supporting the need for sex education. During the period of children's growth, they may display some behaviours that are considered to be sexual problems due to their curiosity to discover the other sex. In general, teachers strongly agreed (range = 19.21% - 20.91%) and agreed (range = 50.21% - 41.81%) with the statements measuring their views on children's development and sexual problems. More specifically, in Q3, there was widespread agreement (69.42% in total) that while children play with their friends, they display curiosity for discovery. The majority of teachers agreed that when children play with their friends in adult roles (e.g. father, mother, doctor, or driver) some sexual behaviour could be displayed, which could raise teachers' concerns. For this reason, some teachers were worried about the possibility of increasing such behaviours. For example, a comment by a pre-school teacher in this regard is that "I suggest we do not talk about the bodily difference between genders because it will encourage children for more exploration". It seems that a majority of pre-school teachers do not have abilities to deal with these behaviours. Therefore, some teachers suggest that dealing with such behaviours requires the involvement of a psychologist. There was also a significant percentage of the respondents (23.31%) who disagreed on this issue, however. One of those disagreeing teachers, who has five years of experience, commented, "I did not see abnormal sexual behaviours in kindergarten. However, I know that some sexual problems could occur in the elementary stage because children may lack the appropriate care and appropriate guidance from their teachers in other educational stages". It can be argued that this teacher is an example of one who acknowledges early childhood needs and development, having a degree in this field.

However, some teachers feared that early sex education could encourage children to display many sexual problems due to their desire for experimentation. It can be seen that in response to Q4, 62.10% of pre-school teachers agreed that sex education might lead to sexual problems. This result shows that teachers worry about children becoming sexually aware and that they may face difficulties in addressing these issues with children. Therefore, they may have been afraid to introduce this topic in this young age group. An experienced pre-school teacher commented: "Do not go into this sexual aspect, because it draws children's attention to inappropriate behaviours", which illustrates a concern for a possible link between sex education and sexual behaviours. For this reason, one teacher

suggested, “Sex education may be unnecessary at this early age and it will suffice to have topics about children’s rights and self-defence”. Furthermore, this was the item with the highest number of unsure responses in the questionnaire results, with 14.58% of teachers were not sure about this point, so they may have lacked confidence to make a judgement on this statement. A possible explanation of this result could be due to the lack of information about sexual development and the importance of sex education. However, if teachers have this uncertain attitude towards children’s healthy sexual development and confuse it with abnormal sexual behaviours, they may not be able to educate children effectively on sexual matters. However, in Q6, almost all teachers (96.49%) agreed that children from age three to six years questioned the world around them, to explore it for themselves. For example, one experienced teacher commented “one of the most common questions being asked is ‘Where do babies come from?’”. Therefore, arguably, children need correct information about their sexual developments. Furthermore, as they need sex education for their developmental sexual growth, in Q14, 40.25% of teachers strongly agreed that correct sex education helped children prepare for puberty, especially given the early occurrence of puberty, sometimes as early as at the age of eight years, and 44.68% agreed on this point.

This result shows teachers’ agreement with the claims in the literature review in Chapter 3 that young children need to understand the puberty signs before reaching it, in order to accept their changes in a healthy manner.

Concern about Sexual Abuse

The statistical results on the importance of sex education for children and the clear concern about sexual abuse in the Saudi society are presented according to pre-school teachers’ views in this sub-section. Table 5.5 below clarifies the findings for items comprising this theme of the concern about sexual abuse of children in Saudi society.

Table 5.5: Concern about sexual abuse

Q	Items	N/ %	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
15	The main reason for providing 'sex education' is to make children aware of religious, health, and social guidance regarding the undesired consequences of illegitimate sex, for example sexual abuse.	%	57.03	37.86	1.90	2.69	0.52
		N	1529	1015	51	72	14
16	Lack of sufficient awareness can lead to children being harassed and exploited	%	60.95	36.22	0.90	1.83	0.11
		N	1634	971	24	49	3
Note: N = frequency, % = percentage							

It can be seen that teachers recognised a significant need for sex education provision to build children's awareness of sexual problems that can occur in the Saudi society, such as sexual abuse. In response to Q15, almost all teachers (94.89%) agreed that the main reason for providing sex education was to make children aware of religious, health, and social guidance regarding the undesired consequences of illegitimate sex, for example, sexual abuse, with 57.03% strongly agreeing and 37.86% agreeing. It can be suggested that this item received a high percentage of agreement at least in the past due to the clarification of the definition of sex education, including that it is based on the aspects of religious values, healthy information and the social norms of Saudi society to make children aware of sexual abuse. Interestingly, it can be argued that the very small number of unsure responses suggests that teachers had strong, confident opinions on this issue, framing the need for sex education in terms of their high concern about sexual abuse in the Saudi society. The majority of teachers commented on the need for this topic due their concern about sexual abuse. For example, one pre-school teacher, with experience of 11 to 20 years, commented "Many thanks for introducing this important topic at this time, when children are surrounded by the dangers of sexual harassment, which destroys their innocence". Another expressed the same concern, and reflected prevailing social assumptions about the source of the problems "The prevalence of sexual harassment is raised in the society, especially from foreign drivers; therefore, we should raise the awareness in children".

Additionally, it can be argued that pre-school teachers perceived a connection between the lack of sex education awareness and sexual abuse of children. In response to Q16, nearly two thirds (60.95%) of teachers strongly agreed that lack of sufficient and correct awareness about how to protect themselves can lead to children being harassed and exploited, while a further 36.22% agreed on this point. As demonstrated in the literature review, several studies report evidence indicating that children who undergo sex education are more confident and have the ability to keep themselves safe from sexual abuse. For this reason, in this study most teachers suggested that, for example, “Children must be taught the right way to behave in case sexual harassment may happen”. Similarly a teacher commented that educators should warn children not to go out alone, whether girls or boys, and not to talk to any strangers”. Furthermore, some of them provided advice such as “I wish you to address the issue of the personal destruction of the child who has been sexually abused. Teach everyone that the child is not supposed to be punished and made the subject of scandal, but we must make him feel safe”. She expressed concerns also about correct ways of dealing with a victim child in the school or family. For this reason, due to the sensitivity of this issue some teachers suggested consulting specialists in sex education and sexual abuse although individuals with such expertise are rare in Saudi Arabia. It is also important to note that providing children with skills, knowledge and strategies is only one half of the equation: these issues need to be addressed across society to prevent the perpetration of all forms of abuse.

Sex education and child protection

The findings regarding dealing with concerns about sexual abuse and protecting children in Saudi society are demonstrated from the pre-school teachers’ perspectives in this subsection. Table 5.6 below clarifies the findings of this theme on the current awareness of child protection from sexual abuse in Saudi society.

Table 5.6: Sex education and child protection

Q	Items	N/ %	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
17	Lack of information in the curriculum and teachers' advice.	%	41.10	51.81	3.84	2.95	0.30
		N	1102	1389	103	79	8
18	I trust any information that is provided regarding children being harassed and exploited.	%	22.04	35.84	11.04	28.38	2.69
		N	591	961	296	761	72
19	I am against providing information about sexual harassment in our society.	%	3.17	11.19	5.67	58.19	21.78
		N	85	300	152	1560	584
20	Non-organised awareness of sexual abuse and feeling unsafe	%	26.04	48.94	8.06	13.76	3.21
		N	698	1312	216	369	86
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

These results show that teachers worried about sexual abuse of children in society, therefore, felt they have an important role in raising child protection awareness. Due to the lack of information regarding sex education and child protection in the curriculum, 92.91% of teachers agreed in response to Q17 that they personally tried to advise children about healthy bodies and protecting themselves from sexual abuse. Consequently, pre-school teachers tried to find information through, for example, the Internet or by recommendation from friends to make children aware of possible protection. However, raising awareness about this sensitive topic with young children in the conservative Saudi society might require different resources that respect local social norms and values. Considering the issue of sexual abuse in society requires trust and correct information for teachers, children, and families; otherwise it could impact negatively on children. Some pre-school teachers shared their experience. For example one of them commented in the questionnaire on how she tried to fill the gap in the DKC:

Due to the lack of safeguarding topics in the current curriculum, I have already worked hard to design a programme for awareness of child sexual harassment, which I have provided to many mothers and children in the pre-school. In fact, children and families need to know real stories about sexual harassment in the society and to be aware about the signs of child sexual abuse.

On the other hand, more than a quarter (28.38%) of teachers disagreed, in Q18, and stated that they did not trust any information provided with reference to children being harassed and exploited. More than half (57%) of them, however, said they trusted any information that could protect children.

One teacher acknowledged that she might have made a mistake in trusting sources and providing them to children. She said,

Five years ago, I took care of this subject to warn pre-school children to protect themselves from sexual harassment, based on my life experience, search and education. I provided information for children based on warning others, my body is mine, do not touch me, running away and shouting 'No' I may have made mistakes because of my lack of knowledge of this subject. So, I hope there will be training courses to qualify teachers to spread correct sex education. I have been a kindergarten teacher for 23 years and I will complete what I started but with good training.

Similarly, another commented "I do not agree with idea of 'my body is mine, do not touch me', because these claims based on intimidation were not helpful".

Thus, one of the strongest areas of disagreement (58.19% DA and 21.78% SDA) was with Q19, concerning opposition to the provision of information about sexual harassment in the Saudi context. This result is consistent with the previous results regarding the concern about sexual abuse and the subsequent perceived need for sex education to protect children of this age. For this reason, the majority of teachers suggested awareness provision in this regard in the society. For example, one teacher pointed out that "training courses should be provided for children to raise their awareness about sexual harassment". Furthermore, they asked for this awareness based on correct information to be provided for educators (parents and teachers) to assist young children. An experienced pre-school teacher suggested, "Provide training courses for teachers and parents to brief them on the approach of personal protection in simple ways to keep our children safe from sexual harassment. Both adults and children need to have awareness about this 'epidemic' in the society". Therefore, some teachers highlighted the school's significant role in child protection awareness in the society. For example, one teacher mentioned, "I suggest that

kindergartens should be forced to activate annually a deliberate campaign against sexual harassment of children, to educate their parents”.

In contrast, teachers perceived that the current non-organised awareness regarding protection from sexual abuse reflected negatively on children and their families in the Saudi society. It can be seen that in Q20 more than three-quarters of teachers agreed that non-organised awareness of sexual abuse leads children and their parents to be scared of people and feel unsafe in society (26.04% SA and 48.94% A). These fears and concerns could arise for many reasons, such as using warning language to protect children, as demonstrated above, or due to the lack of information about this sensitive topic in society. Furthermore, the nature of Saudi society is conservative, influenced by traditions and the ‘shame culture’. For example, some teachers described the state of sexual topics in Saudi society, as taboo. However, a significant minority of teachers disagreed (16.97%) with this item. They might feel the importance of education due to the current openness whereby people share stories of sexual abuse cases, for example by drivers. A teacher confirmed the need for “Caution about drivers and what should be touched on the children’s body and strengthening the concept of sexual abuse and its signs to mothers to teach them to notice any abnormal changes on their children”. Clearly, given the prevailing panic about sexual abuse in the Saudi society, the lack of sex education leads some people to accept unorganised and uninformed awareness. Thus, the provision of organised sex education can better protect children and limit the negative consequences of non-organised education.

It can be seen that the previous results present pre-school teachers’ attitudes towards the importance of sex education for children’s development, concerns about sexual abuse and child protection. Furthermore, pre-school teachers asked for sex education for children to be incorporated in the curriculum, and for connections to be made with parents and families. Therefore, their views on appropriate topics in this regard in Saudi education are reported in the next section, which is related to the second research question of this study.

2) Appropriate sex education topics for children

This section reports the teachers' perspectives based on their experience in pre-school and of the state of sex education in the current curriculum, regarding the appropriate sex education topics. These perceptions reflect their views of sex education and are presented based on young children's needs in the Saudi society.

Current curriculum and sex education

In this sub-section, the statistical results indicate the perceived status of sex education in the pre-school curriculum. Table 5.7 presents the findings for the theme of the current curriculum and sex education.

Table 5.7: Curriculum and sex education

Q	Items	N/%	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
21	Curriculum contains some interesting topics about Human Physiology	%	12.27	37.93	13.84	29.95	6.01
		N	329	1017	371	803	161
22	External sources of sex education.	%	14.73	50.35	12.72	18.99	3.21
		N	395	1350	341	509	86
23	The need of information and materials to support the curriculum.	%	47.59	43.08	3.69	4.59	1.04
		N	1276	1155	99	123	28
24	The need of appropriate knowledge that can be provided to children of this age.	%	54.57	40.54	2.05	2.28	0.56
		N	1463	1087	55	61	15
25	Compulsory sex education curriculum	%	59.64	33.68	2.05	3.88	0.75
		N	1599	903	55	104	20
26	Sex education and respect for traditions	%	55.95	36.67	1.90	5.04	0.45
		N	1500	983	51	135	12
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

The teachers differed in their views regarding the availability of information in the curriculum. In Q21, more than a third (35.96%) of teachers disagreed that the school's curriculum contained some interesting topics about human physiology and there was a high percentage of uncertainty (13.84%). The latter may be due to the teachers' focus on the academic topics of the curriculum and ignoring, for example, gender-related topics. One experienced pre-school teacher, who was unsure about this question pointed out, "I do not

think it is appropriate for children from the age of 3 to 6. In fact, this stage's innocent and just their knowledge of the differences between the sexes can impact on their innocence". Therefore, it can be argued that even though the current curriculum may contain some topics about physical development, some teachers may not believe in their importance for children, causing them to ignore these matters. Another possible reason for this high level of uncertainty could be due to the flexibility of the (DKC) curriculum, which allows teachers to choose topics, as explained in Chapter 2.

Because of the flexibility given to teachers and perceived inadequacy of local resources, the majority of teachers used sources and materials from outside the pre-school curriculum to educate children on topics about sex education. In Q22, 14.73% of respondents strongly agreed and 50.35% agreed that they used teaching aids from external sources to teach children about sex education. An experienced teacher explained that "the current curriculum lacks educational materials regarding sex education, so we depend on personal effort to raise awareness". This potentially gave the teachers the opportunity to add information, as suggested by one teacher: "We have the freedom to add what is useful in teaching units; there are no limitations in the curriculum". Reflecting the interest in this topic, in Q23, a great majority of teachers (90.67%) agreed that there was a need for more information and materials about sex education to support the curriculum topics and teachers. Similarly, in Q24, there was almost total agreement (95.11%) among teachers that they needed knowledge of sex education information and topics suitable to be provided to children of this age. It is important to recognise that teachers perceived a strong need for unified sex education topics to educate both teachers and children. As mentioned by a new pre-school teacher "I suggest standardization of scientific inputs for sex education at the ministry level". Another teacher argued, "The curriculum must be developed in order to keep abreast of the latest developments in the present age, also in a way that suits the mentality of children, because they are more open than in the past".

Additionally, in Q25, 92.3% of the respondents agreed that it is important to apply a compulsory sex education curriculum in schools to assist children to be aware and maintain their physical, social, and psychological health. At the same time, almost all teachers (92.62%) agreed that sex education topics in the curriculum should respect Saudi traditions and customs (55.95% SA and 35.67% A). If sex education is made compulsory,

teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes towards it may be improved, due to their confidence and passion. Moreover, most teachers suggested that sex education should be provided at all educational stages. For example one teacher expressed their hope that "the compulsory curriculum for pre-school will also be suitable for the next educational stages. However, there is a gap between the DKC and primary and secondary schools' curricula". In addition, although some teachers identify changes in children's lives, the conservative culture seems to lag behind these changes.

In order to apply sex education in the Saudi educational system, it is important to find the appropriate topics for children that pre-school teachers would be implemented in the curriculum. This is the subject of the next theme.

Sex education topics

The statistical results on the pre-school curriculum need for sex education topics are presented from pre-school teachers' views in this sub-section. Table 5.8 below clarifies the findings about appropriate sex education topics for young children and their possible provision in the Saudi pre-school curriculum.

Table 5.8: Sex education topics

Q	Items	N/%	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
28	Sex education topics should be taught through all the current units of the curriculum.	%	34.13	37.60	5.93	20.48	1.86
		N	915	1008	159	549	50
29	a – Gender	%	56				
		N	1501				
	b - Life Cycles	%	23				
		N	617				
	c – Relationships	%	51				
		N	1367				
	d - Personal Hygiene	%	58				
		N	1555				
e - Expressing Feelings	%	63					
	N	1689					
f - Keeping Safe	%	80					
	N	2145					
30	The current curriculum covers all the previous topics	%	7.60	23.00	6.70	51.90	10.90
		N	203	616	179	1391	292
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

The results in this theme were focused on the preferred approach to introducing compulsory topics in the curriculum. For example, in Q28, about how to present sex education topics, 71.73% of teachers agreed that they should be in all the current units of the curriculum. This integrated approach might help to smoothly introduce the topics from different perspectives into related units throughout the academic year. However, not all teachers agreed, as one teacher pointed out that “Sex education does not have to be in all areas of units”. There was also a high rate of disagreement on this item (22.34%). Those who disagreed wanted sex education to be an additional unit in the curriculum, making the number of compulsory units 11, instead of 10, as at present. One pre-school teacher shared her comment that “It is necessary to include the personal safety topic as a basic unit of the DKC or to integrate it with the health and safety unit”. The separate unit approach could be more focused; however, the ‘shame culture’ of teachers may lead them to be unwilling to provide it appropriately.

With regard to the topics relevant for young children, in response to Q29, teachers chose them based on their experience and perception of curriculum needs. For instance, more than half (56%) of teachers thought that children should be taught the differences between genders (boy/girl), while just 23% of them asked for topics on the life cycle (pregnancy, birth, care of new-born babies). Half of the respondents (51%), however, wanted to include relationships (family, house worker, driver, friends, society), more than half (58%) called for topics about personal hygiene, and almost two thirds of teachers (63%) wanted topics to teach children to express feelings and different attitudes. “Keeping safe and looking after myself” was the most significant topic, endorsed by 80%. It can be seen that the highest demand was for the ‘keeping safe’ topic, due to the perceived need for this awareness in the Saudi society to protect children from sexual abuse. Moreover, most of teachers’ comments in the open questions demonstrated their perceptions of the need for this topic. For example “I suggest creating only one appropriate intensive unit containing topics of harassment to give clear correct information about this”. Additionally, “Keeping safe from sexual abuse is a significant topic that needs to be introduced in the curriculum through the formal descriptive activity or informally in playtime”. However, it can be argued that as some teachers commented, focusing only on the topic of keeping safe might result in ignoring other important topics in sex education. Other teachers preferred to place the emphasis on topics regarding relationships, hygiene, birth and the life cycle, expressing

feelings and gender. A rationale for this is provided in this teachers' comment: "It is important to change existing curricula to include topics that promote children's personal and community life".

However, almost two thirds (51.90% DA and 10.90% SDA) of teachers disagreed with Q30, that the current curriculum covers all the previously mentioned topics and explains all the related activities and materials. For this reason, some teachers commented in this study that the current curriculum (DKC) should be developed to contain advanced topics to cope with globalisation. They expressed a belief that the DKC should be in line with the current areas of the curriculum. For example, "I favour use of stories or educational performances to educate the child about these topics. Furthermore, I resorted to games for iPads focused on this topic". Although teachers wanted to implement topics and have materials suited to the current era, most of them stressed that it is important that sex education provided in the curriculum is based on Islamic values. Interestingly, one experienced teacher who favoured the inclusion of all the suggested sex education topics commented: "I hope this topic will be implemented in our curricula and not just for your study". Therefore, I hope these results can be considered as a basic ground for sex education topics implementation in the Saudi educational system.

3) Provision of sex education

This section reports the quantitative results of items addressing sex education provision by adults. In response to these items, pre-school teachers showed their attitudes towards the roles of the school, parents and the Saudi culture and their beliefs about providing children with sex education. Furthermore, the section highlights the teachers' perceptions of their need for training in this regard.

Role of teachers and their beliefs

This sub-section presents the results of pre-school teachers' beliefs regarding the significance of pre-school and its role in children's development in the Saudi society. The

theme of school role can be considered both overall and in terms of the subthemes of the significance of pre-school and the teachers' responses to children's questions. The overall score for school role was obtained by summing the scores on the two above-mentioned scales. Here, I report the results for each subtheme separately, in order to understand the emerging themes in depth. Table 5.9 below illustrates the findings for the two items comprising the sub-themes of the significance of pre-school.

Table 5.9: The significance of pre-school

Q	Items	N/%	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
1	The importance of pre-school	%	57.25	39.69	0.86	1.98	0.22
		N	1535	1064	23	53	6
2	The role of the pre-school teacher	%	70.20	29.32	0.11	N/A	0.37
		N	1882	786	3	N/A	10

Note. N = frequency, % = percentage

The results show that the great majority of teachers believed in the importance of pre-school. 57.25% of the teachers strongly agreed and 39.69% of them agreed that pre-school was the main source of children's social development and awareness of individual and family life, through the provision of knowledge and required skills. However, some schools are led by leaders who are not experts in early childhood, which could have a negative impact on children and the curriculum. An example of numerous comments in this regard is by a newly qualified teacher:

There is a gap between the Early Childhood field in university and the pre-school. Information is not applied as required, especially in the villages, because the head teachers are not specialists in pre-school education. Consequently, the regulations of the Ministry of Education might be applied just on paper.

This implies the importance of employing staff with good knowledge of Early Childhood Education in pre-school, due to its significant impact on children's development.

Moreover, pre-school teachers believed in their own role to educating children. It can be seen that in Q2, 70.20% of teachers strongly agreed and 29.32% of them agreed that pre-school teachers play important roles in developing the awareness of children and protecting their physical, emotional, and mental health. However, viewing this responsibility this way

could impact negatively on children if teachers lack knowledge and training, as I demonstrated above regarding unorganised awareness.

Additionally, despite the significance of pre-school teachers for children, some teachers have difficulties with sex-related questions asked by children. The results of responses of pre-school teachers regarding the items on children’s questions about sex in the classroom are summarised in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10: Teachers’ responses to children’s questions

Q	Items	N/%	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
7	Embarrassment and difficulties	%	17.68	40.32	3.02	32.97	6.01
		N	474	1081	81	884	161
8	Lack of adequate knowledge	%	29.06	54.68	7.35	8.36	0.56
		N	779	1466	197	224	15
9	Provision of wrong information	%	15.26	42.00	11.34	26.04	5.37
		N	409	1126	304	698	144
10	Ignoring children’s sexual questions	%	13.20	45.06	7.27	28.24	6.23
		N	354	1208	195	757	167
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

These items highlight how teachers react to children’s questions. In response to Q7, 17.68% of the teachers strongly agreed and 40.32% agreed that they had been embarrassed and found it difficult to discuss some topics with children, especially topics related to sex and gender; thus, more than half of the participants overall reported problems of this kind. These results may be due to the lack of information, or because of the ‘shame culture’ common among pre-school teachers. Some of the respondents confirmed this in their comments. For example, one suggested that “sexual information for boys should be provided by a male”. Another example is the comment of a teacher who disagreed with providing sex education in pre-school. This teacher, who had more than 21 years of experience, commented: “We do not talk about this sensitive topic in pre-schools because most teachers are not married”. This view that the topic of sex is shameful or embarrassing for those who are unmarried, who traditionally should not know about or be interested in sex-related matters, shows how the Saudi culture can impact on the provision of sex education. However, also a significant percentage (38.98%) of the respondents disagreed with this item. For example, one teacher who disapproved of this view claimed that

“Teachers should deal with children’s questions simply and answer correctly”. Moreover, a newly qualified teacher suggested that “Children should be encouraged to ask interesting questions by answering them”. These teachers may have an ability to deal with such questions correctly or they may avoid them, due to the ‘shame culture’ surrounding conversations about sex or gender. This can be further demonstrated by the fact that in Q8, there was a high level of agreement that some teachers lack adequate knowledge to discuss children’s questions related to health and sex education, with 29.06% strongly agreeing and 54.68% agreeing. Therefore, due to the lack of information and skills to answer sexual questions, one teacher suggested that “schools should have a guide teacher able to answer their sexual questions, because some teachers may not be interested in explaining and discussing sex education topics; consequently, they are not responding to children”.

Indeed, in Q9, more than half of the teachers agreed that they may provide incorrect information to avoid embarrassment and 11.34% of them were not sure. In Q10, moreover, 13.20% strongly agreed and 45.06% agreed that they ignored children’s embarrassing questions due to the lack of knowledge about information appropriate for their age group; however, around a third (34.47%) disagreed to some extent. These strategies of avoiding answering sexual questions can lead children to many sexual problems because they will try to find the information from untrustworthy sources such as friends or the Internet. Some teachers, though, feel that sex education is the role of parents. However, an experienced pre-school teacher stressed that “Educating teachers is important because it is complementary to the family role in raising children’s awareness and answering their questions according to their age”. Therefore, it is important for policy makers to consider that pre-school teachers should have correct information about sex education and to promote their skills to provide sex education topics for children effectively.

Role of parents and their beliefs

This sub-section presents participants’ views on parents’ role in educating their children on sex topics and the importance of cooperation between family and school to provide sex education for children in the Saudi society. Table 5.11 therefore clarifies the findings for this theme.

Table 5.11: Responsibility for sex education provision

Q	Themes	N/%	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
27	The cooperation of family and schools	%	64.90	32.90	0.90	1.20	0.10
		N	1740	881	24	32	4
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

Although school and the curriculum have a role in shaping sex education information to promote children’s skills regarding sex education, parents also have the same role. The quantitative results show that pre-school teachers believed in the importance of cooperation between the school and parents to provide an effective curriculum. It can be seen that responses to Q27 regarding cooperation between families and schools in providing the appropriate topics of sex education for children showed overwhelming support, with 97.80% agreeing and strongly agreeing. Furthermore, a majority of teachers’ comments on this issue pointed out that parents have the main responsibility to discuss sex education topics with their children and make them aware for protective purposes. For example, an experienced pre-school teacher explained “The family is mainly responsible for guiding them in these shameful things and keeping them from dangers and harassment”. It can be noticed that the use of the phrase ‘shameful things’, however, suggests that the respondent might have wanted to leave this role to parents because of her own embarrassment, consistent with the earlier findings on the ‘shame culture’. A suggestion was made by one of the teachers that pre-schools (which are staffed by women) could make mothers aware by inviting them to the school and discussing the related issues, but that fathers (who for cultural reasons could not easily join in the discussions on personal issues with female teachers) also need awareness about sex education. Therefore, as another teacher commented, “both parents must be familiar with open communication with their children to give them confidence in talking about sexual issues and not intimidating them”. Another teacher explained the significance of parents’ education in this regard, to assist their children:

Parents must also be trained to educate their children on the subject in a manner that does not lose their innocence or feeling safe towards others. Attention should be paid to play and drawings to analyse children’s personality. In this way, the signs of the problem can be discovered, especially as most of the

problems of sexual harassment of children come from someone related and close.

Such comments reflect a lack of communication between parents and their children and between parents and schools due to the ‘shame culture’ in the Saudi society. However, children who are sexually abused will be scared and cannot report this to their parents. For this reason, one teacher argued that

There is a significant need for parents to teach children how to defend themselves. Children must learn that the parents are a source of safety and they must be informed of what is happening to them.

More importantly, regarding people who are constrained by the ‘shame culture’, another teacher stressed that “In contrast, people who want to educate their children and raise awareness of sex education should not take the ‘shame culture’ as a barrier”.

Considering these results from the sociocultural perspective, it appears that the Saudi culture plays a significant role in influencing teachers and parents, which could reflect on children’s development and education. Social influences are addressed more directly in the next theme.

Role of society and prevailing beliefs

This sub-section provides the results of teachers’ perspectives on the role of cultural influences in children’s sexual development. Table 5.12 below illustrates the findings for items related to the media, globalisation, Saudi culture and Islam, which comprise this theme of ‘society’s role’.

Table 5.12: Social roles

Q	Items	N/%	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
5	Negative global multimedia	%	52.29	40.95	4.18	1.75	0.82
		N	1402	1098	112	47	22
11	Old socialization ‘culture of shame’	%	18.65	38.19	2.50	32.34	8.32
		N	500	1024	67	867	223
12	The role of society’s traditions and customs	%	31.22	54.46	1.64	10.29	2.39
		N	837	1460	44	276	64
13	Islamic education provides sex education	%	38.05	43.79	6.23	10.22	1.72
		N	1020	1174	167	274	46
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

Although the Saudi society is considered conservative, now it is more open than previously, due to globalisation and internal political changes. As discussed in relation to previous results, children exhibit certain curiosity and ask about the world around them. However, global multimedia contains some information and sexual views that are deemed inappropriate, especially for children who live in the Saudi conservative society. In Q5, there was almost a total agreement (93.24%) and more than half (52.29%) of participants strongly agreed that there was a negative impact from the media. Teachers were highly concerned that the media can affect children's behaviours negatively and cause them to behave inappropriately or be exploited sexually. Some behaviour that may be accepted in other societies, such as hugs and kissing, may not be acceptable in the Saudi culture, due to the 'shame culture'.

Despite this cultural sensitivity, it can be seen that, in Q11, although over half of the teachers (56.84%) agreed that they avoided talking about sensitive topics related to sex education due to their socialisation in a 'culture of shame', there was also a high percentage of disagreement (40.66%). This relative equality of agreement and disagreement may be due to the difficulty of balancing the perceived need for sex education to protect children from sexual issues in the Saudi society against the role of 'shame culture' that considers sex education a taboo. Most of the results demonstrate that teachers want sex education only to protect children from sexual abuse; however, for example, few of them feel able to address sexual questions. A comment from an experienced teacher reflects concerns about the prevailing narrow views:

It is true that we need to raise our children sexually within the values and ethics of society. However, sex education is not only about sexual harassment; that view leads the perspective on our society to be as a forest of lust.

Therefore, sex education that respects the Saudi culture should address all the topics that children need. One teacher shared her experience of raising children's and parents' awareness, pointing out that "This topic is new to our society as you mentioned, because of shyness and the concerns of children and parents. Therefore I was guiding them in indirect ways". This is consistent with the result regarding the main factor in avoiding sex education in Q12, regarding the role that societal traditions and customs play in the avoidance of discussions with children about some sensitive topics, for example sex

education, 31.22% and 54.46% strongly agreed and agreed respectively. An example of how traditions and customs can affect the provision of this topic was given by an experienced pre-school teacher: “It is important to separate boys’ and girls’ classes when providing this topic”. Boys and girls learn equally in the same classes in Saudi pre-schools. Sex education aims to achieve equality in the society; therefore, gender segregation in pre-school could reflect negatively on children, and is also against the Ministry’s regulation.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that, as demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, the literature shows that the educational system in the KSA is based on Islamic teachings. A majority of respondents agreed that Islam provides information about sex education. In Q13, 81.84% of teachers agreed that Islamic education provided adequate information to assist and protect individuals and discusses accurate details. Most teachers’ comments highlighted the importance of discussing sex-related topics from an Islamic perspective referring to the Holy Quran and the teachings of the Prophet. For example, teachers who disagreed with the compulsory implementation of sex education topics in Q25 offered explanations based on the Islamic perspective: “Islam ensures the rights of the child in full and I do not expect that we need to increase this topic and expand it” or

I wish that the main interest would be the teaching of the Prophet’s life, and the Islamic personalities and the ethics of Prophet Muhammad. In the biography of our Prophet, teaching about him and his sex, social education and family is a great example for us in life.

On the other hand, teachers who agreed with the implementation of sex education also cited Islam to support their views, for example:

Teach children the limitations of what we learned from the Prophet peace be upon him, to sleep in separate beds, cover up the body when changing clothes and in toilette. It is important that every child learns there are areas that no one can see or touch.

An experienced teacher also advised to “Follow the Quran’s approach to proper sex education, however, without exaggeration or negligence”. However, 11.94% of teachers disagreed that Islam provides sex education for young children. Therefore, further studies are required to understand the Islamic perspective on sex education for young children.

Training courses

This sub-section clarifies the results about the essential needs of pre-school teachers before providing sex education topics. Table 5.13 below clarifies the findings for items comprising the theme of what teachers need to be equipped with to provide effective sex education for children in Saudi pre-schools.

Table 5.13: Teachers' needs

Q	Items	N/%	SD	A	U	DA	SDA
31	Training courses and programmes to educate teachers	%	57.60	37.20	1.50	3.10	0.60
		N	1543	997	41	83	17
32	A guidance booklet for teachers	%	67.40	29.60	1.00	2.00	0.10
		N	1807	793	26	53	2
Note. N = frequency, % = percentage							

Due to the factors of lack of sex education information, children's sexual needs, the high concerns about sexual abuse in Saudi society and the pressure of the 'shame culture' on the provision of sex education, pre-school teachers expressed a need for training courses to enable them to deliver this topic effectively to young children. Therefore, regarding teachers' needs, 94.80% of the teachers agreed with Q31 that it is necessary to provide training courses and programmes to educate teachers in terms of children protection and provide sex education appropriate to their age. The majority of teachers asked for a training course, especially on protecting children from sexual abuse. Some teachers commented in the questionnaire that training centres should provide 'protection from sexual harassment' training courses to raise awareness in society. They suggested some ideas to increase teachers' knowledge and skills; for example, "I wish to increase the training courses for pre-school teachers in the field of sexual harassment and the expression of feelings and self-defence". Furthermore, a teacher claimed,

It is preferable to prepare programmes and visual presentations regarding sex education to train teachers in how to modify child's sexual behaviour, which would contribute quickly to save their effort and time.

Furthermore, teachers expressed the need for guidance from their supervisors, during their evaluation gave suggestions on how to introduce these subjects for children. One teacher commented, "It is best to provide training courses that help the teacher to interpret

children's drawings that may be the key to discovering the crimes of sexual harassment against children". However, some teachers suggested increasing their information about sex education by self-learning, using information provided on CDs and in brochures.

Furthermore, a majority of pre-school teachers wanted some guidance to address the answers to children's sexual questions based in a manner appropriate to their age. The responses to Q32 show that there was a strong agreement regarding the need for a booklet to answer typical questions related to sex education. One teacher commented on the need for such a book by saying: "We hope to gain pamphlets or books on sex education for young children and how to protect them from sexual harassment". Furthermore, teachers asked for books and information in Early Childhood Education generally, for example, "Teachers should have self-learning by periodic visits to the international book fair and have read in all child-related fields, especially sex education". Therefore, from the above results it is clear that pre-school teachers wanted to provide sex education topics effectively; but only after being well trained to ensure they provide the correct information to promote children's skills.

The above section reported pre-school teachers' responses to questions around the significance of sex education topics for young children. There was very high agreement regarding the need for sex education topics as a compulsory component of the curriculum. The findings also highlight the importance of training courses and a booklet to assist teachers to answer children's questions. The next section presents the findings from the interviews.

5.3 Analysis of the semi-structured interviews

In this section, the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews are analysed. These interviews involved pre-school supervisors and specialists from different sectors with an interest in childcare. The qualitative data are presented to complement the quantitative data already discussed. The interview responses are presented in two parts; the first part presents the results from the focus group interviews with 20 pre-school supervisors (policy

makers) in the Ministry of Education and the second section presents the results of similar individual interviews with eight specialists from various sectors. All sections have been divided into nine themes resembling the questionnaire themes that were decided in advance, based on the gap identified in the literature review and used to develop the interview questions to address the answers to the aims of this study. The selection of sample quotations was based on the principles outlined earlier in Section 5.2.2.2.

5.3.1 Supervisors' interviews

The information will be presented according to relevant themes as they were raised. Pre-school supervisors are represented in this section by a code, where 'PS' means pre-school supervisor in the Ministry of Education. I used the numbers 1 to 20 to define their responses in the focus group interviews, for example, PS1, PS2, PS3, ..., PS20. Prior to the start of the focus group interview with pre-school supervisors, the definition of what constitutes sex education in the context of this study was carefully explained to the group, emphasising that the focus was not just on the intercourse, but also on gender differences, hygiene, safety issues, and bodily awareness.

a) The importance of sex education for children

In order to identify the answers to the first research question, this sub-section includes supervisors' views on the importance of sex education for young children in the KSA. Therefore, themes of children's development and curiosity, their concern about sexual abuse and sex education and child protection are presented.

Children's development and curiosity

All participants agreed that many societal problems are related to a lack of sex education. One respondent, PS10 said, "Our society is against sex education due to the 'shame culture', while children, particularly those who live in a globalised world, are curious".

They also stressed that children may ask sex-related questions and behave sexually due to their sexual development. However, they may be punished because of the ‘shame culture’, which prevents people from talking about this topic considered as a taboo. For this reason, they emphasised the importance of sex education in early childhood, not only in the Saudi society, but throughout the world. One of the supervisors (PS12) expressed this clearly by saying:

Sex is an essential part of human life, so sex education is not just for protection from sexual abuse. It is, for example, important for reproduction, hygiene, respect, values, relationships, equality between genders, expressing feelings, and Islam.

Other information on this theme included that ‘children reach puberty at an early age, roughly when they are about 8 years old’. It can be argued that signs of changes in their body start earlier. The lack of sex education can therefore cause health problems. For example, one supervisor (PS6) pointed out that “In primary schools girls who start menstruating do not know about their hygiene”. Therefore, the majority of supervisors claimed that children need awareness and basic information at an early age about their own body and the other gender. They mentioned that there is a subject in the curriculum in the fifth grade (11 years old) that discusses the topic of menstruation but this is, arguably, too late. Moreover, the respondents also pointed out that most teachers ignore these topics. This may be because of the lack of information, lack of confidence or due to the impact of the ‘shame culture’. Additionally, all supervisors pointed out that most students in secondary schools do not have the knowledge to care for themselves in this area or to deal with puberty and self-hygiene. It was clear from all supervisors that the topics being discussed were viewed as being of importance for the whole society.

Concerns about sexual problems

All of the supervisors stressed that the Saudi society, in recent years, is witnessing new and peculiar problems regarding sexual behaviours, which they claimed did not exist, or were not recognised in the past, for example sexual harassment. One of them (PS8) emphasised

that “We have many cases of sexual harassment, mostly from domestic workers, relatives, sport clubs and schools, but we ignore them because of the ‘shame culture’”. It can be argued that sexual harassment under the ‘shame culture’ can lead to problems, as one respondent (PS16) noted the potential consequences, which “can lead to a social phobia of others, even relatives, and which can indirectly promote and encourage sexual abuse”.

In addition, all 20 pre-school supervisors were concerned and worried about the behaviour of students in secondary schools, including the issue of homosexuality, which was described as anti-Islam and against human nature. Furthermore, these interviewees thought that the high percentage of domestic labour from different cultures was one of the main problems in Saudi Arabia, which could also impact on children through the introduction of different cultural values and ideals. Because of such concerns, one supervisor (PS9) recommended, “Pre-school teachers should be aware of sexual problems from the early years”.

Sex education and child protection

Interviewees noted that the current awareness of a need to protect the body is based on intimidation, and one supervisor (PS18) stated clearly that “Parents usually underestimate children and feel that they still do not have adequate capabilities”. Nonetheless, they warn their children to protect them from sexual abuse based on the current awareness in the society. This awareness, however, can harm children and families. For example, supervisor PS11 explained the drawbacks of the current awareness, suggesting that the slogan “‘Do Not Harass’ promotes the idea and spreads it in society”. For this reason, PS17 said, “I am against this approach to awareness because the meaning of the word is disgusting”. PS20 expressed her distress, “They make children afraid even of their fathers’ normal touches”. It can be argued that this approach is taken due to the effort of the Ministry of Education to protect children from abuse, but may not be understood by school staff. One supervisor (PS16) pointed out: “There was an Act issued by the Ministry to guide schools to make a report if they found a case of a child who suffered or was suspected of being abused”.

b) Appropriate sex education topics

With regard to the results related to the answers to the second question of this study, this sub-section presents the results of views of the pre-school supervisors and includes the state of sex education in the current curriculum DKC. Moreover, it demonstrates the appropriate sex education topics for young children from supervisors' perspectives.

Current curriculum and sex education

All of the interviewed pre-school supervisors noted that sex education should form a key link between children, family and school. They mentioned that although the kindergarten curriculum has a national ministerial approach, it is flexible. A supervisor (PS5) pointed out that the flexibility of teachers to decide the order of units during the two academic semesters in the pre-school year by saying that

The curriculum includes separate different themes, which are called units. Pre-schools have freedom of choice in the order of the units through the academic year according to the school budget, social events and the seasons.

The supervisors explained that the current units provide basic cognitive and scientific information to promote children' skills through the school year. However, they noted the clear lack of sex education topics.

One of those interviewed (PS14) suggested that sex education should "be delivered through all existing units gradually, to be more acceptable to families and society". However, in practice, this may be difficult. Regarding the pre-school curriculum in the KSA, pre-school supervisors explained that this contains 11 units that the Ministry of Education in the KSA has agreed to. There is some flexibility as to where sex education topics could be included, in particular, in the Psychological Health unit, which is optional. The current application is highly varied and disjointed. However, most supervisors (PS1, PS2, PS4, PS5, PS8, PS11, PS12, PS14, PS15, PS16, PS17, PS19 and PS20) agreed that the provision of pre-school education does not currently include sex education or child protection topics. Pre-school supervisors also pointed out that teachers who had included these topics under the current structures found them highly problematic, with one

participant (PS15) noting that “This topic is not easy, but also not impossible to be applied”. However, it can be argued that as one supervisor (PS17) claimed, “It is necessary to involve more than one official sector in designing the curriculum of sex education”.

Therefore, all participants agreed that sex education topics should be part of the compulsory curriculum to ensure that teachers become more comfortable with discussing the topics involved. Some of them (PS3, PS4, PS11, PS13, PS15, PS17, PS19 and PS20) stated that teachers could choose to avoid those aspects of the curriculum they find embarrassing or could present them as optional reading. The supervisors eagerly shared their experience with introducing a new trial curriculum, ‘Montessori’, in the Saudi educational system, which has been piloted for a period of around three years in just a few schools with an aim to evaluate its outcomes. Some teachers who did not accept the idea of the ‘Montessori curriculum’ had reflected a negative impact on the application of it. Those teachers may struggle to provide ‘Montessori’ curriculum because it has not flexibility to change and innovate. For this reason, the supervisors stressed that sex education curriculum is not effective without well-trained teachers.

Sex education topics

Pre-school supervisors asserted that sex education topics do not exist formally in the current curriculum, although some teachers offer education in this regard. For example, one of the supervisors (PS3) clarified that “In the Health and Safety unit teachers can raise the theme of ‘body is mine; no one can touch me’, and explain the use of the bathroom in general, because there is a need in the curriculum for these topics”. Supervisor PS9 mentioned “In principle, I am satisfied with this diligence to educate children”. On the other hand, a majority of the supervisors (15) challenged this non-standardised provision. They suggested that the Ministry should update the curriculum to include topics regarding relationships, gender equality, personal hygiene, protection and safety and life cycles. Supervisor PS1 pointed out that “Sex education must be comprehensive because sex is part of life and not just protection from harassment”. Furthermore, interviewees stressed that information must be spread gradually across the three levels of kindergarten. However, teachers can impact the way in which information is delivered. Because of that, it is

important to choose the right phrases and words to respect the values in our society. For example, participants pointed out that calling the topic ‘family life education’ would be comprehensive and more acceptable in a conservative society than the term ‘sex education’.

In brief, all of the supervisors interviewed agreed on the importance of sex education topics and suggested that they be made compulsory. They stressed that this would need to come after appropriate training is provided for teachers and parents, however.

c) Provision of sex education

This sub-section presents results divided under themes that address the third question of this study. It demonstrates the role of school, parents and society in the provision of sex education topics. Moreover, it highlights the way to increase the awareness through training courses.

Role of teachers and their beliefs

All supervisors strongly stressed that teachers have a significant part to play in delivering sex education to children. It can be seen in the comment by one supervisor (PS2) who mentioned that “The role of the pre-school teacher in the curriculum is to choose the appropriate activities for children and focus on acquiring knowledge of scientific information that can assist children in life”. Similarly, supervisor PS4 pointed out the significant role of teachers nowadays: “In the present era parents are busy. Consequently, teachers have a significant impact on children, greater than parents”. For this reason, all supervisors agreed that sex education in the curriculum could be more effective than has previously been the case. However, supervisor PS17 noted that “Not every teacher has the right skill in formulating and presenting sensitive information”. It was discussed, however, that some teachers answer sensitive questions with “fictional and incorrect answers” to avoid embarrassment. All participants agreed that the current role of pre-schools in the sex education area is very weak. Teachers’ preparation was also discussed and it was noted that teachers need to be prepared to deal with sensitive issues, such as sexual abuse.

Role of parents and their beliefs

The supervisors expressed the opinion that there is a noticeable gap between parents who try to educate their children about these issues and those who do not. The latter may occur due to their lack of knowledge. Some respondents noted that this gap was related to location, as those living in 'small villages' would be less likely to discuss these issues. All participants agreed that parents and family play a key role in sex education, with one respondent (PS20) expressing this point clearly: "It is difficult to teach children about sex education before their families; it is a waste of time".

The supervisors emphasised that the parents' role is more significant than that of teachers due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions that may be raised. For example, supervisor PS8 shared her experience with one mother of a pre-school child, who is a doctor at the University, and came to the pre-school to complain about the topic of the stages of foetal growth in the abdomen; she was against the sex education topic". It can be argued that the terms used to describe private parts could also differ between families, which could make teaching consistently difficult. All participants agreed that cooperation between teachers and parents is paramount and would alleviate many such issues.

Role of society and prevailing beliefs

All supervisors strongly emphasised that education is based on Islamic teaching, which provides accurate information regarding sex education, including the fact that Islam encourages people to ask questions in this area. However, it was also highlighted that there is a lack of awareness in the Saudi society regarding Islamic sex education due to its traditional culture. Although the counter-argument, including recognising that Islam is a religion of modesty, was discussed, all participants agreed that for sex education to be accepted, it should be linked with religion in terms of hygiene, reproduction and family education.

The interviewed supervisors strongly agreed that global media, through TV and the Internet, have had a great impact on children and families in Saudi Arabia. One supervisor (PS15) mentioned that "The view of sexual revelations such as kisses and hugs have

become familiar on television”. The issues raised included sexually suggestive content, which may be unsuitable for children. It was stressed that it is important to specify age restrictions for each programme. These issues were discussed as being particularly important due to the current lack of sex education in Saudi Arabia, meaning that their impact could be greater than in the Western countries where the programmes are produced. Although some age restrictions or parental control systems exist in Western countries, it can be argued that those restrictions may be ignored by those who see the programmes whether on TV or on the internet. One participant (PS6) stressed, however, that “globalisation cannot be avoided and these new influences need to be managed, rather than removed”.

Training courses

The supervisors stressed the importance of providing teachers and parents with the skills to deliver sex education before any sex education curriculum is implemented in schools. Importantly, supervisor PS10 highlighted the effort of the Ministry of Education in the provision of continuous training for pre-school teachers: “The Ministry of Education provides a training course for teachers called "new teacher" to prepare teachers for kindergartens and promote their skills”. Additionally, supervisor PS8 pointed out that “Those teachers can attend some training courses regarding curriculum, daily activities and child protection”. However, as supervisor (PS7) argued, “Introducing this topic is not easy because pre-school teachers are not specialised yet”. Because of that, most participants stressed the importance of ensuring that a teacher of sex education was the right candidate for the job. This was expressed aptly in the following comment:

When you apply a sex education curriculum it is important to choose teachers who are interested in this topic and have abilities to improve themselves to attend the course, otherwise they will negatively impact on the provision.

Furthermore, the participants suggested that the Ministry of Education should avoid randomly assigning teachers to deliver the sex education course, because not every teacher is appropriate. Careful training and selection of teachers could waste time and effort, as well as could contribute to the negative views of society in general. However, supervisor

PS13 strongly suggested, “It is necessary not only to train teachers but also to spread the awareness to everyone around children in the society”. It can be seen that to develop and implement an effective sex education curriculum it is important to provide prior awareness among teachers, parents and society.

The next section presents similar themes raised in discussions with specialists across the sectors of education, government, health, law, psychology, sociology and professional development.

5.3.2 Specialists’ interviews

In order to be able to cite the specialists’ names to support the findings of the study, permission was obtained from all participating specialists. Eight specialists on the subject matter agreed to be interviewed and identified in the study and for the data they provided to be used as part of this study. As has already been noted in Section 4.3.2, the following specialists were interviewed for this study:

- Dr. Alduhaim, Former Judge and Member of the KSA Shura Council.
- Dr. Alsheddi, Council Member of the Human Rights Commission in the KSA and Children’s Rights Advocate;
- Dr. Alshamrani, Asst. Prof. Consultant of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics;
- Dr. Alsaleh, the General Secretary of the National Commission for Children in the Ministry of Education;
- Mrs. Aldabass, General Director of Pre-school at the Ministry of Education in the KSA;
- Mrs. Alghamdi, Head of Institutional Excellence Department and Specialist in Children’s Curriculum;
- Mrs. Zaher, Trainer and Author in Protection from Abuse;
- Mr. Almuhamid, Council Member of the National Family Safety Programme in the KSA.

I received written permission from all specialists to disclose their names and positions when quoting them (see Appendix J). The views of the specialist interviewees will be presented thematically in the following sub-sections in order to address the research questions.

a) The importance of sex education for children

This topic is discussed under the sub-themes: children's development and curiosity, concern about sexual problems and child protection.

Children's development and curiosity

All eight specialists emphasised the importance of sex education for young children due to their curiosity, rights and sexual development. Dr. Alsheddi, for example, commented, "Children are curious and usually keen to search for knowledge". It can be noticed that children are interested to ask about sex and gender and explore themselves and others. However, Saudi society is conservative and it considers this topic taboo. Dr. Alduhaim argued that "being socially sensitive in a conservative society is one of the main reasons preventing people from talking about sex and gender" and Mrs. Alghamdi stated "it is difficult to talk about this topic in our society but currently it is important to be able to change this". They noted that some people are worried about their children's behaviours, for example, they have thought that teaching this topic may lead children to behave in a sexual manner. However, Dr. Alshamrani, who is an expert in children's behaviours, emphasised that "children do not feel sexual excitement, they take these behaviours as things they are used to". For this reason, Dr. Alsheddi, stressed that "sex education is a significant topic, not only for children but also for adults as it is part of human rights and life". Similarly, Mrs. Alghamdi highlighted that "the need for this topic is essential in our society; it is a core part of children's rights".

Furthermore, specialists stressed the importance of sex education to prepare children for their puberty; however, Mrs. Alghamdi mentioned, "some mothers are embarrassed to talk

about puberty and teach their own children”. Therefore, Mrs. Aldabass expressed the view that “children, families and society should be familiar with this topic in order to protect children”. Dr. Alsaleh believed that the “provision of sex education will raise awareness and will instil in children the values and skills needed in life to deal with problems if they face them”. In contrast, Mr. Almuhamid mentioned that “sex education might be suitable for adults, but children can receive just general information to some extent, instead of full education”. It can be argued that inadequate information can lead children to be at risk because they may ask for or find information from untrustworthy sources. Dr. Alshamrani argued that “most sexual problems are due to the lack of sex education awareness since childhood”. In this regard, Dr. Alduhaim aptly noted that part of the problem is that “incomplete awareness of this sensitive topic will have negative consequences; therefore, it is important to integrate all of the sectors of education, health, security and law to achieve the aims of sex education confidently”. Arguably, only through communicating correct, effective and age-appropriate information regarding sex education can achieve the ultimate aims of sex education. Mrs. Zaher confirmed this by saying, “The concept of sex education is deeper and more comprehensive than just topics to be taught, or information to be acquired. It is the basis of human values and sexual ethics for all stages of life”.

Concern about sexual problems

All of the specialists participating in this study stressed that in recent years the Saudi society has been witnessing new and worrying problems regarding sexual behaviours, such as sexual harassment, which they claimed did not exist in the past. However, it can be argued that perhaps such behaviours existed, but were hidden and were not reported to any services. It may be that the behaviour is not new, but the awareness of its inappropriacy is greater now. Given the lack of clear evidence, it is not possible to say to what extent sex-related problems may be new or escalating. What is important, however, is that the experts viewed sex education as a tool to provide the awareness to reduce such problems. Dr. Alshamrani noted that

most of the sexual issues in society such as sexual abuse and homosexuality are due to a lack of awareness and we do not have enough studies to be able to discuss the issue of appropriate sex education in the KSA.

Furthermore, he provided an example as a case of some girls in Saudi society

As well there are problems of teenage girls and sexual concern from others, who exploit the girl's fear of being punished by her family because of the 'shame culture'. In fact, the source of safety, "family", has become a source of fear, thus increasing sexual problems.

Dr. Alsaleh highlighted also that "some children with disabilities are subjected to violence and sexual exploitation, so it is important to consider this aspect in order to reduce it". From the above cases, it can be argued that young children and adults with disabilities may be abused sexually. Therefore, as Mr. Almuhamid indicated, "not only children suffer from sexual abuse but also adults"; however, Mrs. Aldabass observed that "our society refuses to acknowledge these sexual problems to protect people's privacy; however, when we know about the problems early on, it is easier to solve them".

It can be argued that that the sensitivity of sexual issues in Saudi society leads people to refrain from discussing them openly. Mrs. Zaher explained that "dealing with sexual problems varies in societies depending on the culture, social values, religions and intellectual development of society". Nevertheless, Mrs. Aldabass pointed out that "in this open age, it is important to provide awareness regarding the causes of sexual harassment". Moreover, all of the specialists highlighted that a major cause of concern in relation to sexual abuse is the fact that most households in the KSA employ foreign domestic workers and private drivers. Dr. Alsheddi argued, for instance, that "sexual abuse has risen because of the high percentage of domestic workers in families who can play the parental role". Mrs. Aldabass pointed out possible reason for this, such as "workers may punish the family because of mistreatment, or may seek to satisfy their sexual needs, but with children".

Mrs. Alghamdi mentioned that "the curriculum advises children to respect and help domestic workers but, unfortunately, there is not an explanation as to what their limited role is and children think that they are members of their family". Mr. Almuhamid stated that "currently, one of the main causes of abuse is

'luxury neglect', which is where children, instead of spending time with parents and family members, are left with domestic workers, and the use of multimedia devices, which also leads to many problems such as electronic exploitation.

Mrs. Aldabass pointed out that "foreign workers have different cultures and habits, which may affect children negatively". For this reason, Mrs. Aldabass suggested "It is important to put children in a nursery instead of leaving them with domestic workers". However, Mr. Almuhamid expressed another concern about children spending time and playing with teenagers by saying that "Uncontrolled mixing of children with adolescents can lead to sexual problems". Children can be exploited more easily by relatives or foreigners if they do not receive sufficient love and care from their families. As Mrs. Aldabass highlighted, "Children who suffer from emotional loss often get gifts and tenderness from offenders ". Nevertheless, the lack of information and abilities of children can exacerbate this issue, as Dr. Alshamrani stressed: "Children do not have a knowledge and information on how to protect themselves from sexual abuse; also, there are no realistic studies that illustrate this".

Moreover, Dr. Alsheddi mentioned that "most of the studies focusing on sexual problems do not suggest solutions". Mrs. Zaher and Dr. Alshamrani noted that studies about sexual abuse of children in the KSA are still not accurate and do not reflect the reality, due to cultural shame. In line with this, Dr. Alsheddi argued that "shame, fear, customs and traditions do not give credibility to the numbers and proportion of sexual problems in the society". Similarly, Mr. Almuhamid clearly revealed the reason by saying "We have a crisis of thought about the perception of defect, the reputation of the family (scandal), and silence, which lead to the fear of going to the official agencies for protection or notification".

However, Dr. Alduhaim stated that "although sexual harassment in the Saudi society is not a common phenomenon compared with other problems, it is one of the significant topics that the KSA Shura Council created a law of punishments for, to protect children". Mr. Almuhamid explained that "in accordance with the existing regulations, harassment is considered a major crime, subject to prison and punishment of up to 15 years' imprisonment and a fine of 10 million riyals". On the other hand, it can be argued that if children are sexually abused, the process of the investigation to establish the reasons may

harm them further. As Dr. Alshamrani mentioned “the government agencies are not specialists in discussing this sensitive issue, so the method of investigation and verification of the correct information may cause psychological problems for children and their families”. For this reason, the specialists hoped that sex education provision can make people aware of how to deal with sexual issues in the correct manner. Otherwise, as Dr. Alduhaim revealed, “lack of awareness of this subject has negative repercussions in the public life of individuals and society”. Thus, Mr. Almuhamid argued that “the law is not sufficient to protect children; awareness should be provided about sex education topics through education, the media and society”.

Sex education and child protection

In view of such concerns in Saudi society, all of the specialists participating in this study emphasised the importance of sex education awareness to protect children from sexual abuse. Dr. Alsheddi and Mrs. Alghamdi agreed strongly that most of the current non-organised awareness provides confusing information in a warning tone. Specialists mentioned that such a tone in the current awareness training results in children’s and families’ fear of others and feelings of an unsafe society. Therefore, Mrs. Aldabass stated that “awareness against sexual abuse should be provided from specialists while taking into consideration respect for the Saudi culture”. Dr. Alsaleh pointed out that “sex education is a broad topic, not only for protection but for keeping children safe too”.

Furthermore, in general agreement, Mrs. Zaher commented that “children need to learn their rights and how to protect themselves; also, society should be aware of protecting and respecting children”. Both Mrs. Zaher and Dr. Alsheddi highlighted that sex education would provide correct and reliable information to children, who might otherwise find out about it through non-trusted sources such as friends or the Internet. Additionally, it was suggested that parent-child communication can be improved through sex education. For example, Dr. Alsheddi suggested that “it is necessary to take advantage of daily situations to encourage parents and children to talk about sex education”. Similarly, as Mrs. Zaher explained, “educating individuals about sexual life can protect them from bad experiences”.

It was considered important to provide awareness in Saudi society to protect children and others from sexual problems. Most of the specialists agreed on the use of other wording of the awareness provision, such as ‘family life education’ or ‘keeping safe’, in order to respect Saudi society and to increase families’ acceptance of sex awareness. Nevertheless, Dr. Alshamrani observed that “usually we make people aware of child protection from sexual abuse by providing courses titled ‘sexual harassment’”. Mr. Almuhamid cautioned “not to change the wording and focus on the content, to protect children”. Optimistically, Dr. Alsaleh pointed out the efforts of the Saudi government towards child protection from sexual exploitation and emphasised that “a team of government agencies is currently working on a comprehensive national strategy to provide all forms of protection for children from sexual exploitation, based on sex education”.

b) Appropriate sex education topics

This theme includes the experts’ views on the current curriculum, as well as their thoughts on which appropriate topics for young children should be included in any proposed revision or addition.

Current curriculum and sex education

Most of the specialists agreed that the sex education topics should be incorporated in the current curriculum. Dr. Alshamrani mentioned that “sex education topics should be provided to all levels gradually”. Mrs. Alghamdi commented on the possible approaches to implementing sex education topics in the pre-school curriculum by explaining that

Topics of sex education can be presented in two ways, either presenting all subjects in one unit for two weeks, as a complete material, or distributing the subjects within relevant units. However, I suggest that the school should have freedom of choice.

Mrs. Aldabass and Mrs. Alghamdi suggested that “topics could be integrated in the appropriate units in the pre-school curriculum, which would be more acceptable to families

and society”. However, there is advantage from the separate approach that sets all sex education topics in one unit. For example, Mrs. Zaher had a different view: “Sex education should be in one curriculum or a separate unit, due to its importance and coherence”.

Regarding the name of the sex education curriculum, the specialists had various perspectives. Mrs. Alghamdi believed, for example, that “most of society think sex education is about ‘the private relationship’, due to having the limited perspective”. Dr. Alsheddi, therefore, preferred the phrase ‘family life education’, as an alternative title to ‘sex education’, regarding this as showing appropriate respect to social values. On the other hand, Dr. Alduhaim argued that “changing the name of ‘sex education’ may affect its aims; sex education is a broad topic which requires accuracy and clarity”. However, Mrs. Zaher argued that “it would not be helpful to change the name of sex education to personal protection, except for the purpose of overcoming opposition”.

Sex education topics

It is important to highlight that the specialists in pre-school curriculum in this study revealed that the current curriculum does not contain sex education topics. For example, Mrs. Alghamdi mentioned that “the curriculum does not address private cleanliness. There is no topic about the cleanliness of sensitive organs”. Furthermore, she pointed out that “there is no topic on the differences between the sexes, because it is considered a red line; we just clarify the social roles of the sexes in the family unit”. There is also an absence of relationship topics in the curriculum, as Mrs. Zaher explained that “we need a topic about friendships and relationships and their frames. Children should understand, also the special relationship between a couple and respect for personal privacy”. Moreover, Mrs. Alghamdi claimed that “children need to learn about wet dreams, to understand about puberty and situations when they cannot enter the mosque”. Mrs. Zaher argued that some sex-related topics are addressed in Islam as

Islamic jurisprudence deals with sexual issues openly and clearly and is logical and rational...Islam has committed the child to sexual care from the earliest age, beginning with circumcision, as well as in adolescence, teaching children about puberty, the rules of purity, training and separation in sleep time.

Mrs. Aldabass and Mrs. Zaher stressed that this information should be provided gradually, at the appropriate age. For example, Mrs. Zaher discussed teaching of the life cycle topic to children, as it is explained in Islamic teachings

It is preferable to start teaching about pregnancy, childbirth and fetal formation, and clarify that marriage is the right way to make a Muslim family. Furthermore, the curriculum should include advice on not being alone with foreigners, and no one should look at the genitals or touch them.

With regard to the suggested appropriate topics for young children in the KSA, all specialists suggested that children should know about gender, the life cycle, relationships, personal hygiene, expressing their feelings, and especially keeping safe from sexual abuse. Dr. Alduhaim discussed the importance of addressing this area in universities: “Before we place an emphasis on the sex education curriculum, we should focus on how we can establish the specialisation in faculty at universities to produce graduate specialists in this sensitive and significant topic”.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that all of the specialists interviewed agreed on the importance of sex education, while taking into consideration respect for the Saudi culture. The specialists discussed appropriate topics for young children and their perspectives on the way in which sex education could be implemented.

c) Provision of sex education

This section includes the roles played in sex education by schools, parents and the wider society. It also presents the need for harming to enable them to play their roles effectively.

Role of teachers and their beliefs

The specialists strongly agreed that teachers have a significant responsibility for sex education. Mrs. Aldabass pointed out that “some of the signs of sexual abuse are

discovered by teachers at school”. However, she also stressed that teachers should be knowledgeable and aware by reading up-to-date information from recommended resources as this will enable them to help children and their families. Furthermore, Mrs. Alghamdi was concerned that “if sex education is generalised, teachers could provide it in the wrong way, due to their culture”. Mrs. Zaher highlighted one of the main struggles that teachers could face, for example, “some teachers believe that if they are unmarried, they are unable to talk about this topic”. Therefore, they cannot discuss these matters with children. However, Dr. Alsheddi pointed out the drawbacks of ‘shame culture’ of teachers by explaining that “shyness in answering children’s questions creates children’s shyness; furthermore, it highlights that there is a sinful thing, which motivates them to discover the information by themselves”. Dr. Alsaleh described sex education as “a tool with two sides that should be provided carefully within a correct approach”. Furthermore, specialists were concerned that if children are given the information at school, their parents may clash with teachers because of the sensitivity of these topics in the Saudi society. For example, Mrs. Zaher pointed out that “teachers may face the problem of convincing parents to accept the information that children receive; teachers should therefore be patient and appreciate the positions of the parents”.

Role of parents and their beliefs

There is no doubt that some parents are well-informed about children’s needs, but others need to know the importance of this phase in human life. The specialists mentioned that young children are inquisitive and ask about everything around them, about themselves and others. The specialists discussed the different responses that parents have to the questions raised by children about sex and gender. Mrs. Alghamdi mentioned that “some parents are very embarrassed to talk about sex and gender with their children, particularly when they prepare them for puberty”. Mrs. Zaher explained that this must be “due to the old customs and socialisation from their childhood”.

Dr. Alshamrani and Mrs. Aldabass similarly reported that the mother is the main person to answer the questions; children just need simple and honest answers at an appropriate age. Dr. Alsheddi pointed out that “the inadequate knowledge of parents about their children’s needs, rights and education leads to abuse”. Mrs. Zaher clarified that “the family

environment should encourage children to communicate, ask questions and express themselves; otherwise, they will suffer from many problems like sexual abuse”.

All of the specialists in this study agreed that there is a lack of awareness of sex education in society and they recommended that the information provided should be more accurate and controlled by the government. Mrs. Alghamdi mentioned that “there is a widespread lack of awareness, although there is a national programme, ‘Child Helpline’, which is certified by the government under specialists”. Dr. Alshamrani stated that “therapy sessions for children who have suffered from sexual problems should be provided firstly to parents and then their children”. Co-operation between schools and families is thus very important to protect children and avoid sex-related issues; as Dr. Alsheddi suggested, “providing effective sex education through schools and universities could be implemented by inviting parents to monthly training”.

Role of society and prevailing beliefs

All participants agreed that many societal sexual problems occur due to the nature of traditions and customs of the Saudi society, in the absence of sex education. Mrs. Zaher pointed out people’s misunderstanding about the concept of sex education by explaining “some people think that sex education helps pornography and the spread of moral decay, which is contrary to the truth”. However, Mr. Almuhamid argued that “it is difficult to change the culture but easy to suggest appropriate solutions that respect the culture, way of thinking and beliefs”. Mrs. Aldabass mentioned that different societies have different perspectives; for example, “kissing children is acceptable in the Saudi society but in other societies it is a kind of abuse” and Mrs. Zaher mentioned that “there are different perspectives due to the cultural values and beliefs in each society”. Additionally, Dr. Alsheddi noted “the social isolation resulting from the separation of the genders leads to many problems and misunderstanding between each other”. For this reason, as he explained, “Young people have curiosity; boys want to discover girl. However it happens in inappropriate ways”. Children may therefore have incorrect information about the other gender.

All of the specialists agreed strongly that Islam encourages people to learn about sex education and provides accurate information. They held the view that Islam provides accurate information about sex education from the childhood phase until adulthood. Mrs. Aldabass emphasised that “one of the main goals of the educational policy in the KSA is to build children’s personality in the Islamic manner”. Nevertheless, Mrs. Zaher noted that “the perspective towards sex education is still limited, and the shocking thing is that some people have thought it is against Islam”. However, Dr. Alduhaim stated that “Islam emphasises virtues and ethics, and applies sanctions to protect individuals; therefore, sex education does not conflict with the religion”. Dr. Alshamrani similarly argued that “the main issue is not ‘good or bad’ but it is the beliefs associated with customs and traditions”. Dr. Alsheddi stressed “the awareness of mosques is very important so that social issues such as child protection can be discussed because mosques are an accepted source of awareness”.

A problem arises, however, with regard to behaviours which are not acceptable in Islam, but which may be viewed differently in other societies. Sex education from a cultural perspective was seen as a solution to such problems, for example, although homosexuality is taboo in Islam, there are some cases that are considered a problem. Dr. Alshamrani revealed that “the issue of homosexuality exists in the Saudi society in youth of both sexes”. However, Mrs. Alghamdi explained that “if there is a defect in hormones and a person wants to transform gender, he will lose his identity, renounce the community and declare that he was male but has become female; unfortunately such a person is treated violently”. Dr. Alshamrani stressed that “raising sexual awareness is not only a matter of *halal* or *haram* (acceptable or forbidden in Islamic terms), but it is about the health awareness issue”. Therefore, there is a significant need for more studies in this regard because people facing these issues are human beings and are part of the society.

The interviewed specialists strongly agreed that the global media such as satellite TV and the Internet have had a negative impact on children and families in Saudi Arabia. Dr. Alshamrani highlighted that “in the age of social media, friends can be the first source of sex education”. Therefore, as Mrs. Aldabass mentioned, “the social and global media have affected children negatively due to inappropriate content that involves sexual views”. However, she also stressed “it encourages children to discover things by themselves and

not be exploited by others”. Dr. Alshamrani emphasised the fact that “children could be exploited by social media in their bedroom”. All the specialists agreed that globalisation has had a negative effect on children. For example, Mrs. Aldabass noted that “the Internet could help offenders and teenagers to exploit children and usually they focus on victims’ children, who have been abused and missed love and kindness in their families”. It can be argued that, as Mr. Almuhamid stressed, “The law alone will not be able to educate people and protect them, which will be achieved through promoting ethics, community initiatives, education, and the media”. Nevertheless, Dr. Alsheddi and Dr. Alshamrani highlighted that “although the role of the media is very important to educate families and teachers, the current awareness is very weak”. However, from a positive perspective, Dr. Alsaleh pointed out “Currently, some of the Saudi government agencies are working to create a national strategy to protect children from sexual exploitation through the Internet”.

It can be seen that from the above quantitative and qualitative results, there are many social internal and external factors that can impact on sex education implementation in Saudi society. The internal factors are lack studies about Islamic sex education, ‘shame culture’, concern about sexual abuse, which all contribute to a lack of knowledge about sex education. The external factors are globalisation, multimedia and the Internet, which lead to fear and concern for children. Consequently, these factors can affect people’s view of sex education and its implementation. Therefore, it is important to provide awareness about sex education through training courses.

Training courses

The specialists strongly suggested that educators need to be fully trained before sex education for young children is implemented. Dr. Alshamrani stated that “sex education is important not only for educators but also for policy governors”. However, Dr. Alsaleh mentioned that

the National Committee for Children has worked with a number of partners, in particular the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and the UNICEF organisation and the National Family Safety Programme to address confronting all forms of abuse and neglect to which children have been exposed.

Mrs. Aldabass explained that “in 2007 there was a training course titled ‘Child Safety Programme’, which was provided to pre-school teachers and 70% of it was about the topic of sexual abuse”. Mrs. Alghamdi argued that “the question is... ‘are the supervisors competent enough to train teachers?’ Because some supervisors still need training and awareness in this aspect”. For this reason, Mrs. Aldabass pointed out that

In 2016, training centres provided training courses on child personal safety. We chose trainers who have the ability to accept information and training. It is important that the trainers are open minded and that they have a desire for change.

Mrs. Aldabass and Dr. Alsaleh pointed out that the government approved the system of child protection; however, it is important to have sex education provided by training from specialists in the field.

As an example, Dr. Alsaleh described the first protection programme run by the Ministry of Education: “There is a ministry programme of early detection and intervention in the cases of children at risk of all abuses and neglect”. Furthermore, Dr. Alsaleh and Mrs. Aldabass stressed the importance of a second programme, a child personal safety programme for children in pre-school. All these programmes have positive outcomes because they take into account directly and indirectly the issue of sexual abuse of children. Mrs. Aldabass highlighted the advantage of such programmes in child protection: “Protection training encourages children to protect their bodies, ask for free dialogue and expression of feelings as well as mothers being trained on this programme”. Dr. Alsaleh, describing the current training courses that are organised by the Ministry of Education, argued that “in general, child protection is the main concern and sexual abuse in particular”. However, Mrs. Zaher commented on the current low level of awareness in Saudi society: “Unorganized awareness causes confusion of information and ideas, it causes fear and concern in families and their children”.

In addition, all specialists expressed their gratitude for the first step of the Saudi government, which in 2016 organised the first forum to protect children from on line exploitation. It encourages researchers across in the sectors to do studies in sexual abuse and child protection. Moreover, it was observed that all specialists strongly suggested that providing sexual education in the curriculum could alleviate many problems in Saudi society. Dr. Alsheddi stressed the importance of training educators: “It is important to train

teachers by getting them to attend educational training programmes to prepare them on how to deal with this sensitive topic”. Mrs. Aldabass strongly suggested “sex education training can be provided through the training centres, which are distributed throughout the Kingdom’s 45 educational districts”. Therefore, it can be seen that in experts’ views implementing sex education is required in the Saudi society; however, training courses about sex education should be provided for all educators and correct awareness should be spread in the Saudi society before the provision of such education for children.

From the above results of interviews, it can be concluded that all of the interviewed supervisors and specialists agreed on the importance of sex education, while taking into consideration respect for the Saudi culture. They discussed appropriate topics for young children and their perspectives on the ways in which sex education could be implemented and the importance of provision training programmes in this regard.

5.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented the results of this study from 2681 pre-school teachers, 20 supervisors and eight specialists. It was divided into two main sections based on the methods of collecting the quantitative and qualitative data, which have been presented in order to address the three research questions. The presented findings of this study highlight the themes that address 1) the importance of sex education for pre-school children in the KSA, 2) the appropriate sex education topics for Saudi pre-school curriculum, and 3) the role of school, parents and culture in the provision of sex education for children. The next chapter discusses the main results in depth and looks at the implications of the results in the context of existing literature on the topic of sex education.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results of the current research and how the collected data addresses the research questions:

- From the participants' perspectives, to what extent should sex education be included in the three-to-six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)?
- What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?
- How should sex education topics be delivered to children between three and six years of age?

This discussion focuses on the most significant aspects of this study's results, which are interpreted in the light of previous literature. The data collected was based on a survey of 2,681 pre-school teachers, and interviews with 20 pre-school supervisors in the Ministry of Education and eight specialists from various sectors in Saudi Arabia to present multiple perspectives on sex education. As explained in the methodology (Chapter 4), the data was obtained from all 45 Saudi educational districts, including five geographic regions in the KSA as explained in Figure 5.1, to create a wide sample and provide comprehensive data and a variety of perspectives. Although the findings of this research could have implications for early childhood education worldwide, the most significant results will be discussed and interpreted from socio-cultural perspectives in the context of the KSA.

Before proceeding to discuss the findings, however, it is important to remember that they are based on the perceptions and opinions reported by participants. This means that they are subject to certain limitations and should be viewed with a degree of caution (Sikes

and Piper, 2010; Creswell, 2014). Perceptions may be influenced by a variety of sources, such as personal experiences, the opinions of significant others, the media, or a general sense of the prevailing view in a particular context (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, social desirability bias may lead participants to give what they think is the correct or expected response. Thus, the “reality” expressed by participants may not always accord with objective facts, especially with topics that discuss sensitive issues, such as sex and sexuality (Sikes and Piper, 2010). This does not mean such views are not valuable. The discovery that a particular perception exists is in itself informative, and may inspire future research to attain more objective data (Silverman, 2013; Gray, 2013). Until such data is available, however, it is important to be critical in viewing the opinions expressed and, for this reason, various caveats and qualifications are included in the discussion (Gray, 2013; Creswell, 2014).

This chapter is divided into three main sections based on the key themes from the findings that answer the research questions stated above. Firstly, the importance of sex education for young children in the KSA will be highlighted. Secondly, the appropriate sex education topics for the pre-school curriculum will be examined. Thirdly, the provision of sex education to young children will be explained.

6.2 The importance of sex education for young children

The purpose of this section is to address the first research question, concerning whether sex education should form part of the Saudi pre-school curriculum, based on the findings of the study. In doing so, I discuss the importance of sex education for children aged from three to six years old, and I investigate the implementation of this topic in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The presented themes will discuss the findings related to the question, ‘From the participants’ perspectives, to what extent should sex education be included in the three-to-six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the KSA?’

The literature review demonstrated that many previous studies have shown the significance of sex education for children, to enable them to grow healthily in several aspects of their development, such as sexual development, values, morality, sexual

knowledge, and awareness of their rights that protect them from harm (Kirby, 201; Goldman, 2013; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a; Alldred et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2009; 2018). In discussing the research findings regarding these issues, this section is divided into four sub-sections as follows. The first sub-section discusses Saudi society's perspective on sex education. The second sub-section explores the sexual development of children. The third sub-section explains the importance of sex education for development of children's values. The fourth sub-section highlights the concerns about sexual problems and evaluates the role of sex education in child protection.

6.2.1 Saudi perspectives on sex education

It is important to consider the perspective of Saudi society on sex education prior to discussing its possible implementation in the pre-school curriculum. The research solicited participants' views on this, consistent with the sociocultural theoretical framework. Surprisingly, in both the quantitative and qualitative data from this study, some teachers, supervisors and specialists demonstrated the widespread prevalence in Saudi society of misconceptions of what sex education entails. These fall into two different views.

The first is a narrow vision of sex education, assuming that it involves discussion of intercourse and private marital relationships. Participants stressed that people who hold this misapprehension consider sex education as a 'taboo topic'. For example, Dr. Alduhaim argued that "being socially sensitive in a conservative society is one of the main reasons preventing people from talking about sex and gender" and Mrs. Alghamdi believed, for example, that "most of society think sex education is about 'the private relationship', due to having a limited perspective". However, most studies indicate that sex education is also a sensitive topic worldwide, and those sensitivities relate to the different sociocultural contexts of different countries and regions (Kenny, 2009; Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013; Haberland and Rogow, 2015; Alldred et al., 2016). Moreover, the findings shed light on the reasons for the misunderstanding of sex education; Table 5.12 showed that 56.84% of the pre-school teachers agreed that the 'shame culture' prevents people from talking about sex education for children. From a sociocultural perspective, it can be argued that the interpretation of sex education through

the terms of a 'shame culture' is problematic, because it attaches a stigma to sex education topics, making them matters that cannot be talked about. This finding of the study is consistent with literature suggesting that Saudi customs and traditions deter some people from talking openly about sex education (Almuneef et al., 2014). The implication is that the 'shame culture' can negatively affect the concept of sex education, causing it to be considered it as taboo, which may constrain its provision.

Furthermore, another factor that can lead people to have this narrow view of sex education is the limited Islamic studies currently available regarding the early childhood phase. The results of this study found a lack of Islamic sex education topics for young children could be one of the causes for a narrow view. For example, although Ashraah et al. (2013) point out that Islamic sex education should begin from early childhood, most Islamic studies have clearly emphasised sex education as a means to prepare young people for marital life (Al-Ghazali, 1975; Elwan, 1993; Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008; Ashraah et al., 2013). This absence of discussion in the literature can create confusion in Muslims towards the Islamic perspective regarding sex education, which may negatively affect children who live in the globalised era, with access to wider sources of knowledge and information than has previously been possible. Furthermore, sex education in Islam is more bold and direct (Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008; Ashraah et al., 2013), which can lead to this misunderstanding. For this reason, people may have thought that the term 'sex' refers only to adults' private relationships, contraception and sexual abstinence. Such a view was reflected by an experienced pre-school teacher, who commented: "Do not go into this sexual aspect, because it draws children's attention to inappropriate behaviours". Another experienced pre-school teacher, who was unsure about this question, pointed out, "I do not think it is appropriate for children from the age of 3 to 6...it can impact on their innocence". This narrow view can cause adults' lack of confidence and raise their concerns about discussing topics on this matter. This narrow view was considered by many respondents as the main barrier to children gaining correct information and skills in this regard. However, this view is not unique to Saudi Arabia; some previous studies from different contexts revealed that some parents have similar anxiety and concerns about talking with their children about sex education topics, because they have a narrow understanding of the term 'sex' (Goldman, 2008; Sciaraffa and Randolph, 2011).

The second view, held by the majority of the participants, although they suggested some sex education topics, was strongly focused on the concept of protecting children from sexual abuse, which is also a narrow vision. It can be argued that this may be due to the current high level of concern about this issue in the Saudi society, reflected by a pre-school teacher, with experience of 11 to 20 years, who commented, “Many thanks for introducing this important topic at this time, when children are surrounded by the dangers of sexual harassment, which destroys their innocence”. The data indicated that moral panic about abuse contributed to a narrow concept of sex education. Several participants rationalized their support for introducing sex education in terms of the need for a solution to protect children in Saudi society. Moreover, the lack of studies about sexual abuse in Saudi society may have led participants to emphasize it and discuss it openly in this study, which is the first study to investigate the sensitive topic of sex education in the KSA.

These narrow perspectives on sex education as taboo or related to sexual abuse are not Saudi-specific, however, but are consistent with Robinson et al. (2002) who defined sex education as having a main focus on sexual activity. Furthermore, Blaise (2009) and Sciaraffa and Randolph (2011) demonstrate that educators have interpreted children’s sexual development (such as sexual questions and behaviours) in the light of their perceptions of adult sexual activity. If this is the case, even in the West, where sex-related issues are more openly discussed, it is understandable that this focus on the mechanics of the physical act of sex can be a primary factor that may prevent adults in the conservative Saudi society from talking about sex and gender to their children, which can have a negative impact, as described in the next section.

6.2.2 Sex education and child development

Another issue to be considered in deciding whether sex education should be provided to young children is the needs raised by children’s development. The findings of this study shows participants’ perception of the importance of sex education for understanding children’s curiosity, play and sexual behaviour, sexual problems, and puberty.

In this study, pre-school teachers and supervisors pointed out that children have curiosity due to their sexual development, so they ask about themselves and others. The responses to Q6, in Table 5.4, show that 96.49% of teachers agreed that children ask questions regarding sex and gender, and this was supported by qualitative data. For example, an experienced teacher commented, “One of the most common questions being asked is ‘Where do babies come from?’” Most supervisors recognised that children of this age group generally possess a strong sense of curiosity and desire to discover the differences between themselves and others. Moreover, all eight specialists emphasised the importance of educators’ response to children’s curiosity, as they viewed appropriate information as part of children’s rights and sexual development. For example, Dr. Alsheddi emphasised that “Children are curious and usually keen to search for knowledge”. Therefore, the experts asserted that providing children with sex-related information and answering their questions correctly, in an age appropriate way, can encourage their healthy growth. The data in this respect are consistent with evidence in many previous studies that children may ask sexual questions in order to satisfy their curiosity, and that this is a natural part of their cognitive and sexual development (Malinowski, 1979; Kirby, 2007, 2011; Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum, 2014; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2016).

Moreover, the findings of this study indicate a belief among participants that the lack of knowledge in Saudi society about the importance of childhood development can be a cause of neglect of children’s needs, amounting to child abuse. As Dr. Alsheddi pointed out in this study, “The inadequate knowledge of parents about their children’s needs, rights and education is considered to be abuse”. Arguably, some parents do not have basic knowledge about childcare, such as children’s needs, rights, voice, growth and development, and how to deal with age-related developmental problems. Most participants asserted the prevalence of a belief that children do not have the capability to understand sexual information and therefore should not ask or be informed about it. Illustrating this assumption in Saudi society, one supervisor mentioned that “Parents usually underestimate children’s ability, thinking that they still do not have adequate capabilities for understanding”. Indeed, some teachers themselves expressed such a view. For example, an experienced teacher expressed her concern about the correlation between sex education and sexual behaviours: “In fact, this stage is innocent and just their

knowledge of the differences between the sexes can impact on their innocence”. Such thoughts have been discredited by authors such as Renold (2005, p.22), who argues that “discourses of innocence”, which attempt to impose sexual innocence on childhood, are fictional, as this type of innocence is a parental fantasy rather than a childhood fact. Moreover, the work of Prymachuk (1998) Goldman (2013) and Collier-Harris and Goldman (2017a) proved that children are aware of sexual/erotic thoughts, regardless of the opinions of parents.

In contrast to the ‘discourse of innocence’, many participants acknowledged that some sexual behaviours commonly appear in young children, such as touching the sexual organs, discovering others’ genitalia, and asking sex-related questions, that may annoy and irritate educators (i.e., parents and teachers) because these behaviours are considered to be socially unacceptable. More than half the pre-school teachers in this study expressed concern that sex education could lead to inappropriate sexual behaviours. From the concerns expressed by participants, however, it can be deduced that some educators may think similarly to Freud, that children have sexual feelings that begin at birth (Prymachuk, 1998), creating a fear that sex education may stimulate such sexual feelings. However, Dr. Alshamrani, who is an expert in children’s behaviours, emphasised that “children do not feel sexual excitement, they take these behaviours as things they are used to”. Arguably, the concern contradicts studies done by Kirby (2007; 2011), which demonstrated that no correlation has been found between the provision of sex education and engaging in sexual behaviours. Moreover, the findings in Q4 in Table 5.4 demonstrate that the highest level of uncertainty in the study was in response to this statement, 14% of respondents expressing uncertainty. It can be argued that educators may have confused thoughts about children’s innocence and children’s sexual behaviours, due to the lack of sex-related information. Moreover, they are unable to address any such tensions or contradictions because of the lack of guidance for teachers as well as the lack of sex education for children. For this reason, the findings show that educators might face difficulties in dealing with children’s sexual development. Therefore, the findings clearly reflect the impact of the absence of Saudi studies in this field, given the prevalence of such misplaced fears, whereas most Western studies confirm that the provision of sex education, subject to the age-appropriateness of the material presented, prevents children from inappropriate sexual behaviours (Goldman,

2008; Mueller et al., 2008; Kirby, 2011; Lindberg and Maddow-Zimet, 2012; Alldred et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2009; 2018). The evidence appears to support the idea that implementing sex education for children has the potential to encourage healthy attitudes, relationships and behaviour, contrary to the current concerns in the Saudi context.

Another consideration, in addition to its importance for children, is the potential for sex education to provide a guiding framework for teachers in dealing with sexual development issues that currently perplex them. For example, the findings of this research demonstrated that although sexuality is a natural part of development, Saudi teachers could be disturbed by sexual behaviours discovered while children are playing together. Table 5.4 presented that 69.42% of teachers were concerned when children played adult roles (father, mother, doctor, driver, etc.) with their friends because some sexual behaviour could appear. Similarly to the behaviours reported in this research, previous research studies explained that children aged three to six years old might discover others' bodies through their play, and that this is a normal part of their development. It has been noted that children at very young ages can take an interest in their own and their peers' genitals, including showing them to each other and engaging in 'sexual plays' (Duquet, 2003). For this reason, some teachers suggested that there is a need to involve a psychologist in pre-school to deal with such behaviours. They seemed to feel they did not have adequate skills to deal with these behaviours and educate children in these matters. Moreover, the suggestion that such behaviours needs to be addressed by a psychologist might be seen as reflecting a tendency to 'pathologize' them, or view them as separate from normal daily life. This study has, therefore, highlighted teachers' expressed need for professional and formal methods to deal with children's sexual behaviour, rather than simply suppressing their play, given Vygotsky's (1978) proposition that play is a "leading factor in development" (p.101). Play allows children to develop socially and emotionally, and "may also contribute to unity of mind and personality through the development of self-esteem, as well as cultural, gender and sexual identities" (Wood and Attfield, 2005, p.64). Therefore, it can be suggested that appropriate pre- and in-service training, and the awareness of sex education can lead teachers to improve their skills to deal with sexual behaviours that children normally develop through play.

Additionally, the findings of this study suggest the perceived need for sex education for supporting children's physiological and sexual development, by providing them with information regarding puberty before they reach that stage. In this regard, Table 5.4 showed that 84.93% of participating teachers agreed that including sex education in the curriculum could prepare children for puberty and that this was especially important for girls, as some of them may reach it at an early age. In this regard, pre-school supervisors explained that in the KSA, some girls reach puberty as early age, as eight years old, which is consistent with some previous studies in other contexts (Harrison, 2000; Blake, 2002; Parent et al. 2003; SIECUS, 2004; Hashemi, 2007). According to Collier-Harris (2015), research evidence showed that the sexual hormonal changes of puberty could occur from ages 6–8. This suggests that children need to be prepared for these changes from an early age, and this need is currently not being met in Saudi education. Pre-school supervisors mentioned that some information about puberty is provided towards the end of primary school (at age 11) and more details in high school (13 to 17 years old). As Measor et al. (2000, p. 159) stress, however, this can be considered “too little, too late”. However, the findings of this study show that most teachers ignore this topic and fail to provide even the limited information allowed for in the present curriculum due to the lack of information and the impact of the ‘shame culture’ in Saudi society. Such neglect, it was suggested, can cause health problems. Mrs. Alghamdi mentioned, “Some mothers are embarrassed to talk about puberty and how to teach their children”. For this reason, one supervisor (PS6) suggested early sex education in the curriculum because “in primary schools girls who start their periods do not know about their hygiene”. These findings are consistent with DeRose et al. (2011) and Goldman (2013; 2015) who found that neglecting to provide appropriate sex information will create unhealthy gaps between emotional, cognitive and reproductive development. Furthermore, this gap will continue to grow if the idea of school-based sex education is not aptly addressed. For this reason, participants in this study believed that young children need formal access to sex-related information, including accurate information regarding the names of the private parts, their functions for both genders, and the physical signs that herald puberty, such as hair growth, change in voice, shape of body, etc., in order for them to be well prepared for adulthood. The findings are thus consistent with Al-Qadi's (2006) view that sex education can be provided appropriately on the basis that the roots of understanding and

knowing about adolescent sexual emotions and behaviour should be planted in early childhood.

Interestingly, all pre-school supervisors and specialists suggested that providing school-based sex education can contribute to educators' awareness in this regard. Consequently, it could relieve the anxiety of Saudi adults regarding children's sexual development and sexual knowledge. Arguably, as they pointed out, this finding confirms that providing sex education for children could be positively reflected in their future sexual lives. The study data in this regard is in line with previous research evidence that providing children sex education and knowledge of sexual topics can promote them psychologically and emotionally in later life (Prymachuk, 1998; Goldman, 2013; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a).

6.2.3 Sex education and children's values

The main aim of the Saudi educational system is not only to provide knowledge but also to enrich studies regarding Islamic values, to develop behaviours and skills that are in accordance with such values (MOE, 2005). In this research, the majority of participants pointed out that the importance of sex education for children was related to and shaped by Islamic moral values and Saudi cultural norms. Supervisors and specialists believed that Islamic teachings provide accurate information regarding sex education, including the fact that Islam encourages people to ask questions on this topic. Furthermore, in this regard, Table 5.12 showed that 81.84% of pre-school teachers agreed that Islamic education provided adequate information to assist and protect individuals and discussed sexual behaviours and morality in detail. One of the pre-school supervisors (PS12) expressed clearly that sex education is "important for reproduction, hygiene, respect, values, relationships, equality between genders, expressing feelings in Islam". This finding is similar to those of Al-Ghazali (1975) and Al-Qadi (2006), who argued that sex education in the Islamic paradigm is not just about the physical act, but includes related values such as morality, relationships, equality between genders, hygiene and self-protection. Similarly, Mrs. Zaher confirmed this values-based view by saying, "The concept of sex education is deeper and more comprehensive than being just topics to be taught, or information to be acquired, it is the basis of human values and sexual ethics for

all life stages". This is similar to the view reported by Tabatabaie (2015) in the UK, where many Muslims considered that awareness about sex and gender is not only about health, but should be related to Islamic principles. Nevertheless, such values were not the sole concern of participants in this study. Dr. Alshamrani stressed that "Raising sexual awareness is not only a matter of halal or haram (acceptable or forbidden in Islamic terms), but is about the health awareness issue". Differences in views and provisions may be due to different values between Western and Islamic contexts. Perhaps Muslims in the UK felt the need to assert Islamic values because they perceived such values as neglected in Western sex education, whereas in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic perspective prevails. As Mrs. Zaher argued, "There are different perspectives due to the cultural values and beliefs in each society". Therefore, it can be seen that the content of sex education from different contexts may be inappropriate for Saudi children, due to the cultural beliefs and values of the societies.

In the light of such concern, in this study participants expressed their belief that including sex education in the curriculum could create valuable opportunities for children to obtain life skills and Islamic values as part of their physical, cognitive and sexual development. Dr. Alsaleh, in the interview, argued, "The provision of sex education will raise sexual awareness in the Saudi society and will instil the values and skills needed in their children's daily life". For example, as previously described, children possess a strong sense of curiosity, so it is natural for them to have the curiosity and desire to look at others' naked bodies, due to their lack of knowledge of the moral dimensions around sexual behaviour. Given this natural curiosity, sex education offers an opportunity for adults to teach their children Saudi social ethics and Islamic values such as modesty and decency (Al-Qadi, 2006). Whilst societies worldwide have their own cultural values, such a view is consistent with many current Western studies, which indicate that values form a cornerstone of sex education curricula, with a focus on wider issues related to sex and sexuality, including fairness, equality, freedom, truth, and peace of mind (Halstead and Reiss, 2003; Sex Education Forum, 2015). Teaching personal values as part of sex education is now mandatory in nations like Australia (Goldman, 2008; 2013). Sex education can directly affect many personal values, including self-esteem, love, body-image, privacy respect, personal humility and a sense of responsibility for health (Duquet, 2003; Sex Education Forum, 2016b).

Additionally, as demonstrated in the literature review, most Islamic studies such as Al-Ghazali (1975); Elwan (1993); Al-Qadi, (2006); Islam and Rahman (2008) and Ashraah et al. (2013) explained that Islamic sex education emphasises the equal rights and duties of both sexes in relation to decency, chastity, and values. Despite such assertions, however, this finding of this study also highlights the state of the value of equality in Islam and the cultural practice in Saudi society, as explained in Chapter 2. It can be seen that the equality of genders provided in Islam has been diminished in Saudi cultural practices due to the ‘shame culture’, which does not exist in Islam (CBSN, 2018). It can be seen from the research findings that the Saudi society’s ‘shame culture’ was seen as posing a potential barrier to the provision of appropriate sex education for children. For example, an experienced pre-school teacher suggested, “It is important to separate boys’ and girls’ classes when providing this topic”. However, sex education aims to achieve equality in the society (Al-Qadi, 2006); therefore, gender segregation in pre-school could reflect negatively on children, and might be against the Ministry’s regulation.

On the other hand, this segregation is maintained in upper educational levels and the wider Saudi society. The rule of separation between genders is reinforced by physical segregation of males and females from an early age, in education, work and public places. Participants commented on the potential disadvantages of this. Dr. Alsheddi noted that “the social isolation resulting from the separation of different genders leads to many problems and misunderstandings between each other”. Concerns about this lack of gender equality may have led the majority of participants in this study to advocate the implementation of Islamic values in sex education in order to achieve equality of rights between genders, which they expected would reflect positively on children and the Saudi society. However, Saudi policies in different sectors, which support this segregation, could cause a lack of equality between genders to satisfy the traditional Saudi culture. There is reason to suppose that participants’ plea for gender equality to be promoted by sex education would be supported by the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who is the leader of the Saudi Vision 2030 plan. When he was interviewed on the US channel, CBS News (2018), he distinguished between Islam and Saudi culture regarding gender equality and explained the reason for the current situation, saying;

In the year 1979, religious extremists in Saudi Arabia took over Islam's holiest site, the Grand Mosque in Mecca. In order to appease their own religious

radicals, the Saudis began clamping down and segregating women from everyday life (CBSN, 2018).

Furthermore, he explained how this contrasted with the earlier approach to gender in Saudi society and expressed that the current goal is to take Saudi Arabia back to a more moderate interpretation of Islam, which better reflected its real values and the example of the Prophet and early Islamic leaders:

We have extremists who forbid mixing between the two sexes and are unable to differentiate between a man and a woman alone together and their being together in the workplace. Many of those ideas contradict the way of life during the time of the prophet and the Caliphs. This is the real example and the true model (CBSN, 2018).

Participants in this study, therefore, can be seen as reflecting a more moderate trend in some parts of Saudi society, which would support the provision of sex education from an Islamic perspective. On the other hand, the findings of this research also emphasise the significant point that despite the perception among participants that sex education can be consistent with Islamic values, literature reports a lack of Islamic studies regarding sex education (Tabatabaie, 2015), which participants thought causes many sex-related problems in Saudi society. For example, most teachers' comments highlighted the importance of discussing sex-related topics from an Islamic perspective. Supervisors also stressed that sex education should be based on Islamic teachings. They mentioned that Islam is a religion of modesty, which is one of the challenges in implementation of sex education for children. Modesty may prevent researchers doing studies on Islamic sex education, and developing a clear idea about its values. It is clear, therefore, as discussed in Section 3.3 in the literature review of this study, that although Islam encourages people to understand the value and role of sex education (Kotb, 2004; Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008; Ashraah et al., 2013), the lack on up-to-date Islamic studies in this regard could be a barrier to implementation of sex education for young children.

Furthermore, it can be argued that this lack, combined with the negative perceptions of Saudi society, derived from the 'shame culture' regarding sex education, may adversely affect children's perceptions of their sexual development. This may lead to feelings of

guilt, which could negatively affect children's and adults' knowledge, skills and behaviours. If children learn that sexual development, physically and emotionally, and social changes are shameful and unacceptable, this may negatively affect their values, as well as their interaction with the other gender. Such concerns were acknowledged in this study, for example, by Dr. Alsaleh who suggested that the "provision of sex education will raise awareness and will instil in children the values and skills needed in life to deal with problems if they face them". Therefore, it could be argued that this research points to the possible positive impact on children and society if sex education were to be effectively implemented in the curriculum, as it may alleviate any internal conflict that children may feel between their natural curiosity and need to question and explore, and the conservative values of Saudi society, which can cause many problems such as sexual abuse and exploitation. This raises the issue of the potential protective role of sex education, which is discussed in the next section.

6.2.4 Sex education and child protection

Based on the findings of this study, it can be highlighted that there is a strong concern about child protection in the Saudi society. From the participants' perspectives, this is a result of many factors, such as the beliefs and traditions of Saudi culture, social changes, such as the widespread employment of domestic workers, sexual abuse, and the perceived negative effects of the multimedia, as shown in Figure 6.1.

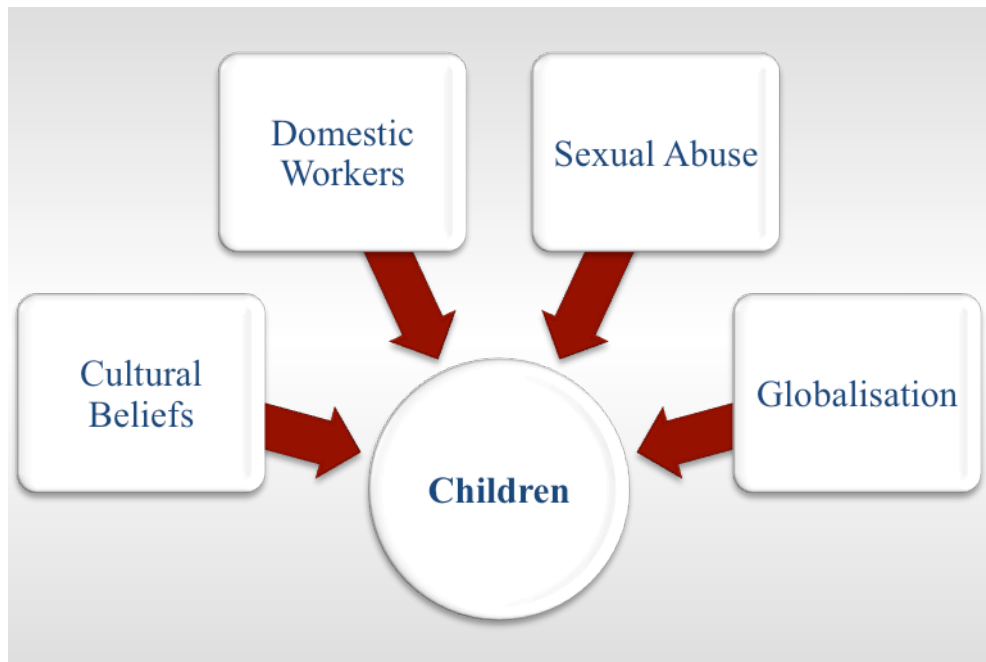


Figure 6.1: Factors that impact child protection in Saudi society.

As noted in Section 6.2.1, a common view of sex education held by participants was that it is a protective tool. The interview results from this research showed that most supervisors and specialists and teachers' comments were highly concerned about the sexual abuse of children as what they perceived to be a relatively 'common phenomenon' in Saudi society. For example, Mr. Almuhamid expressed his concern about children spending time and playing with teenagers, suggesting that "Uncontrolled mixing of children with adolescents can lead to sexual problems", as they can be exploited sexually. Dr. Alduhaim pointed out that "although sexual harassment in Saudi society is not a common phenomenon compared with other problems, it is one of the significant topics that the KSA Shura Council created a law of punishments for, to protect children". In this respect, participants' responses echoed a common concern about the sexual abuse of children, a recognised problem globally (UNESCO, 2009; WHO and BZgA, 2010; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015), and a major concern. In this study, the majority of teachers expressed extreme concern about sexual abuse of children in Saudi society. This concern is consistent with the findings of my earlier study, in which most participating

parents, teachers and specialists expressed concern about child sexual abuse in Saudi society (Banunnah, 2013).

At this point, it should be noted that sexual abuse is an extremely sensitive subject that challenges established norms of morality and traditional values such as the privacy and safety of family as the cornerstone of Saudi society (Al Eissa and Almuneef, 2010; Banunnah, 2013). Participants' views were based on their professional experience, but this in turn would be shaped by what children and families were willing to disclose to them. There is a lack of objective data in Saudi Arabia, and it is important to remember this, especially when – as in after the case - the views expressed include opinions as to the group (s) believed to be responsible for perpetrating abuse (Alsehaimi, 2016; Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2017). Such claims need to be subjected to further scrutiny, to see to what extent the current moral panic is borne out by evidence. To reserve judgement on such issues does not, however, call into question the genuine concern of the interviewees about potential risks to Saudi children and that such risks, whatever their sources, should be openly acknowledged and addressed.

The findings of this study show participants' concern that children were among groups vulnerable to sexual exploitation. For example, the majority of participants claimed that children are targeted for sexual abuse, due to their lack of knowledge about this issue. Furthermore, Dr. Alsaleh claimed that “some children with disabilities are subjected to violence and sexual exploitation, so it is important to consider this aspect in order to reduce it”. These concerns are consistent with evidence from the literature indicating that sexual abuse is most likely to occur during childhood. For instance, the study of Lanning (2010) found that children are the main targets of victimisation and are considered to be ‘preferential’ by ‘sex offenders’. Moreover, the report of the NFSP in the Saudi health sector indicated that 82% of victims who had suffered sexual abuse were under the age of 12 (Almuneef et al., 2016). It can be argued that undermining children may lead them to be victims. For example, if children suffer from physical and emotional abuse at home, it could negatively affect their development and self-esteem, making them vulnerable to victimisation. However, Mr. Almuhamid indicated, “not only children suffer from sexual abuse but also adults”. These findings reveal participants' belief that sexual abuse occurs in Saudi society at different ages. Dr. Alshamrani indicated the vulnerability of some girls

in Saudi society “As well there are problems of teenage girls and sexual concern from others, who exploit the girl’s fear of being punished by her family because of the ‘shame culture’”. Due to gender segregation, girls can be exploited sexually, as Dr. Alsheddi explained: “Young people have curiosity; boys want to discover girls. However, it happens in inappropriate ways”. However, girls who suffered from sexual problems could keep silent out of fear of being punished by their families and shamed in society. Participants therefore emphasised that lack of communication between family members, the ‘shame culture’ and the lack of sex education may impact negatively on both children’s and adults’ safety.

Additionally, the findings of this study point out the lack of accurate current statistical evidence in this regard, and suggested that the problem is under-reported. For example, Mrs. Zaher and Dr. Alshamrani noted that studies about sexual abuse of children in the KSA still are not accurate and do not reflect the reality, due to cultural shame. According to Dr. Alsheddi, a reason for sexual problems in Saudi society is that “shame, fear, customs and traditions do not give credibility to the numbers and proportion of sexual problems in the society”. These results support the claim by Almuneef, et al. (2014) that it is difficult to talk openly about the taboo subject of child sexual abuse because Saudi religion and culture are very conservative. Therefore, it is difficult to report abuse cases in the KSA. Despite the difficulty of approaching the subject, evidence of abuse exists, as discussed in Chapter 3. One of the supervisors (PS8) listed various perpetrator groups: “We have many cases of sexual harassment, mostly from domestic workers, relatives, sports clubs and schools, but we ignore them because of the ‘shame culture’” however, this was the only respondents to mention relatives in the context. It was seen in Chapter 5 of this study that the participants showed some reluctance to talk about the incidence of sexual abuse within the family, and they appeared to focus on domestic workers, who seem to be ‘scapegoated’ in discussion of social problems. These findings suggest that it is not only the shame culture that is problematic: children may be not listened to or silenced, regardless of the context in which abuse occurs.

All specialists in this study articulated that a major cause of concern for sexual abuse is that most households in the KSA employ foreign domestic workers and private drivers.

For example, a teacher reflected prevailing social assumptions about the source of the problem by saying “The prevalence of sexual harassment is raised in the society, especially from foreign drivers; therefore, we should raise the awareness in children”. Participants argued that abuse can occur due to the absence of proper communication between parents and their children, which may result in children tending to communicate with those domestic employees instead of their parents. As Mr. Almuhamid stated,

Currently, one of the main causes of abuse is ‘luxury neglect’, which is where children, instead of spending time with parents and family members, are left with domestic workers, and the use of multimedia devices, which also leads to many problems such as electronic exploitation.

Gahwaji (2013) similarly mentioned there is a widespread use of domestic workers, often from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Saudi society. The concern expressed by specialists in this study is similar to the findings in my Master’s research, which also raised concerns about domestic workers as major perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Banunnah, 2013). Such views reflect a moral panic in Saudi society. It is difficult to trust foreign labourers to care for and raise children, as they may have different cultural values and behaviours, as well as unknown history in terms of medical/psychological issues. Specialists and supervisors both made the same point, and suggested that the overlap between domestic workers’ and parental roles is often confusing for children. In the interviews carried out for this study, Dr. Alsheddi argued, “Sexual abuse is increased because of the high percentages of domestic workers in the families who play the parental role”. Therefore, young children may consider domestic workers to be like their parents or relatives, which can lead to problems, such as issues of over-trusting and tending not to speak up if abuse happens. Parents feel their children are safe and are not exposed to any abuse while they are at home and a similar naive trust is demonstrated in previous studies (Collins, 1996; Tang and Yan, 2004; Alldred et al., 2016). Arguably, participants’ concerns in this study are consistent with the high concerns of Saudis who shared some stories that were raised in social media regarding the issue of, in the absence of parents, young children exploited sexually by domestic workers. This can be through sexual activities with young children whilst using pictures or videos to blackmail them. It can be argued that there are many reasons for these issues, for example, the employees came

alone for many years to work, it could be an act of revenge against the abuse that the perpetrator is subject to by the family, verbally or non verbally. Or it could be a psychological issue, which dictates their desires have sex with children 'Paedophilia'. The issue about this is, there is no domestic psychological tests in the KSA. The recruitment of labour agency only performs medical tests for the new workers, making it extremely difficult to identify a potential perpetrator. Furthermore, it should be compulsory to examine the employees' history before their arrival to work in the KSA. This will ensure a higher level of assurance and safety for the family and their children.

However, in 2016, the National Family Safety Program (NFSP) reported the perpetrators who abused children sexually: 26.8% by other caregivers such as domestic workers and drivers, 17.5% by relatives, 13.4% by one of their parents and 1.2% by a stepfather/mother in the KSA (Almuneef et al., 2016). It can be seen that some perpetrators could be members of the family who around children are expected to be the source of safety for them, but together form the largest group of abusers in domestic contexts. Nevertheless, the inadequate evidence base regarding relative perpetrators could be due to 'shame culture', which may deny them to report the abuse. Therefore, it is not clear to what extent foreign workers are perpetrators of abuse or whether they are a scapegoat held responsible for social ills in a time of social change. They seem to feature extensively in the current discourse of moral panic about changing values and behaviour, but it is important to recognise perpetrators may also exist within the family. Therefore, accurate research and data about all forms of child abuse is needed to further explore who the main perpetrators are, rather than attributing blame to one social group who may themselves be exploited due to their relative lack of power and status within Saudi society.

Another factor fuelling the concern about potential abuse and the perceived need for sex education as a protective measure, as reflected in the words of Mr. Almuhamid, quoted above, was the Internet. Due to globalisation and the wide spread of the Internet in the KSA, children could be at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation through their online activities. The findings from the interviews in this study show participants' fear that children can be exploited through smart technologies. For example, Dr. Alshamrani emphasised that "children could be exploited from social media in their bedroom".

Children can play and access many games that include live chatting; therefore, it is easy for them to be exploited or they may be exposed to sexual content, emotional manipulation, or pornography. Moreover, he also highlighted that “in the age of social media, friends can be the first source of sex education”. Participants showed concern that regardless of the boundaries set by the conservative Saudi education system, children can navigate the world on the Internet, learn ideas, and see images that may be inappropriate for their age, or send photos of themselves to others electronically. Therefore, as Mrs. Aldabass noted, “the Internet could help offenders and teenagers to exploit children and usually they focus on victims’ children, who have been abused and missed love and kindness in their families”. It can be seen that the participants’ concerns are in line with DeHart et al. (2017) who explain that uncontrolled Internet exposure could put children at greater risk of sexual abuse. Moreover, they are consistent with a number of studies in the Saudi context that emphasise the need for more studies to be conducted by well-trained specialists to strengthen public awareness about how to protect children from sexual abuse in Saudi society (Al Eissa and Almuneef, 2010; Alsehaimi, 2016; Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2017).

Furthermore, supervisors and specialists interviewed in this study suggested that because of the presence of technologies and smart devices, Saudi strategies on education and child protection must develop to be consistent with the rapidly changing social context. For example, Mr. Almuhamid stressed, “Law alone will not be able to educate people and protect them, but it will be achieved through promoting ethics, community initiatives, education, and the media”. Therefore, specialists expressed their gratitude for the Saudi National Forum for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children via the Internet in 2016, which they viewed as a courageous step from the Saudi government towards protecting children through the use of specialists from various fields. Referring to this conference, Dr. Alsaleh pointed out in this study, “Currently, some of the Saudi government agencies are working to create a national strategy to protect children from sexual exploitation through the Internet”. One of the recommendations of this conference was that scientific studies on sex education for children should be conducted in different fields, to investigate new ways to protect children from sexual abuse in Saudi society (Alshebani, 2016). This was seen by participants as a positive initiative by the Saudi

government, which they appreciated for potentially opening doors for specialists and researchers to express their recommendations regarding sex education.

Therefore, most of the participants' responses in this study, either through the questionnaire or interviews, indicated their urgent desire to reduce the problem of child sexual exploitation in Saudi Arabia. As Dr. Alsheddi mentioned, "Most of the studies focusing on sexual problems do not suggest solutions". Because of that, in response to Q15, in Table 5.5, almost all teachers (94.89%) agreed that the main reason for providing sex education was to make children aware of religious, health, and social guidance regarding the undesired consequences of illegitimate sex, for example, sexual abuse. Such a rationale is consistent with previous research in which direct correlations have been shown between sex education and lower occurrences of sexual abuse in later life (Gibson and Leitenberg, 2000; Kenny, 2010; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). In regard to self-awareness and protection, participants expressed their belief that it is important to teach children how to keep safe from abuse. Their thinking is in line with a body of evidence which demonstrates that sex education can provide awareness to promote children's and adults' skills regarding protection (Kenny, 2010; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a), by promoting their confidence, self-esteem, relationships skills, expression, responsibility, decision-making, self-management and social awareness (Goldman, 2011; Sex Education Forum, 2018; UNESCO, 2018). For example, Wellings et al. (2006, p.12) demonstrate that "School-based sex education leads to improved awareness of risk and knowledge of risk reduction strategies, increased self-effectiveness and intention to adopt safer sex behaviours, and to delay, rather than hasten, the onset of sexual activity".

For this reason, it can be noticed that one of the highest levels of agreement in the questionnaire was in Table 5.5, where 97.71% of pre-school teachers agreed that the lack of sufficient and proper awareness on how children can protect themselves can lead to harassment and exploitation. Therefore, most teachers claimed a need to implement sex education in the curriculum to provide guidance for keeping safe. For example one teacher suggested, "Children must be taught the right way to behave in case sexual harassment may happen". Furthermore, the majority of supervisors and specialists in this study stressed that including sex education in the curriculum could help with child

protection. Therefore, they called for the implementation of safety topics. Their attention to this need is similar to that reflected, for example, in an American document on teaching sex education in the Future of Sex Education initiative [FOSEi], which explains the sexual learning needs of students between the ages of 5-8 years. It advocates that sex education “explains that all people (including children) have the right to tell others not to touch their body” and “explains why bullying and teasing are wrong ... and how to respond” in such situations (FOSEi, 2012, p.13). From the above discussions, it is clear that sex education might equip children with self-protection skills and sharper awareness, which could protect them, regardless of the time or place. Thus, due to the growing concern in Saudi society about child sexual abuse, the Ministry of Education has taken serious steps in education to spread awareness to children, teachers, and families in terms of teaching children how to protect themselves from sexual abuse (MOE, 2018c). However, this approach could place a heavy responsibility on children’s shoulders to protect themselves. The main responsibility for protecting children from such dangers should rest with adults and the wider society, according to indications from this study’s findings.

Despite the significance of children’s self-awareness, the majority of supervisors and specialists strongly believed that it is the responsibility of families and Saudi society to protect children. They expressed the need also for adults to be educated and made aware about child protection, as they are the main players in the provision of sexual awareness and child protection. Mrs. Aldabass and Mrs. Zaher emphasised in their interviews that families and society should be aware of this topic to protect children from all types of abuse and neglect. Their view is in line with Wooden and Anderson’s (2012) assertion that parents need support to have the appropriate sexual information to protect their children.

To summarise, based on the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data, this research presents the social and cultural beliefs, values and experiences in Saudi society as well as globally. This section has discussed reasons for the potential importance of including sex education in the curriculum for young children from the ages of three to six in the KSA in order to answer the first question of this study, ‘To what extent should sex education be included in the three to six years old’ pre-school curriculum in the KSA?’ In order to

address this question, it has presented information about the Saudi society's perspective on sex education, child sexual development, the transmission of values to children, and the need for better child protection. The excess or absence of information on sex education can lead to many problems, especially for young children growing up in a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia. Given the widespread agreement among the research participants that sex education should be part of the pre-school curriculum, the findings about the topics of sex education that could be taught to children of this age will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

6.3 Appropriate sex education topics for children in the KSA

It is clear from the previous section's discussions that sex education for pre-school children is extremely important in the KSA. This section explores the sex education topics that could be appropriate for young children, in order to answer the second research question: 'What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?' In the first subsection, I discuss the current context of sex education in Saudi pre-schools. Then, in the second subsection, I introduce the sex education topics suggested in the current study. Finally, I present a brief comparison between the suggested topics in this study and those suggested in other contexts, such as in the UK, Australia, the USA, and by UNESCO.

6.3.1 Current sex education in Saudi pre-schools

Exploring the current sex education topics in Saudi pre-schools is necessary for a good understanding of which topics are appropriate for young children in Saudi society. In this sub-section, I present a critical discussion on the context of sex education in Saudi pre-schools. Furthermore, I investigate the link between the challenges in child protection and the lack of sex education in the pre-school curriculum. Then, I highlight teachers' efforts to fill in the gaps with regard to the topic of safeguarding in pre-schools. Finally, I

present the main advantages of introducing formal sex education topics in the pre-school curriculum.

In order to identify the appropriate topics for sex education that can be implemented for children between three and six years old in the KSA, it is important to look at the current Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC). This study thus examined pre-school teachers' and supervisors' perspectives on the current coverage of sex education, if any, in the DKC. The majority of pre-school teachers and supervisors explained that, although the pre-school curriculum provides knowledge, values and activities to promote children's life skills, there is a clear lack of specific sex education topics. For example, Mrs. Alghamdi mentioned "There is no topic about the cleanliness of sensitive organs... there is no topic on the differences between the sexes, because it is considered a red line". It was argued in the previous section that this absence could negatively affect children's growth and development and that there is a link between this lack of education and sex-related problems in Saudi society. However, pre-school supervisors mentioned that although the kindergarten curriculum has a national approach, set by the Ministry of Education, it is flexible (MOE, 2016a). For example, one supervisor (PS5) explained that this flexibility allows teachers to decide the order of units during the two academic semesters in the pre-school year:

The curriculum includes separate different themes, which are called units. Pre-schools have freedom of choice in the order of the units through the academic year according to the school budget, social events and the seasons.

This potentially gave the teachers the opportunity to add or omit information to cope with children's needs in this current era, as suggested by one teacher: "We have the freedom to add what is useful in teaching units; there are no limitations in the curriculum". For this reason, the majority of teachers claimed to use teaching aids from external sources to teach children about sex education. However, this flexibility may lead to problems in the approach of delivering the curriculum by omission of topics that teachers do not like to deliver, or feel uncomfortable with the topic, which can affect children and their education. Such a view is consistent with the international study by UNESCO (2018), which indicates that "silencing or omitting these topics can contribute to stigma, shame

and ignorance, may increase risk-taking and create help-seeking barriers for vulnerable or marginalised populations” (UNESCO, 2018, p.18).

Furthermore, this research found that pre-school teachers have been facing challenges regarding the absence of mandatory sex education topics. For example, the responses of pre-school teachers in Q17 of Table 5.6 revealed that the absence of sex education in the curriculum led to 92.91% of teachers making personal efforts to educate children in the classroom about well-being and how to protect themselves from sexual abuse. One pre-school teacher commented in the questionnaire on how she tried to fill this gap:

Due to the lack of safeguarding topics in the current curriculum, I have already worked hard to design a programme for awareness of child sexual harassment, which I have provided to many mothers and children in the pre-school. In fact, children and families need to know real stories about sexual harassment in society and to be aware about the signs of child sexual abuse.

It can be argued that the lack of education on safeguarding and keeping safe topics results in random and possibly inefficient personal efforts made by teachers to raise awareness of these issues. For example, one teacher recognised that in her previous effort to promote awareness she had made what she described as a ‘mistake’ of using untrustworthy sources from the Internet. Similarly, another commented, “I do not agree with idea of ‘my body is mine, do not touch me’, because these claims based on intimidation were not helpful”. It can be seen that inconsistent and disorganised efforts to address sex-related topics may cause fear and panic in children and families. The research findings suggest that despite limited knowledge and skills on how to address this sensitive topic, many teachers are intuitively trying hard to protect children and prepare them to deal with sex-related issues in Saudi society.

For this reason, this study found a prevailing view among participants, consistent with the literature, that introducing effective sex education topics in the pre-school curriculum can assist educators to develop various skills and abilities in children. In this regard, 92.3% of the respondents agreed that it is important to apply a compulsory sex education curriculum in schools to assist children to be aware and maintain their physical, social, and psychological health. Similarly, in my Master’s study, it was shown that the majority

of parents wanted sex education to be implemented in the education system (Banunnah, 2013). This, in turn, could help educators to deal with sensitive issues related to sex in a positive way. This approach is in line with a recent international study by UNESCO (2018), which stated: “Comprehensive Sex Education Programmes (CSE) help develop skills that are closely linked to effective social and emotional learning, including self-awareness, self- management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making” (p. 83). From the above discussions, it appears that identifying appropriate sex education topics for children could be an opportunity to promote teachers’ abilities, thus limiting the negative impact of non-organised education efforts on children in Saudi pre-schools. Accurate information and effective awareness could be provided through formal sex education topics in the pre-school curriculum to help children, teachers and families, which could be considered a positive approach to deal with sex-related issues in Saudi society. With this in mind, the topics that participants perceived as appropriate for such a curriculum are discussed in the next section.

6.3.2 Appropriate sex education topics for children

It is important to carefully investigate appropriate topics for sex education for young children who live in a conservative society such as Saudi society. In this sub-section, suggested content for a sex education curriculum for young children is introduced. Moreover, the proposed sex education topics are critically discussed through the lens of the Saudi context.

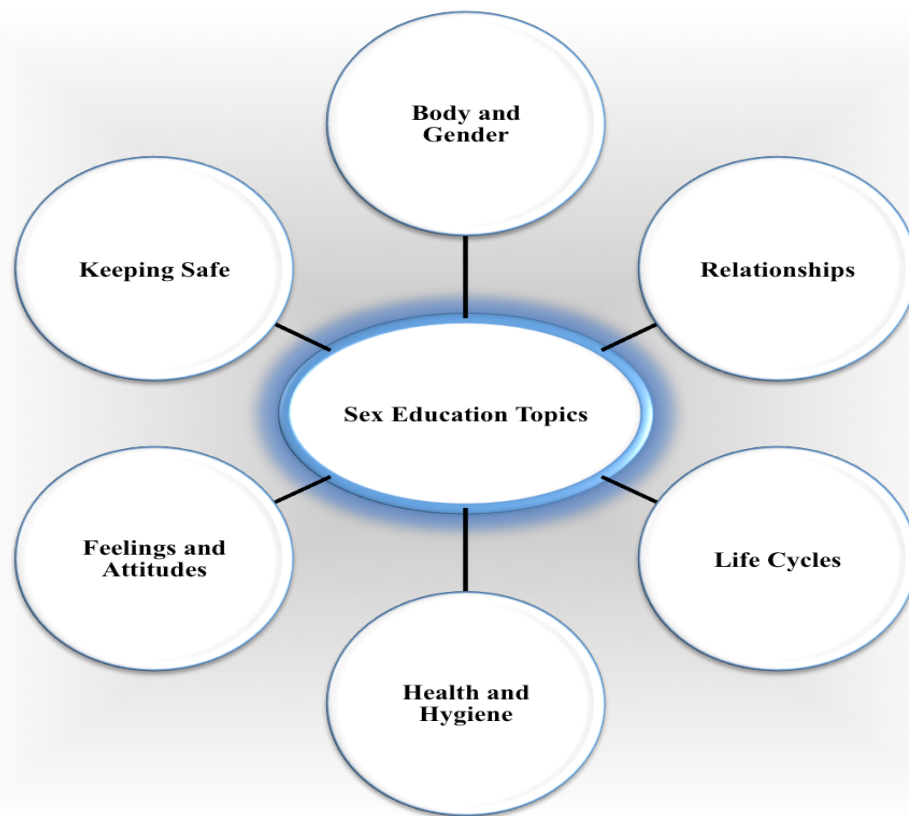


Figure 6.2: Suggested sex education topics for pre-school children in the KSA

This study examined the participants' perspectives on the appropriate sex education topics, taking into account the Saudi cultural context. Participants in the interviews in this study drew attention to some topics of sex education that they considered essential for educating young children, as shown in Figure 6.2. The topics suggested in the interviews were similar to those proposed in the questionnaire, based on the literature. For example, specialists and the majority of the supervisors (15) suggested that children should have knowledge about relationships, gender equality, personal hygiene, protection and safety and the life cycle. Similarly, in response to Q29 of the questionnaire, the majority of teachers, as shown in Table 5.8, agreed that the suggested topics proposed by the expert interviewees could be provided in Saudi pre-schools. From these responses, six topics that participants believed could feature in sex education for Saudi pre-school children were identified. Figure 6.2 illustrates the sex education topics suggested in this study, which are: body and gender, relationships, life cycles, health and hygiene, feelings and attitudes, and keeping safe. This list is similar to those reported in an international study

by UNESCO (2009), which suggested that comprehensive sex education should focus on six core notions for children (aged 5 to 18 years):

1. Relationships, 2. Values, attitudes and skills, 3. Culture, society and human rights, 4. Human development, 5. Sexual behaviour, 6. Sexual and reproductive health; Each topic is linked to specific learning objectives, grouped according to the four age levels (UNESCO, 2009, p.72).

With regard to the terminology used in referring to the suggested sex education topics, the data from this study showed that participants emphasised the importance of showing respect for Saudi culture by using implicit terms when implementing these topics in the pre-school curriculum. They felt that the word 'sex' is sensitive in Saudi society and may increase Saudi adults' caution and concerns, which relates to the 'shame culture'. It can be noted that the word 'sex' is not explicitly used in the titles of the topics, so they can be acceptable to Saudi society. Although the suggested topics are related directly to sex education, the use of more indirect terminology could help to facilitate effective implementation in Saudi pre-schools. In fact, this is not a solely Saudi concern. As Goldman (2008) and Sciaraffa and Randolph (2011) mentioned, some educators get anxious when terms such as 'sex' are used when speaking about young children; however, it has to be noted that these anxieties usually relate to the narrow understanding of the term. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with that of my Master's study, in which parents indicated that they felt more comfortable about discussing sex education with their children in indirect language (Banunnah, 2013). Furthermore, these more indirect terms could assist teachers to avoid embarrassment and assist them to teach these topics effectively, as teachers may feel more confident and comfortable to provide information on these topics for pre-school children if they are separated from the connotations of adult sexual relationships. Consequently, sex education should be provided with respect for culture and to be age-appropriate, especially if it is provided to young children (Levine, 2002; Goldman, 2008; 2015).

Pre-school teachers in this study agreed that children should learn key concepts comprising various themes on sex education such as the differences between the genders (boy, girl), life cycles (i.e., pregnancy, birth, care of newborn babies), relationships (i.e., family, house workers, driver, friends, society), personal health and hygiene, how to

express feelings and different attitudes, and they stressed the significance of keeping safe from sexual abuse (i.e., looking after myself, people who can help me). In this study, the suggested key sex education topics contain information, life skills and values and attitudes that could enhance children's sexual development and prepare them for a healthy life in the future. Similarly, many recent studies have proved that Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) includes topics about beliefs, knowledge, values and skills that could enhance quality of health and sexual life (Pop and Rusu, 2015; Haberland and Rogow, 2015; UNESCO, 2018). Such a comprehensive approach to sex education, which includes knowledge, skills and values, can promote positive attitudes and meet children's needs in terms of cognitive, physical, emotional and sexual development.

An important factor in support of the potential topics explored in this study is that, as shown in Table 5.8 in this study, 30.6% of teachers agreed that the current DKC covers some of these topics. This finding is considered as a positive indication of the appropriateness and feasibility of addressing these themes in the pre-school curriculum. Arguably, however, these topics could be implemented more effectively and in a modern professional approach compared with the way they are currently addressed in the Saudi pre-school curriculum. As pre-school supervisors mentioned, the suggested sex education topics could provide answers to the common sex-related questions that children ask. Moreover, the suggested topics are a good opportunity to enhance teachers' knowledge, abilities and confidence to answer these common questions accurately in an age-appropriate way. Providing information regarding the suggested topics could feed children's desire for knowledge and assist them in their sexual development through the pre-school curriculum. Similarly, in the UK, the Sex Education Forum (2018) designed the key topics of a sex education curriculum for pre-schoolers that covers all common questions with age-appropriate answers related to each theme. Following this introductory exposition, it is of interest to explore participants' opinions towards the suitability and need for specific topics for pre-school children from three to six years old.

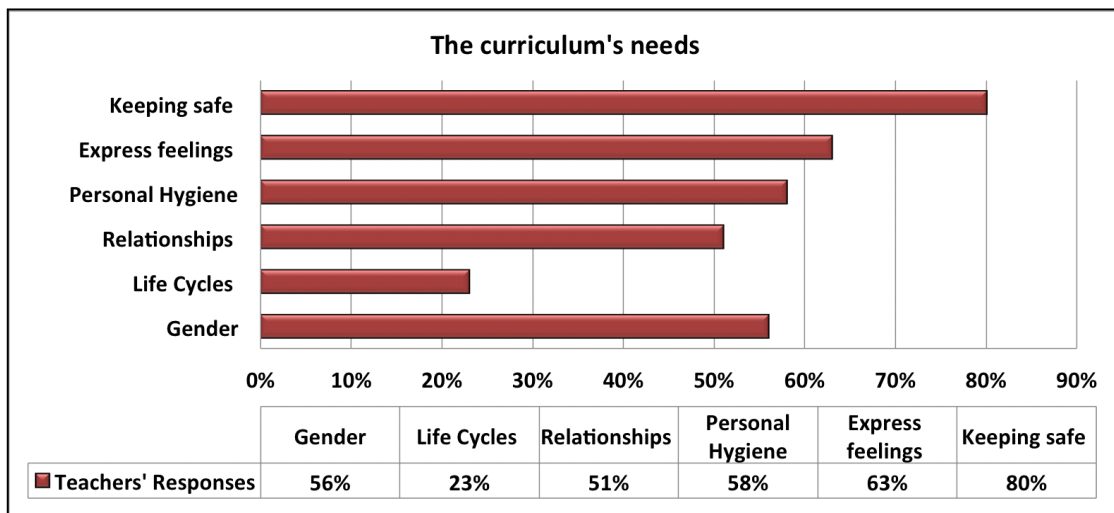


Figure 6.3: The curriculum's needs for sex education topics

Figure 6.3 shows teachers' responses to the questionnaire on what would be appropriate sex-related topics to be taught to young children in Saudi society. It demonstrates the remarkable range of demand for sex education topics in the DKC. It can be seen from Figure 6.3 that only 23% of teachers saw a need for life cycle-related topics (pregnancy, birth, care of newborn babies). It can be suggested that the lower level of support for these topics is because most life cycle topics are linked to the act of intercourse and private relationships, which many Saudis cannot accept for children due to the effects of the 'shame culture'. However, Mrs. Zaher pointed out that in her view teaching of the life cycle topic is acceptable, as it is explained in Islam teachings. It can be argued that Islamic teachings explain human reproduction and this topic recurs in the Quran, although it is always linked to other teachings, as shown in the following example from the Holy Quran:

We created the human from an essence of clay: then We made him, a drop, in a secure receptacle (the womb). Then We created of the drop, a clot (of congealed blood) and We created the clot into bite size tissue, then We created the bite size tissue into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it an other creation. Blessed is Allah, the Best of creators (Quran, 23, p. 12; 14).

In the light of this evidence, it seems that although Saudi society follows Islamic guidance, prevalent misunderstandings of the idea of sex education could be a result of its conservative culture and the lack of Islamic studies for children, rather than Islam itself.

For example, one of the teachers who disagreed with the implementation of sex education topics stated her suggestion: “Islam ensures the rights of the child in full and I do not expect that we need to increase in this topic and expand it”. Clearly, this finding demonstrates that although teachers called for application of Islamic values and teachings in the implementation of sex education, the ‘shame culture’ has a dominating effect on Saudi society, which prevents adults and children from developing their knowledge, even when it is in line with Islam. Therefore, there is a distinction between Islamic values and Saudi culture.

In contrast, Figure 6.3 illustrates that the highest demand by teachers was for the ‘keeping safe’ topic. Eighty percent of teachers requested topics related to keeping safe. This result clearly demonstrates that the teachers’ main concern was how to protect children effectively from sexual abuse, in the absence of formal educational sources. The emphasis on the topic of ‘keeping safe’ is consistent with participants’ focus on protection as a rationale for sex education, discussed in Section 6.2.4. This strong demand from the participants for awareness to be established in a child’s early years is compatible with Kenny’s consideration, which states; “Beginning safety education with pre-school-aged children is important, before children are targeted as victims” (Kenny, 2010, p. 982). These findings are also in line with a number of recent studies, which argue that the best approach to protect children from sexual abuse is the implementation of a compulsory curriculum that includes sex education topics (Kirby, 2011; DeJong, 2012; Walsh et al., 2015; Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017a). On the other hand, some participants in this study disagreed with focusing only on the ‘keeping safe’ topic. For example, a teacher stressed that “sex education is not only about sexual harassment”. Not only is this important topic needed in Saudi society, but also, previous Western studies have demonstrated that there is generally insufficient provision and information about children’s health and safety, particularly on how to keep safe from sexual abuse (UNESCO, 2009; WHO and BZgA, 2010; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2015; Alldred et al., 2016). However, in this study Mrs. Zaher explained that “dealing with sexual problems varies in societies depending on the culture, social values, religions and intellectual development of society”. This statement is in contrast with the argument of Collier-Harris and Goldman (2017b), that the current European standard approach to self-defence for children is appropriate also for all children worldwide.

The findings of this research revealed that focusing only on the topic of keeping safe in Saudi pre-schools may result in ignoring other important topics, as highlighted by some teachers in their comments. For example, one teacher commented, “I suggest creating only one appropriate intensive unit containing topics of harassment to give clear correct information about this”. However, the topics suggested in this study based on expert opinions and on participants’ endorsement of topics proposed to them in the questionnaire, which were broadly consistent with UNESCO (2009) clearly reflect that sex education encompasses various topics, such as gender differences, child sexual development, hygiene, self-protection, body acceptance and self-consciousness, and how bodies function, all of which fall under the umbrella of ‘sex education’. It can be argued that focusing excessively on keeping safe and ignoring other topics related to sex education in Saudi pre-schools, may emotionally affect children and even increase feelings of being unsafe.

6.3.3 Comparing the suggested sex education topics with other contexts

In this section, I assess the sex education topics suggested by participants as appropriate for young children in the KSA by comparing them with various contexts. I make a comparison between the topics identified in this study and topics for young children in other contexts with different cultural backgrounds.

The qualitative findings of this study emphasised the importance of sex education in early childhood, not only in Saudi society, but worldwide, as children’s needs are the same, regardless of their culture or socio-economic status. For instance, one of the supervisors (PS12) emphasised that “Sex is an essential part of human life”. These findings are similar to previous studies, which proved that children worldwide undergo the same needs and development process (Dorn and Biro, 2011; Tolman and McClelland, 2011; Fortenberry, 2013), despite coming from different backgrounds. Furthermore, according to Wiseman et al. (2008), however, while several studies have demonstrated that education in some countries is characterised by a rejection of global trends, which are against their traditional, religious and cultural values, they also use a unique method of

adapting to these global trends around education in light of these apparent barriers. Therefore, due to the lack of sex education resources for children in the KSA and Islam, the impact of the ‘shame culture’, and children’s developmental needs, it would be beneficial to compare the topics agreed by participants in this study and sex education topics for young children in different contexts. Table 6.1 overleaf provides an overview of key concepts of the sex education topics agreed on by participants with some examples of topics in various other contexts, such as the UK, Australia, and United States, and the international perspective from UNESCO.

Table 6.1: Overview of key concepts of sex education in the current study and examples from the UK, Australia, United States and UNESCO.

Sex Education Curriculum Key Concepts for Ages 3-8				
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	United Kingdom	Australia	United States	UNESCO
(3-6 years) (Current Study)	(3-6 years) (SEF, 2018)	(5-8 years) (DEECD, 2011)	(5-18 years) (SIECUS, 2004)	(5-18 years) (UNESCO, 2018)
Relationships	Relationships	Belonging	Relationships	Relationships
Life Cycles	Life Cycles	Where did I Come from?	Sexual Behaviour	Sexual and Reproductive Health
My Body and Gender	My Body	My Body	Human Development	The Human Body and Development
Feelings Expression and Attitudes	Feelings and Attitudes	Knowing me, Knowing you	Personal Skills	Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality
Personal Skills for Health and Hygiene	Keeping safe and Looking after myself	Growing and Changing	Sexual Health	Skills for Health and Well-being
Keeping Safe and Looking after myself	People who can Help me	Someone to Talk to?	Society and Culture	Violence and Staying Safe
				Sexuality and Sexual Behaviour
				Understanding Gender

Interestingly, it can be seen from Table 6.1 that the concepts of sex education topics for young children in this study are approximately similar to the topics proposed in various other contexts, such as the UK, Australia, and the United States, as well as the international perspective from UNESCO. It can be noticed that all the programmes include similar sex education topics that children need, such as about their body, life

cycle, relationships, feelings, personal skills, and keeping safe. On the other hand, it can be argued that due to the socio-cultural difference, there is may some difference in the terminology and the information content. It can be seen that different terminologies are used between the topics in this study and SIECUS (2004) in the USA and the international study of UNESCO (2018). For example, they use the terms ‘sex’ and ‘sexual’, whereas in this study, the suggested terms applied to the equivalent topics are more indirect, as discussed in Section 6.3.2, due to cultural difference. Another reason could be that these curricula are provided gradually to children from five to 18 years old, while the focus of this study was on topics suitable for children from three to six years old. In contrast, the terms used in sex education topics in in the UK and Australia curricula are similar to those topics in this study. In the UK, the Sex Education Forum suggests appropriate key topics for the sex education curriculum for children from three to six years old as:

- Theme of relationships; Family, Friends and Other people.
- Theme of my body; Differences between Girls and boys difference and names of the Body’s organs.
- Theme of life cycles; Delivering baby and Growth and changes.
- Theme of keeping safe and looking after myself; Private parts and Touch rules.
- Theme of people who help me; Help if I am worry about something (Sex Education Forum, 2018; Martinez et al., 2012).

Additionally, in Australia, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) designed the sex education curriculum for young children, which focuses on six main themes, which are: “Knowing me and Knowing you, Growing and Changing, My Body, Belonging, Someone to Talk to? Where did I come from?” (DEECD, 2011, p.35). Clearly, it can be seen that the terms used to refer to sex education topics for young children, preferred by participants in this study, seem to be similar to the

sex education topics in the UK and Australia. However, there are differences in their contents.

For example, the findings of this study point out the importance of the relationships topic for young children. As Mrs. Zaher explained, “We need a topic about friendships and relationships and their frames”. The relationship topic can assist children to have clear information about the nature and scope of different relationships; consequently, can assist children, families and society to have respect and equality. This finding is in line with many other studies, which show that young children need to know more about relationships and feelings before they form strong emotional attachments in the period of adolescence (SIECUS, 2004; Goldman, 2013; 2015; UNESCO, 2015; Pound et al., 2016; Sex Education Forum, 2018). For this reason, in England, the UK Department of Education indicates that, in 2019, ‘Relationships Education’ will be provided as a compulsory part of the foundation and primary school curricula (DfE, 2017). However, although these key topics focus on social life education more than sexual acts, the contents of such topics differ in different contexts, both in the information provided and in the teaching approach. It can be seen that in this study, participants stressed that implementation of sex education topics should be based on Islamic teachings, in line with Saudi culture, which has different perspectives on relationships than those in Western societies. For example, the term ‘boyfriend/girlfriend relationships’, or LGBT rights and concepts are acceptable in the UK, but are not acceptable in Islam and Saudi society. Most Islamic studies stressed that the Western beliefs regarding these relationships directly violate Islamic law (Elwan, 2002; Al-Qadi, 2006; Islam and Rahman, 2008). Clearly, this finding is consistent with the concept of Tabatabaie (2015) that sex education for children in Islam conflicts with the secular concept in the contents and approach of delivery as they are different due to Islamic values. For this reason, Islam and Rahman (2008) demonstrated that a way for Muslims to ‘escape’ from assimilation into Western cultural values is through demanding sex education according to Islamic values. Such evidence supports the view that, although sex education topics are essential for children’s natural sexual development, regardless of their cultural background, they should be implemented differently based on sociocultural perspectives worldwide.

Furthermore, although there is similarity between the terms of the presented topics in this study and these taught in other contexts, the Saudi culture would play a significant role in presenting these topics. As shown in Table 5.7, 92.62% of the teachers surveyed, along with the pre-school supervisors interviewed, stressed the significant need to update the DKC units and provide sex education with related knowledge, activities and materials that respect Saudi culture. This is in line with the Saudi vision 2030, which emphasised the need to develop the education systems, with respect for the national culture (MOE, 2018c). Similarly, recently, teaching and learning methods have been changing as a consequence of the continuous change in social circumstances due to globalisation, such as the global media and the Internet (Wiseman et al, 2013; Marginson and Dang, 2017). Therefore, it is important to consider the appropriate activities and materials of sex education topics that are acceptable in Saudi society, in order to develop an effective curriculum for pre-schools. Due to the social norm of modesty, the tools used in teaching sex education topics for young children, such as videos and pictures that can be used in the classroom, should thus respect the culture. It would not be appropriate in sex education in Saudi pre-schools, for example, to show pictures of nudity, kissing, or real pictures of private parts. For children to see parents kissing, for example, would be acceptable in other societies; however, it is not acceptable in Saudi culture. This confirms the studies of Tabatabaie (2015) and Pop and Rusu (2015) that implementation of sex education topics in diverse contexts will be different based on their inherent values and the application (i.e. what should be provided when, by whom, and how). Clearly, it is important to examine how these topics can be effectively delivered in the pre-school curriculum in a way that can be accepted in Saudi society.

In addition, Saudi participants in this study suggested children's need for information, skills and values, in order to promote children's sexual development through the pre-school curriculum. This study found that the majority of participants mentioned three core components that can be included in the content of sex education:

- Information and knowledge that respect the local culture.
- Personal skills.
- Islamic values and attitudes.

Each topic can be divided into several sub-headings regarding these core principles. This finding highlighted the significant opportunity to apply topics with these principles gradually for all different educational levels, based on their age. Pre-school supervisors and specialists in this study argued that information in sex education topics should be delivered gradually, from the basic to more advanced levels based on age-appropriateness. For example, Mrs. Aldabass and Mrs. Zaher stressed that this information should be provided gradually, at the appropriate age. This approach can encourage teachers and families to accept sex education. As supervisor (PS14) clarified, sex education should “be delivered through all existing units gradually, to be more acceptable to families and society”. Children need to be gradually given basic information about sex using appropriate terms and an approach acceptable in Saudi society. It can be argued that due to the lack of age-appropriateness and the nature of Saudi culture, educators would struggle to provide this kind of information to young children in pre-schools. Consequently, each concept in the presented topics can be divided into sub-topics that encourage teachers to explain information, skills and Islamic values in sex education gradually, in an age-appropriate way. This suggestion could reflect positively on educators because they can feel more comfortable that their children are learning appropriate information based on their age. This approach can assist children sexually by building their knowledge, promoting their personal skills and abilities for future life and implementing the values of Islam. Similarly, UNESCO (2018) reported, “the key concepts are further delineated into two to five topics, each with key ideas and knowledge, attitudinal, and skill-based learning objectives per age group” (UNESCO, 2018, p.35).

Finally, it can be noted from the previous discussion and the analysis of the questionnaire and interview data from this research that appropriate sex education topics for children from three to six years old can be defined. This section has discussed the appropriate sex education topics in Saudi pre-schools in order to answer the second question of this study, ‘What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?’ This section has demonstrated the limitations of current sex education in pre-schools, presented age-appropriate sex education topics, and compared them with other topics in different contexts. It can be concluded that although the agreed terms of sex education topics for children are similar to those taught in other contexts, the contents and manner

of providing them are different, and are likely to be so because they would be based on Islamic values and Saudi culture. Therefore, the third section of this chapter will discuss potentially appropriate ways of providing the sex education curriculum to these children.

6.4 Provision of sex education

It is important to investigate the appropriate approaches to implementing sex education for young children in Saudi pre-schools effectively. This section therefore explores issues in implementing sex education topics in Saudi education settings, which answers the third question for this research, ‘How should sex education be provided to pre-school children in the KSA?’ In the first subsection, I discuss the possible approaches to implementing sex education in the pre-school curriculum. In the second subsection, I address the roles of teachers, parents and society in sex education provision, thus connecting the roles and responsibilities of home, preschool and wider society. Finally, I highlight findings related to some challenges and opportunities related to sex education training programmes in the KSA.

6.4.1 Implementing sex education in the DKC

This subsection discusses the implementation of sex education topics in the Saudi pre-school curriculum. I examine the different views regarding informal and formal implementation of the suggested topics. Then, I compare between the possible approaches to implementing these topics, whether as a separate unit or integrated into the existing units of the DKC.

6.4.1.1 Informal sex education topics in the DKC

The findings of this study indicate a strong need for implementing the suggested sex education topics in the curriculum for children in the KSA. However, some teachers disagreed with compulsory provision and preferred sex education to be provided informally. Arguably, understanding those teachers’ reasons for opposing implementing these new topics as compulsory in the Saudi pre-school curriculum could help avoid

negative consequences for children. In explaining their views, some of them pointed out the importance of sex education provision at an early age, however, in indirect manner to respect the Saudi culture. For example, one teacher mentioned that “This topic is new to our society as you mentioned, because of shyness and the concerns of children and parents. Therefore I was guiding them in indirect ways”. Moreover, some of those teachers who disagreed with a compulsory sex education curriculum suggested providing such topics informally in the class through daily activities such as stories and songs, or health awareness days, to which a nurse could be invited. Furthermore, some teachers mentioned the importance of using appropriate tools and technologies to provide these topics informally, such as CDs and games on smart devices to teach sex education. For example, one teacher commented “I favour use of stories or educational performances to educate the child about these topics. Furthermore, I resorted to games for iPads focused on this topic”. This result is similar to the UNESCO (2018) study, which explains that comprehensive sex education can be provided through a formal approach in the existing curriculum or an informal approach via school activities. However, Pound et al. (2017) argue that in order to make sex education effective, it should be set formally in the timetable of the curriculum and supported by appropriate activities, materials and events.

It can be argued that the previous examples of the personal efforts in providing informal sex education topics in Saudi pre-schools could lead to many related problems in future. Pre-school supervisors mentioned, for example, that unofficial implementation, especially taking into account the ‘shame culture’, may lead teachers to avoid discussing some topics because they are embarrassed. Moreover, teachers could ignore sex education topics and focus on the compulsory academic topics. As the Sex Education Forum (2016b) indicates teachers may focus on topics in the compulsory subjects instead of focusing on sex education topics, because most educators tend to focus on standardised academic topics and ignore topics related to well-being (Goldman, 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Sex Education Forum, 2016a). Furthermore, due to the lack of trustworthy sources for children in the KSA, some teachers may add some topics that are not appropriate to children’s age, which could lead them to be at risk. For this reason, the majority of participants in this study agreed that sex education topics should be clearly part of the compulsory Saudi pre-school curriculum. The suggested topics could alleviate opposition derived from the conflict between the notion of sex education and the ‘shame culture’ in

Saudi society. This method can limit the drawbacks of the informal sex education and ensure teachers become more comfortable with discussing sex education topics in an age-appropriate and accurate way. Thus, the findings point out the opportunity for the curriculum to include accurate and clear knowledge that appropriate for young children from three to six years. This finding is similar to Goldman and Goldman's (1982) study, which stated three important criteria to consider when selecting and evaluating materials in sex education topics, which are accuracy, clarity and appropriateness for children.

6.4.1.2 Formal sex education in the DKC

This study has uncovered debate regarding the appropriate approach for the presentation of compulsory sex education topics in the Saudi pre-school curriculum, either in a new separate unit or by distributing the topics within the existing units of the DKC. Sex education topics could be provided as a stand-alone subject or by integrating them with the current subjects of the curriculum (UNESCO, 2018). This section evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of the possible implementation approaches as a separate unit or topics integrated within the current units.

Due to the importance of sex education, all supervisors and specialists in this study stressed that it should be implemented formally from an early age. Based on the findings of this study, applying compulsory sex education as a separate, stand-alone unit could have advantages and disadvantages. For example, one interviewee, Mrs. Zaher, emphasised that "sex education should be in one curriculum or a separate unit due to its importance and coherence". Furthermore, some pre-school teachers suggested that sex education could be added to the current 11 compulsory units to make a total of 12 units. One of the advantages of a stand-alone unit of sex education topics is that keeping all sex-related topics in one book could promote coherence and facilitate related knowledge and materials formally in the DKC. Consequently, this approach could encourage teachers to focus on children's needs and address all ideas, including children's questions related to the specific unit, effectively. Similarly, UNESCO guidance (2009) promotes sex education ideally as a separate and continuous school subject, so that competing priorities do not allow it to be marginalised. Furthermore, this approach is supported by

Goldman's (2011, p.78) study, which found that topics integrated through a cross-curricular approach to teaching sex education have "less emphasis on the discrete boundaries and more emphasis on integrated forms of knowledge", thereby creating a relevant and meaningful curriculum that is child-centred and accessible.

Moreover, having a single unit can help teachers to be better prepared to provide these topics in Saudi pre-schools. It can be argued that a separate unit could give opportunities to well-trained teachers to provide this unit effectively; therefore, it also could be cost effective for schools. UNESCO (2018) similarly points out that the advantage of a stand-alone subject is that it is cost-effective because only one well-trained teacher is required to provide the materials and activities in school. One well-trained teacher, for example, with adequate abilities to deal with certain issues, could provide this unit to all classes in the school. Furthermore, pre-school supervisors would find it easier this way to evaluate those trained teachers' teaching and the materials used, to ensure that sex education topics are provided effectively.

On the other hand, pre-school supervisors in this study pointed out that in practice, adding a separate unit to the already heavy curriculum load may be more difficult for teachers. Teachers may thus face problems in managing the timetable if a new unit were added to the pre-school curriculum. As my Master's findings demonstrated, some Saudi teachers have high pressures regarding time management and the current heavy curriculum (Banunnah, 2013). Untrained teachers may not be able to cope with the new unit's materials, activities and reflection, which would negatively impact on achieving the objectives of sex education for children during the Saudi academic year. Al-Qadi (2006) noted that schools already have a lot of information and knowledge to impart within the existing curriculum, so the addition of a new curriculum based on sex education would only make these issues worse. Despite the advantages of having a separate unit for sex education topics, if there is insufficient time for providing it, this will be reflected in the effectiveness of its impact on children (UNESCO, 2018).

With regard to the name of a separate unit, the nature of the conservative Saudi society led the majority of supervisors and specialists to suggest that it must be named appropriately in order to be acceptable. Therefore, this study found that most of the pre-

school supervisors in this study preferred the term, ‘family life education’, because it is comprehensive and they considered it to be more acceptable than ‘sex education’ in Saudi culture. For example, Dr. Alsheddi preferred the phrase, ‘family life education’, as an alternative title to ‘sex education’, thereby showing appropriate respect to social values. This point demonstrates that educators did not reject the notion of sex education per se, but felt more comfortable and confident with its provision under the name ‘family life education’, which better reflected their views of what sex education should encompass in Saudi culture and removed the apparent focus on sex itself. Interestingly, Parker et al. (2009) found that the term ‘family life education’ is used in most of Eastern Europe, including Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. Conversely, there are those who question excessive focus on the specific terminology used, arguing that it would be more beneficial to focus on the content of the curriculum. This was raised by one of the interviewees, Dr. Alduhaim, who argued that “changing the name of sex education may affect its aims; sex education is a broad topic which requires accuracy and clarity”. As a consultant and religious judge in the Saudi Court, he understood the concept of sex education for young children wholly according to Islamic guidance. However, Mrs. Zaher argued against changing the name of the sex education topic by saying, “It would not be helpful to change the name of sex education to personal protection, except for the purpose of overcoming opposition”. This shows how cultural bias and social norms are central to how sex education is taught to children, and should be taken into account (Campos, 2002).

The second approach by which sex education topics could be presented to young children in the DKC is to distribute these topics within the existing 11 units of the curriculum. Most of the specialists and teachers participating in this study favoured this option. Arguably, if sex education topics were made part of other units, their provision could still be made compulsory for teachers. For example, sex education topics regarding health, physiology, awareness, and protection could be, and often are, incorporated into the My Body, Family, and Health units. The integration of sex education topics within the regular curriculum can contribute to establishing connections with other existing topics (UNESCO, 2018). Topics relating to morals could be incorporated into religious studies in many curricula, and issues of customs, traditions and relationships could be implemented as part of social studies (Al-Qadi, 2006; Elwan, 2002).

Furthermore, the pre-school supervisors in this study suggested that arguably, there is some flexibility in the DKC because some units are optional depending on circumstances. The suggested sex education topics could therefore be included in one of them, such as the Psychological Health unit, which is an optional unit. Moreover, some teachers stressed the importance of the Health and Safety unit, which is optional, and suggested that it should include sex education topics. In practice, this idea is similar to what happens in England's state primary schools, as they teach the basics of sex education in the National Science Curriculum, including anatomy, puberty, and reproduction. Some other topics are provided through non-statutory education, however, including Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) (Brook, PSHE Association, and Sex Education Forum 2014). One drawback, however, is that in the UK, some families tend to withdraw their children from sex education because it is optional (Tabatabaie, 2015; Alldred et al., 2016). Similarly, due to the Saudi 'shame culture', some families may have concerns and complaints about this optional unit. Parents who oppose sex education may force their children to be absent during this unit, which can affect their children and Saudi society. Section 34 of the *Children and Social Work Act 2017* will make sex education a statutory requirement of all primary schools in England from 2019, through 'Relationships Education' in PSHE (DfE, 2017). It can be argued that the experiences of English schools with a non-statutory curriculum have led the government to act, due to the importance of sex education in assisting children and educators in avoiding sex-related problems in society. Learning from this experience in England would suggest the possibility that implementing compulsory sex education topics in the Saudi pre-school curriculum would achieve a more effective and inclusive learning environment.

However, the findings of this study reveal a perception that incorporating the suggested sex education topics in an integrated approach could increase the quality of all existing units to match children's needs and current lifestyle. As some teachers commented in this study, the current curriculum (DKC) should be developed to contain advanced topics to cope with this globalised era. Another issue to consider was the level of teachers' abilities and skills to provide the curriculum and educate children effectively in Saudi pre-schools. Therefore, an integrated approach could provide training opportunities for all pre-school teachers to improve their abilities and capabilities in teaching, especially when dealing with sex education topics. Furthermore, although the cost of training could be higher than

training for just a separate unit approach, this approach could also be more effective in improving the quality of pre-school provision in the Saudi educational system.

Moreover, the results of this study reveal a perception that applying the suggested sex education topics using an integrated approach is an opportunity to provide the topics gradually from basic to advanced topics, as appropriate at different ages. For example, Dr. Alshamrani argued that “sex education topics should be provided to all educational levels gradually”. Due to the importance of sex education for children and Saudi society, this study therefore points out that it be continued gradually for all educational levels, to promote the needs of all children, both boys and girls, equally in all schools. It can be argued that this approach can help pre-school teachers to build on children’s knowledge gradually through lessons, which would reflect positively on their personal skills and abilities. Consequently, the sexual development of children would be more focused and followed up through all units in the academic year.

This study provides indications that the integrated approach of implementing sex education topics may be more acceptable to families than a separate unit, as it could alleviate the impact of the ‘shame culture’ in Saudi society. For example, in this study Mrs. Aldabass and Mrs. Alghamdi recommended that addition of topics into appropriate units in the DKC would be more acceptable to families and Saudi society. As one supervisor interviewed in this study mentioned, “Sex education should be delivered through all existing units gradually, to be more acceptable to families and society”. Families’ acceptance would be important in order to achieve an effective curriculum for sex education in Saudi pre-schools. It can be noted that the integrated approach avoids the appearance of focusing specially on ‘sex’ in one unit, which could be a more acceptable approach for Saudi society. Sex education topics can then be presented as an expansion of units in the DKC that are already accepted by families, rather than as a radically new development. Furthermore, the participants all noted that sex education could be a key link between children, families and school. This may also help pre-school teachers to feel more confident to share their knowledge and experiences with parents, as well as provide an opportunity for parents to educate children about sex education topics through the topics in the pre-school curriculum.

Despite the finding that the majority of participants favoured the integrated approach, the Saudi culture would play a fundamental role in implementing sex education. For example, one of the supervisors in this study noted that “this topic is not easy for Saudi culture but it is not impossible to be applied in Saudi education”. However, as discussed previously, due to the flexibility of the DKC, there is a risk that if some changes are made to the subjects or materials to adapt to Saudi culture, it could affect the core goal of sex education. UNESCO (2018, p.96) emphasises that “Changing some language, or images or cultural references to make the content more relevant does not impact on effectiveness”, however. There is flexibility to design sex education topics in a culturally acceptable way, which would hopefully have a positive effect on society. This is important because the literature shows that various factors, which are very significant for children, parents, teachers, curriculum specialists, and policy makers, should be taken into account during the design of any sex education curriculum (Collier-Harris and Goldman, 2017b). Hence, it can be seen from the previous discussions that the integration of sex education topics within the current units might facilitate their gradual implementation in an age-appropriate and culturally sensitive manner.

6.4.2 The important roles in provision of sex education

The social environments surrounding children play a significant role in promoting children skills for a healthy future life in families, schools, and communities in Saudi society. Furthermore, the surrounding environments have a great impact on children’s sexual development. Therefore, in this section, the research findings about the roles of teachers, parents, and Saudi society in the provision of sex education will be discussed to encourage parents, teachers and society to educate children in an appropriate manner.

6.4.2.1 Role of teachers and their beliefs

The findings of this research assert the importance of pre-school in shaping children’s skills and personality. The results showed that the majority of teachers, supervisors and specialists believed in the importance of the pre-school stage. Table 5.9 shows that 96.94% of teachers agreed on the importance of the school role in children’s social

development and awareness of individual and family life, through the provision of knowledge and required skills. Pre-school is a great opportunity for young children because they can obtain information and skills that cannot be provided in their families or surrounding environments. Therefore, children who attend pre-schools can be greatly impacted by the pre-school environment, because they spend most of the day interacting with the setting, teachers, friends, and the curriculum. Similarly, Marginson and Dang (2017) argue that the significant interaction between sociocultural and biological developments can shape children's personality, as Vygotsky (1986) also explained. Conversely, it is important to point out that although this study focuses on children who are between three and six years old, preschool is non-compulsory education in the KSA. Therefore, children who are raised exclusively at home, and are not registered at pre-schools, cannot benefit from such useful child development programmes. Moreover, the majority of pre-school supervisors were worried that the current role of pre-schools in sex education provision is very weak. Although the pre-school role is significant to educate children, some pre-schools' leaders are not experts in early childhood, which could have a negative impact on children and the curriculum. As an example of numerous comments in this regard is this one by a newly qualified teacher:

There is a gap between the Early Childhood field in university and the pre-school. Information is not applied as required, especially in the villages, because the head teachers are not specialists in pre-school education. Consequently, the regulations of the Ministry of Education might be applied just on paper.

It can be argued that children can be affected negatively, due to the power of those head teachers, who lack information regarding ECE. For example, if sex education topics are presented in the curriculum, the head teachers may not understand their importance for children sexual development. Therefore, sex-related topics could be ignored or edited to accommodate certain perceptions in Saudi society. These variables highlight the need for sex education also to be integrated into the primary school curriculum, as this phase is compulsory for children.

In addition, the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study show support for the significant impact of pre-school teachers on children's education. For example, 99.52% of teachers believe that pre-school teachers play important roles in developing children's awareness and protecting their physical, emotional, and mental health. Supervisor PS4

pointed out the significant role of teachers nowadays: “In the present era parents are busy. Consequently, teachers have a significant impact on children, greater than parents”. Therefore, many children who attend the school may obtain information and communicate with their teachers more than their families. It can be suggested that sex-related information could be more effective and acceptable from their teachers. Pre-school teachers and supervisors are the most familiar with the DKC and children’s needs, accordingly this study proposed to involve their perspectives in designing the suggested sex education topic. This would be in line with Collier-Harris and Goldman’s (2017a) argument that the design of sex education programmes should also take account of school factors, such as students’ and teachers’ needs.

On the other hand, this study found that although there is significant belief in teachers’ role, sex education implementation could be impacted negatively. Mrs. Alghamdi was concerned that “if sex education is generalised in pre-schools, teachers could provide it negatively, due to Saudi culture”. For example, the findings of this study stress that Saudi pre-school teachers may lack confidence in dealing with sex-related issues that could be raised in the class, due to the lack of sex education sources and cultural norms. However, this is not a purely Saudi problem; in the UK, it has been reported that some teachers have a lack of experience in teaching sex education topics and thus do not have the ability to deliver these topics effectively (Ofsted, 2013). Moreover, arguably, in Saudi culture, unmarried people often find it embarrassing to teach or talk about this topic. As Mrs. Zaher highlighted in this study, “Some teachers believe that if they are unmarried, they are unable to talk about this topic”. Similarly, a pre-school teacher with more than 21 years’ experience commented in the questionnaire, “We do not talk about this sensitive topic in pre-schools because most teachers are not married”. Such responses illustrate that strong traditions and the ‘shame culture’ are key factors that could affect the implementation of sex education in Saudi society. This finding is similar to several previous studies, which highlight the need for effective sex education to consider some important factors such as being culturally appropriate, family-centred and community-based (Prinz and Sanders, 2007; Tabatabaie, 2015; Pop and Rusu, 2015).

With regard to teachers’ responses towards children’s sexual questions, this study found that currently Saudi educators have three prevalent responses towards children’s sexual

curiosity; either ignoring children's questions, providing wrong answers, or providing correct answers but with inappropriate information. As discussed in Section 6.2.2, children have curiosity to ask about sex and gender, and may seek knowledge and understanding of these matters. Table 5.10 shows teachers' varied ways of responding to sexual question that could be raised in the class, while 83.7% of participating teachers agreed that those responses would be due to the lack of information about sex education for young children. For this reason, 58% of teachers pointed out that they had difficulty in answering sex related questions. Therefore, 58.26% of teachers agreed that they avoided answering children's questions by changing the subject as a result of discomfort, due to their embarrassment. For example, an experienced pre-school teacher explained, "The family is mainly responsible for guiding them in these shameful things and keeping them from dangers and harassment". The use of the phrase 'shameful things', however, may suggest that the respondent might have wanted to leave this role to parents because of her own embarrassment, consistent with the earlier findings on the 'shame culture'. However, Dr. Alsheddi pointed out the drawbacks of the impact of the 'shame culture' of teachers by explaining that "shyness in answering children's questions creates children's shyness; furthermore, it highlights that there is a sinful thing, which motivates them to discover the information by themselves". Children in this open era can find information from many untrustworthy sources, such as friends and the Internet, which exposes them to abuse. Such reactions are similar to the view of Ketterman (2007), who noted that sexual exploration is a natural part of development and children should not be reprimanded for it, as it could lead them to be ashamed to talk about sex and sexual issues, hindering future development.

On the other hand, participants in this study mentioned that some people might provide wrong answers under the misapprehension that providing correct information regarding sex and gender is directly related to the pursuit of sexual acts. In this situation, pre-school teachers, and supervisors stated that the lack of appropriate information about sex and gender in the curriculum for each age group is one of the factors that contributes to educators' failures to address children's sexual questions in Saudi society. These responses that pre-school teachers are unwilling to answer children's questions about sex is consistent with several studies, which found that many educators lack the confidence to address sex-related issues with their children (Berne et al., 2000; Wooden and Anderson,

2012; Pop and Rusu, 2015). Whereas Western studies such as those cited attribute this to lack of confidence, the present findings add a further dimension by highlighting the extent to which such feelings are exacerbated in the Saudi context by the above-mentioned 'shame culture', which creates taboos around sex-related topics. However, Dr. Alshamrani and Mrs. Aldabass explained that in responses to children's questions related to sex and gender, children just need simple and honest answers at an appropriate age. This finding could provide a guide to regarding the appropriate and honest response with children's sexual questions. Therefore, it can be seen that the findings of this study reveal a prevailing view that teachers have a major responsibility for delivering sex education topics effectively and responding to children's questions in an appropriate manner, rather than relying on possibly unplanned, ill-informed or biased personal efforts (Milton, 2003; Banunnah, 2013; Counterman and Kirkwood, 2013).

Arguably, although the previous examples highlighted an interesting point that may be related to the 'shame culture', such a view cannot be generalised to the whole of Saudi society. Nevertheless, the findings of this study demonstrate how sociocultural factors could have a negative impact on the teaching of sex education topics in Saudi pre-schools. Such factors could result in some teachers skipping these topics or leaving them to the parents, which could lead to the perpetuation of the 'shame culture' in Saudi society. Because of this, Mrs. Aldabass stressed that "teachers should be knowledgeable and aware by reading up-to-date information from recommended resources, which will impact on children and their families in Saudi society". Having compulsory sex education topics could be a great opportunity to encourage teachers to avoid the embarrassment caused by the 'shame culture' in Saudi society and share their knowledge with parents and families, which could have a positive impact on Saudi society.

6.4.2.2 Role of parents and their beliefs

The majority of participants in this study (pre-school teachers, supervisors and specialists) argued the importance of parents' responsibility in delivering sex education. Moreover, they highlighted that parents' role is also significant, due to the sensitive nature of some questions that may be raised. Parents can potentially encourage their children's sexual development by means that go beyond sex-specific discussion and education. It has been shown that more general characteristics of the parent-child

relationship, including connectedness, supportiveness and conveying future expectations, are more influential on a child than direct conversations about sex and sexual issues (Haffner, 2008; Markham et al., 2010; Parkes et al., 2011). According to Martinez and Cooper (2006) children prefer to receive sex education from their parents rather than in a school setting. In this respect, the findings of this study revealed a feeling among pre-school teachers that families are mainly responsible for caring for their children, including providing sex education. For example, Dr. Alshamrani and Mrs. Aldabass in this study saw mothers, especially, as having the main responsibility for sex education and answering sex-related questions. Furthermore, one teacher argued that

There is a significant need for parents to teach children how to defend themselves. Children must learn that the parents are a source of safety and they must be informed of what is happening to them.

It can be seen that parents should be a resource of safety for their children to build their knowledge and promote their skills by continuing communications and healthy relationships, which can assist them in protection.

Despite this assertion of the importance of parents, implementing sex education in the pre-school curriculum in such a conservative Saudi society may encounter many challenges and obstacles. In this study, some of the participants mentioned that some families might be concerned that if children are given sexual information at school, it could lead to inappropriate sexual behaviours. Furthermore, parents may find it difficult to talk about this topic due the 'shame culture'. One teacher, however, stressed that "people who want to educate their children and raise awareness of sex education should not take the 'shame culture' as a barrier". It can be noted that although the 'shame culture' plays a role in education, the current concerns about sexual abuse and exploitation lead some parents to educate their children about keeping safe. They challenged the drawbacks of the concept of shame in order to protect their children. However, some parents' concern about this topic can affect children, because they may notice differences between the ideas and information presented at school and in the family. Consequently, they might disagree with their children being taught about it even at school. For this reason, Mrs. Zaher pointed out that "teachers may face the problem of convincing parents to accept the information that children receive; teachers should

therefore be patient and appreciate the positions of the parents”. These findings indicate that changes need to take place in the different areas of children’s lives, in education policy and practice and in Saudi society.

Due to the potentially significant role of parents, the findings of this study emphasise that parents should be educated about sex education before their children. For example, one supervisor (PS20) expressing this point clearly: “It is difficult to teach children about sex education before their families; it is a waste of time”. Parents should be aware of issues that may occur during childhood, such as addressing children’s basic needs and dealing appropriately with children’s sexual problems. This essential awareness can protect children from neglect and abuse. For this reason, Dr. Alshamrani, argued that “therapy sessions for children who have suffered from sexual problems should be provided firstly to parents, then their children”. He discussed his experience in treating children who had been sexually abused, which involved educating their parents about the importance of child protection as an appropriate course of treatment. This result is similar to Wight and Fullerton (2013) who suggested that when evaluating the success of a programme, it is important to look at it in terms of setting the target group, children and their parents, and the intensity of the sex education programme. Colarossi et al. (2014) argue that it is important to provide effective sex education for families to encourage them to assist their children.

Arguably, the findings of this study suggest that there is confusion about the relative roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers for sex education, which may lead to children not receiving any guidance. The data suggest that the roles of parents and teachers remain vague, due to the lack of confidence, information and ‘shame culture’. While Saudi parents interviewed in my previous study (Banunnah, 2013) felt too embarrassed or uninformed to discuss sex education topics with their children, so advised them to ask their teachers such questions, this study shows that teachers, conversely, may also feel inadequate. Moreover, although parents may expect this job to be taken up by the educational system, many children do not attend pre-school.

Children can have more effective sex education if it is provided both in school and in their family. This can create a healthy environment that encourages the safe development

of children's skills and values. In this respect, this study found that the majority of participants highlighted the importance of cooperation between teachers and parents, which they felt would alleviate many related issues. 97.8% of teachers who responded to Q27 in Table 5.11 agreed on the importance of cooperation between families and schools on deciding appropriate topics of sex education for children, showing overwhelming support. Cooperation and mutual support between schools and families encourage the promotion of the wellbeing and safety for children's future life (UNESCO, 2018). Cooperation between schools and families is thus important in avoiding problems. As Dr. Alsheddi in this study explained, "Providing effective sex education through schools can be implemented effectively by inviting parents to monthly education". Through this kind of strategy, pre-schools can share with parents accurate knowledge, skills and values related to compulsory sex education, which will benefit children and families. Such cooperation would be an opportunity for parents to build their knowledge and skills, which could contribute to increasing their confidence and help to make them feel more comfortable in dealing with sensitive issues in the Saudi society. This finding is similar to my Master's result, which indicated that both teachers and parents need to be given due consideration through their cooperation in teaching children about such sensitive topics in the conservative Saudi society (Banunnah, 2013). This implies that, just as teachers need training, parents also need support to have the appropriate sex-related information to inform, guide and protect their children (Haffner, 2008; Wooden and Anderson, 2012).

From a sociocultural perspective, it can be argued that the cooperation between educators should, in turn, have a beneficial impact on children in Saudi society. According to Vygotsky (1978), the development of children's culture occurs through two processes, first of the social level, then the personal level. It is important to acknowledge that the process of children's development starts from the social environment surrounding them, such as families, schools, and communities. Hence, if sex education topics are established in the Saudi educational system and reinforced by positive cooperation between educators in pre-schools and families, children will benefit from a consistent, accurate, path of effective learning about these topics.

6.4.2.3 Role of society and prevailing beliefs

Looking beyond the immediate school and family, the majority of participants expressed strong concerns about the impact of globalisation and contents of multimedia. For example, 93.24% of teachers in Table 5.12 showed concerns about the negative impact of global multimedia on children's behaviour and protection. The supervisors interviewed in this study strongly agreed that the global media, through TV and the Internet, contain inappropriate sexual views for children. For example, due to inappropriate sexual views in the Internet, Mrs. Zaher pointed out people's misunderstanding about the concept of sex education by saying, "Some people think that sex education helps pornography and the spread of moral decay, which is contrary to the truth". Furthermore, Saudi children can gain knowledge about sex and gender from other cultures over the Internet and TV, which may impact their behaviours. Similarly, my Master's findings (Banunnah, 2013) showed that the majority of Saudi parents, teachers and experts in the study believed that the global media has a negative impact on Saudi society. One of the main concerns in this regard is that these new Western media will portray different beliefs and morals than those that are important in a Muslim society (Al-Qadi, 2006; Bahareth, 2011).

Contrary to the above assumption that the provision of sex education would encourage inappropriate behaviours, the data collected in this research revealed concerns that the absence of sex education, the lack of knowledge of adults, and Saudi conservative culture in the era of globalisation could actually lead children to inappropriate sexual behaviour, from which appropriate education could protect them. A significant concern was expressed by one supervisor (PS10) who said, "Our society is against sex education due to the 'shame culture', while children, particularly those who live in a globalised world, have curiosity", making them vulnerable. Arguably, it can be difficult for children to find correct knowledge about sex-related matters from adults, due to the absence of school-based sex education, the shame culture in Saudi society and the shortage of studies on Islamic sex education for children. However, these factors may result in many problems because currently, children might discover things and gain misinformation or partial truths, not only by questioning others, but also by themselves, through playing and searching on the Internet.

Nevertheless, in this study, some supervisors and specialists acknowledged that globalisation cannot be avoided. For example, a pre-school supervisor (PS6) stressed that “globalisation cannot be avoided and these new influences need to be managed, rather than removed”. Therefore, these influences need to be managed and used in a positive way to make people aware about sex education, rather than removed. Regarding providing sex education, this finding confirms that dealing with sex education topics can impact both positively and negatively on children and Saudi society. Dr. Alsaleh described sex education as “a double-sided tool that should be provided carefully within a correct approach”. Mr. Almuhamid asserted in his interview the importance of sex education awareness across the society as a way to protect children. He argued that awareness about these topics should be raised through education and the media for all sectors in Saudi society. Similarly, UNESCO’s international study (2018) highlights the significant power of multi-media resources to spread accurate information regarding sex education to all age-groups to increase the awareness of people in society. In the USA, for example, media campaigns have tried to encourage such dual education by stressing the importance of the child-parent relationship in communication about sex and sexuality. These programmes have utilised TV broadcasts, adverts, billboards, booklets, leaflets and postcards (Kirby and Miller, 2002).

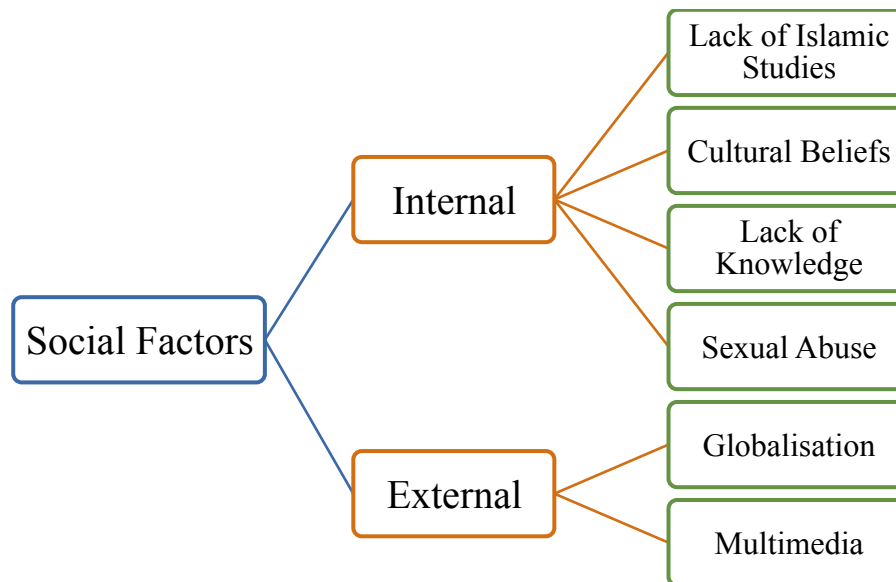


Figure 6.4: Social factors that impact the provision of sex education in the KSA.

It can be concluded from the previous discussions in this chapter, as shown in Figure 6.4, there are many social factors, both internal and external, that can impact on sex education implementation in Saudi society. Regarding the internal factors, the lack of Islamic studies for young children and the ‘shame culture’ can be major causes of misconception among Saudi people as to the aims of sex education. This contributes to the lack of knowledge about sex education for children, which impacts on provision. Furthermore, due to the flexibility of the DKC and the high concern about sexual abuse, teachers may focus on the ‘keeping safe’ topic and ignore other sex education topics. External factors are globalisation, multimedia and the Internet, which lead to families’ fear and concerns about children’s behaviour and protection. For this reason, most participants in this study saw an urgent need to include sex education in the national curriculum, to educate children correctly and prevent them being driven towards unreliable sources of information. It can be seen that the previous factors can create some contextually situated challenges in implementing sex education. As some studies have demonstrated, Arab and Islamic countries like the KSA face specific challenges in implementing sex education programmes, as they have to be balanced with distinctive social, economic and political development issues (Wiseman et al., 2008; Banunnah, 2013; Alsehaimi and Alanazi, 2015). Therefore, it is important to provide awareness about sex education for children through effective training courses to educators, before its implementation.

6.4.3 Provision of training programmes

For educators (teachers and parents), dealing with new topics is not easy. Introducing sex education, which is a sensitive subject, in the DKC may therefore be more difficult than other subjects because of the lack of information and skills and the conservative culture of Saudi society. This sub-section discusses some of the challenges and the opportunities that could be faced in a training programme to prepare educators for providing sex education.

Promoting skills and abilities in teaching through training is important to achieve the specific goals for effective education in general, especially for pre-school teachers, and arguably through all stages of education. The majority of participants in this study argued that sex education will have significant effects on children and Saudi society and they stressed the great need for a sex education training programme. As Dr. Alduhaim revealed, “Lack of awareness of this subject has negative repercussions in the public life of individuals and society”. However, Dr. Alsaleh, for example, described sex education as “a double-sided tool that should be provided carefully within a correct approach”. It has already been suggested that dealing with sex education topics could have a negative or positive impact on children and Saudi society, depending on the skill and sensitivity with which such topics are addressed. Creating and establishing a new training programme for sex education also could bring both challenges and opportunities for Saudi society. As supervisor PS17 noted, “Not every teacher has the right skill in formulating and presenting sensitive information”.

6.4.3.1 Challenges for a sex education training programme

The education system in Saudi Arabia is highly centralised, and this extends to the design of all programmes and curricula. There was a prevalent belief among participants that training programmes on the provision of sex education for young children should be provided prior to introducing compulsory sex education topics in Saudi pre-schools. As supervisor (PS7) argued, “Introducing this topic is not easy because pre-school teachers are not specialised yet”. One of the challenges that could be faced in training is pre-school teachers’ own immersion in a ‘shame culture’, which could negatively affect

curriculum provision. For this reason, pre-school supervisors stressed that the Saudi Ministry of Education should choose appropriate teachers to avoid wasting time and effort, as well as avoiding the exacerbation of negative views towards sex education among Saudi society. For effective training, they pointed out that the applicants selected are interested in this topic and have the potential to improve themselves by attending the course. For example, Mrs. Aldabass explained her experience in providing a 'Child Personal Safety' training programme "We chose trainers who have the ability to accept information and training. It is important that the trainers are open minded and that they have a desire for change". It can be argued that recruiting teachers who are not wholly supportive of sex education provision in pre-schools may negatively impact the quality of provision. For example, those teachers may refuse to attend the training course and persist in attitudes that undermine the goals of the programme. However, the literature asserts the need for all teachers to be trained to apply a broad range of teaching methods, taking into account cognitive and affective learning, as well as developmental, behavioural and communication skills (Hodzic 2003; Krause et al., 2006; SIECCAN 2005).

Another challenge that could be faced in providing a sex education training programme is that the findings of this study indicated that currently, the only efforts made in Saudi society to raise awareness of these issues are in the form of individual initiatives, run by non-specialists in the field of sex education. For example, Dr. Alsheddi and Mrs. Alghamdi agreed strongly that most of the current non-organised awareness-raising efforts provide confusing information in a warning tone. These non-organised efforts in Saudi society to build awareness may be a result of abuse cases and the lack of information and specialists in the field. Furthermore, some participants mentioned that some training courses provide child protection awareness, but by intimidation. One respondent (PS16) noted the potential consequences of such an approach, saying it "can lead to a social phobia of others, even relatives, and which can indirectly promote and encourage sexual abuse". Similarly, an experienced teacher expressed concerns that the prevailing narrow view "leads the perspective on our society to be as a forest of lust". Clearly, the intimidating tone of messages used to raise awareness in the society can lead to problems. Publicizing sexual abuse stories in an intimidating tone, with the aim of inducing caution and avoiding related problems can raise fear and concern in the society,

which impact also on the goal of sex education about safety. A possible reason, as demonstrated in Section 6.2.3, is that Saudis may tend to perceive Islamic and social discourses in an intimidating way, due to the era of religious extremism. Therefore, to achieve sex education aims effectively training should be provided positively by trainers who are specialists in child protection.

Furthermore, as described in Section 6.3.2, most current training courses have been provided under the name of 'sexual harassment' in Saudi society. The findings of this study show that most participants used the terminology of 'harassment' to protect children from sexual abuse. For example, Dr. Alshamrani pointed out "usually we make people aware of child protection from sexual abuse by providing courses titled 'sexual harassment'". However, it could be argued that focusing only on problematic issues and using the term 'sexual harassment' in the training course could be considered a negative approach to raising awareness, for several reasons. Firstly, 'sexual harassment' is not an acceptable term in Saudi society, as PS17 said: "I am against this approach to awareness because the meaning of the word is disgusting". Secondly, the goal of sex education is to provide appropriate solutions through a positive approach to sensitive issues rather than focusing on the problems. One teacher shared her experience in the awareness by saying that "In fact, children and families need to know real stories about sexual harassment". It can be argued that using the term 'Harassment' in the awareness could cause fear and concern in the society. This would be an example of the point made by Mr. Almuhamid in this study, that "although it is difficult to change the culture, it is easy to suggest appropriate solutions that respect its culture, thinking and beliefs" in a positive approach (Banunnah, 2017a; b).

However, the findings of this study demonstrate that the Ministry of Education provides a programme to train teachers regarding child protection under an appropriate name, which is provided only to help children who attend pre-school. Mrs. Aldabass and Dr. Alsaleh mentioned that there is a training course named 'Child Personal Safety', which I designed in 2016, organised by the Ministry of Education and the UNICEF organisation to protect pre-school children from abuse, such as sexual abuse. It can be noticed that the 'Child Personal Safety' organised training course is running under a positive name, which is acceptable in the society. Similarly, the World Health Organisation emphasises that sex

education should be provided through a positive approach to individuals knowing their rights (WHO, 2006). However, this programme supports children and their families in pre-school, which is non-compulsory education and does not have comprehensive reach. For this reason, Dr. Alduhaim aptly noted that part of the current awareness problem is that “incomplete awareness of this sensitive topic will have negative consequences; therefore, it is important to integrate all of the sectors of education, health, security and law to achieve the aims of sex education confidently”. Therefore, this finding indicates that in order to provide effective sex education training courses in Saudi society, it should be organised by involving all government sectors. In addition, sex education should be provided in compulsory schooling to reach those children who did not attend pre-school. Additionally, there could be a challenge related to following up teachers and evaluating their skills in class, due to the lack of sufficiently skilled and experienced supervisors. Some teachers in this study suggested that supervisors should provide model lessons for teachers, for example, to help them develop their skills in presenting these topics. Although this may be a good idea to save time in training, supervisors themselves may not have the abilities to deal with these new topics. As Mrs. Alghamdi argued that “the question is... ‘are the supervisors competent enough to train teachers?’ Because some supervisors still need training and awareness in this aspect”. Therefore, it is also difficult to evaluate the competence of teachers in providing these topics due to the lack of pre-school supervisors with relevant expertise. Thus, pre-school supervisors should also receive training and skills in any attempt to provide a programme to teachers in Saudi pre-schools.

In addition, social segregation can be one of the challenges in the provision of training courses for parents. In this study, the majority of specialists and pre-school supervisors pointed out the importance of educating mothers on sex education topics to ensure effective education both in school and in families to protect children in Saudi society. However, as explained in the introduction chapter of this study, the Saudi pre-school stage is staffed by female teachers. Therefore, due to the culture and educational system, parental meetings and awareness programmes could be provided just to mothers, rather than fathers. One of the teachers commented that pre-schools could make mothers aware by inviting them to the school and discussing the related issues, but fathers similarly need to be aware about sex education. Involving parents in training programmes could enhance

the acceptance of sex education and improve their communication and support for their children (Pop and Rusu, 2015). However, the gender segregation in Saudi society could be one of the challenges to education and training, because focusing only on mothers could negatively affect both children and Saudi society. For example, non-educated fathers might punish or even abuse their children for sexual questions that are in fact part of normal child development, which affects children and society negatively. For this reason, a teacher commented, “Both parents must be familiar with open communication with their children to give them confidence in talking about sexual issues and not intimidating them”. Parents, therefore, should equally responsible for the care and protection of their children; an unbalanced parental education could lead to problems inside the family and Saudi society, due to misunderstandings. Conversely, the Kenny’s (2010) study proved the benefit of a parent-child communication programme aimed at all genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds, for improving knowledge. Again, such approaches imply not just a change of family practices but also a change of cultural beliefs, which indicates the scope and scale of providing training programmes for sex education in a comprehensive way that spans education, home and wider society.

6.4.3.2 Opportunities for sex education training programmes

The findings of this study have provided an important opportunity to inform the development of a sex education training programme in the future in Saudi society. The high agreement in the findings of this study on the need to implement sex education in Saudi pre-school and the benefits of doing so would justify the creation of an appropriate training programme. This study found that there are some opportunities to facilitate a training programme that could have a positive impact on educators, children, and Saudi society.

Despite the above challenges in training, the findings support the importance of introducing training programmes related to sex education in Saudi society. The findings of this study show the Saudi government effort in child protection, which will reflect positively on the training programmes in this regard and sex education. As Mrs. Aldabass and Dr. Alsaleh in this study pointed out, the government has approved a system of child protection; therefore, there is an important need to provide sex education training courses

from specialists in the field. This is a clear authorisation and policy from the Saudi government regarding training on this topic that could hence support the aims of this training for children and society. For this reason, participants in this study expressed clearly a highly significant need for training courses for teachers, parents and Saudi society, to avoid sex-related problems. Furthermore, based on this authorisation, Mrs. Aldabass strongly suggested, “Sex education training can be provided through the training centres, which are distributed throughout the Kingdom’s 45 educational districts”. It can be suggested that the provision of this course will be a great step from the Ministry of Education if the ‘training of trainers’ (TOT) is provided to qualified trainees through 45 educational districts. However, training pre-school supervisors, teachers and both parents prior to delivering sex education for children, may take time, because of the challenges that have been identified in this study.

An optimistic sign is that in this study, there are some opportunities to facilitate a training programme that could have a positive impact on educators, children, and Saudi society. For example, 94.80% of pre-school teachers’ responses to Q31, in Table 5.13, felt a need to attend training courses and programmes, in order to provide age-appropriate sex education for children. This result reflects the views of pre-school teachers from all 45 educational districts, which supports this topic from all local perspectives in the KSA. Furthermore, it indicates their desire to obtain accurate related knowledge and enhance their skills to be able to provide sex education. Similarly, 98% of parents who participated in my Master’s study expressed a wish to attend training courses regarding sex education to deal with their children appropriately (Banunnah, 2013). The educators have significant demand for training, which could contribute to breaking down barriers to sex education provision in Saudi society. This is in line with UNESCO’s (2018) advice that effective comprehensive sex education needs to be delivered by well-trained teachers and involved parents. Therefore, children and educators will then have adequate awareness and accurate information to avoid and solve many of the issues in Saudi society caused by the ‘shame culture’ and globalisation. Similarly, Counterman and Kirkwood (2013) emphasise the significance of training and education to improve educators’ abilities to discuss sexual health development topics in a professional setting. The evidence of growing recognition of the importance of sex education for early childhood in Saudi society could contribute to addressing the issues in a positive method.

Additionally, the findings of this study stress that training courses regarding sex education could provide opportunities for educators to access trusted materials covering the related knowledge in an age-appropriate manner. 97% of pre-school teachers, in response to Q32 in Table 5.13, revealed significant agreement on the need for a guidance booklet to answer typical questions related to sex education. It can be suggested that designing sex education training materials could decrease the negative impact of untrustworthy sources, as well as those that are not suitable for Saudi culture. The materials and activities prepared for this training could address this information and provide an approach to deal appropriately with related issues in Saudi society and to match the expressed need. For this reason, these materials could be shared with families to educate them in this regard. Similarly, in my Master's study, 95% of parents expressed the need for a booklet for sex education topics they could use with their children (Banunnah, 2013). As Alldred et al. (2016) demonstrate engaging parents with sex education materials will improve the relationships between children, teachers and parents, which all contribute to the effectiveness of sex education.

The results of this study highlight a vital point, which is that a training programme could be made more effective by involving specialist trainers in the sex education field. Dr. Alduhaim, for example, discussed the importance of a training programme in sex education at universities, as he said, "We should focus on how we can establish the specialisation in faculties at universities to produce graduate specialists in this sensitive and significant topic". Furthermore, Dr. Alsheddi suggested "providing effective sex education through universities to train teachers and parents". Arguably, establishing the discipline of sex education in universities in the KSA would be a great opportunity for students to gain deep knowledge and comprehensive training as specialists in this area. Training centres that prepare pre-school teachers could also cooperate with these universities to spread awareness and training for teachers at all Saudi educational levels for both boys and girls equally, which would be a significant contribution towards achieving a thriving society with healthy children. Furthermore, establishing such a specialism would be an opportunity to prepare the adults of the future by supporting them to achieve a healthy sexual and parental life. Pop and Rusu (2015) have also suggested that sex education training programmes should be an essential part of adults' learning and lifelong education.

To sum up the third section of the discussion chapter, this section has answered the third question of this research, which is ‘How should sex education be provided to pre-school children in the KSA?’ It discussed possible ways of implementing sex education topics in the pre-school curriculum. Furthermore, it explained the roles of educators, both teachers and parents, in sex education provision. It demonstrated the social factor that could impact on sex education provision in the KSA. Then, it highlighted some challenges and opportunities for providing training programmes for educators and the potential impact on Saudi society.

6.5 Chapter conclusion

To conclude this chapter, the significant findings of the current study have been linked with the literature in the field of sex education for children to answer the three research questions of this study. This chapter was divided into three main sections addressing, consecutively, 1) the importance of sex education for pre-school children in the KSA, 2) the appropriate sex education topics for Saudi pre-school curriculum, and 3) the implementations of this topic in the pre-school curriculum and its provision for Saudi pre-school children.

Firstly, I discussed the findings related to the first question of this study, ‘To what extent should sex education be included in the three-to-six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the KSA?’ The importance of sex education for children aged from three to six years living in the KSA was explained. I discussed the importance of sex education for children in terms of Saudi society’s perspective, children’s sexual development, the development of values and child protection in the KSA, all supporting the conclusion that this topic should be taught from an early age.

Secondly, the importance of sex education for young children led to investigation of the appropriate topics for the pre-school curriculum in the KSA. I thus discussed sex education topics that could be appropriate for young children, thereby answering the second research question of this study, ‘What are the appropriate sex education topics

that should be taught to these children?’ I examined the current context of sex education in Saudi pre-schools. Furthermore, I presented six main topics of sex education for the pre-school curriculum that were suggested by participants, which are body and gender, relationships, life cycles, health and hygiene, feelings and attitudes, and keeping safe. Finally, I provided a brief comparison between these agreed topics and those taught in other sex education contexts such as in the UK, Australia, USA, and those recommended by UNESCO, showing the similarities between them as well as the distinctive features called for in the Saudi context.

Thirdly, I discussed the appropriate approaches to provide the suggested sex education topics of this study to young children in Saudi pre-schools. This answered the third question of this research, ‘How should sex education be provided to pre-school children in the KSA?’ Accordingly, I discussed the possible approaches of implementing sex education in the pre-school curriculum, either informally or formally, as a stand-alone unit or integrated within the current units. Moreover, I explored the potential roles of teachers, parents and society in sex education provision. Finally, I highlighted findings related to some challenges and opportunities for sex education training programmes in the KSA regarding children, educators, and Saudi society.

The chapter that follows concludes this thesis by highlighting the contributions of this research in the field of sex education for children and early childhood studies. Furthermore, the significant implications are introduced, with ideas for future research.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

Providing sex education to young children aged between three and six years is significant for Saudi society. Conducting a research on this sensitive topic for a critical phase, especially in a conservative society, is a challenging task. This contributes to my study being unique in this area of research. This is the final chapter, which summarises the key findings and the implications of this research based on the data that was collected from questionnaires from 2,681 pre-school teachers in all 45 Saudi educational districts, group interviews with 20 pre-school supervisors in the Ministry of Education, and eight specialists from various childcare-focused institutions in Saudi Arabia. Multiple perspectives on sex education have thus been presented. These findings were analysed by mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative, to obtain a comprehensive perspective of information. In the light of the literature review and the results of this study, the research findings addressed all the three questions of the current study, which were:

- From the participants' perspectives, to what extent should sex education be included in the three-to-six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)?
- What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?
- How should sex education topics be delivered to children between three and six years of age?

In this chapter, firstly, summaries of the key findings of the study are highlighted based on the analysis and discussion provided in the previous chapter. Secondly, I suggest some implications regarding 1) policies for the Saudi Ministry of Education, 2) educators (teachers and parents), and 3) the media. Thirdly, I highlight the limitations of this study and I suggest some recommendations for future studies in the field of sex education for

children. Then, I briefly demonstrate the contributions of this research in the fields of Early Childhood and Sex Education Studies. Finally, I report my practical self-development in sex education during my academic journey in the UK.

7.2 Summary of the key findings

This section presents the significant results that were explained in Chapter 6, the discussion chapter, based on the answers to the above three research questions. Firstly, I briefly present the findings regarding the importance of implementing sex education in the pre-school curriculum to assist children, adults and Saudi society. Secondly, I highlight the key results related to the sex education topics suggested in this study, which can be appropriate for the Saudi pre-school curriculum. Thirdly, I summarise the significant findings on the appropriate approaches to implement the suggested sex education topics in the Saudi pre-school curriculum (DKC).

With regard to the first research question, ‘To what extent should sex education be included in the three to six-year-old pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)?’, the findings of this study emphasised the significance of sex education to pre-school children, educators and Saudi society. The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data of this study revealed that some educators have narrow views about the sex education concept, which lead to misconceptions in Saudi society. For this reason, the majority of participants thus preferred to rename sex education as ‘family life education’, to be more acceptable in Saudi society. Furthermore, this study found that Islam encourages Muslims to learn about sex education because it is a significant aspect of family life. However, the findings show that Saudi culture can be considered as a barrier to implementing the suggested topics. In contrast, strong concerns were expressed by participants about the sexual abuse of children in Saudi society. Due to sex education’s importance for young children, the research findings strongly emphasised the importance of implementing sex education in the pre-school curriculum to promote children’s knowledge and skills and to develop a healthy environment in Saudi society. The sex education curriculum could be a great opportunity for educators to correct misconceptions regarding sex education. Therefore, sex education should start from an

early age to raise positive awareness among children and educators, which could help to reduce the related issues in Saudi society.

In relation to the second research question, which was ‘What are the appropriate sex education topics that should be taught to these children?’ the quantitative and qualitative findings investigated six suggested topics of sex education that could be appropriate for Saudi pre-school children. The sex education topics suggested in the current study for the pre-school curriculum are: body and gender, relationships, life cycles, health and hygiene, feelings and attitudes, and keeping safe, which are similar in terminology to the comprehensive sex education provided in different contexts and those recommended by UNESCO (2009). Furthermore, this study examined the findings related to the current suggested topics of sex education and curriculum needs in Saudi pre-schools. Then, a brief comparison was made between these suggested topics and those taught in other sex education contexts such as in the UK, Australia, the USA, and the UNESCO recommendations. In this respect, the findings show that although the suggested topics seem to be similar in terminology to those in other contexts, the contents and materials would be different from those in global contexts, due to the unique Islamic values and Saudi cultural norms. Therefore, this study shows the connections between local and global contexts, as well as the significance of local adaptations that are sensitive to the social and cultural contexts of specific regions or countries.

In terms of the third research question, which is ‘How should sex education be provided to pre-school children in the KSA?’, the findings of the current research discussed the appropriate approach to provision of sex education in the Saudi pre-school curriculum. The findings revealed that there are two possible approaches to provide sex education topics informally or formally in the compulsory curriculum the DKC. The current study found that compulsory implementation could better assist children’s and teachers’ knowledge and skills, which is likely to reflect positively on families and Saudi society. There was significant agreement from participants that the approach of integrating sex education topics within the current units in the DKC could be an appropriate approach for Saudi society. The findings clarified the importance of teachers’, parents’ and society’s roles and the cooperation between them in effective provision of sex education for young

children. Moreover, the discussion chapter of this research demonstrated the importance of sex education training programmes for teachers and parents in Saudi society, before sex education is implemented for children. These approaches could potentially create opportunities to build a healthy environment for the benefit of children, educators and Saudi society's future.

It can be seen from the above discussion that the findings of this research addressed the answers to the three research questions of this study, as explained in Chapter 6.

7.3 Implications of the findings

Based on the findings of the study, there are some implications for policy makers in the Saudi government, pre-school teachers, parents, and people working in the media to implement effective sex education in the pre-school curriculum in the KSA. This research will consider the above groups, as all have a responsibility to provide sex education and to improve awareness in Saudi society.

7.3.1 Policy level

The outcomes of this research suggest that, in conjunction with Saudi Vision 2030, it is important to consider how best to support children in developing healthy attitudes toward self, sexuality, relationships, and personal responsibility. Furthermore, the study suggests that the Saudi government should apply a clear policy that can protect children from various issues in society by creating a sex education curriculum starting from the early years and designing training programmes for educators (teachers/ parents). Given the more outward-facing orientation in contemporary society and governance in Saudi Vision 2030, these policies need to be locally appropriate but might also be informed by recommendations from international organisations such as UNESCO.

7.3.1.1 Providing a curriculum

This study shows the significant implications for policy makers to create a sex education curriculum for Saudi pre-schools based on the input of specialists in the field. The sex education curriculum could be an opportunity to create a safe environment for children by

delivering correct, age-appropriate knowledge. A compulsory curriculum could access each home, even in villages, which would increase the spread of awareness about sex education for children in Saudi society. Consequently, a sex education curriculum has the future potential to prevent the negative impact of the 'shame culture' by implementing the values of Islam in sex education for both boys and girls, to achieve equality in Saudi society. From this perspective, it can be argued that there is a significant need for new and clear policies that implement the principles and values of Islam regarding the equality of the genders in Saudi society, and that appropriate and effective sex education would have a key role in supporting such a social trend.

Clearly, this study has demonstrated that appropriate sex education could protect children from sex-related issues in Saudi society, and other forms of abuse. Indeed, this research presents a vital solution that could help prevent sexual problems in children and Saudi society. It can be suggested that to solve sensitive issues such as sexual abuse, especially in Saudi society, official information should inform the design of the pre-school curriculum based on many factors related to sociocultural studies, such as its policy, religion, and Saudi culture. This research suggests that to solve problems in Saudi society, such as sexual abuse, there is a need for specialised studies and to take into account the Saudi culture in terms of its traditions and moves towards modernisation. Therefore, it is essential that a sex education curriculum be designed by specialists from various fields to include religious, philosophical, ethical, social and health perspectives. Educators, children, and Saudi society should be informed about the importance of sex education, especially in regard to child protection, to promote cultural progress and societal well-being.

The research that has informed this thesis indicates that sex education in the curriculum can be one of the most appropriate and effective approaches used to protect young children. Furthermore, it is important to implement the sex education topics suggested in this study, which are body and gender, relationships, life cycles, health and hygiene, feelings and attitudes, and keeping safe, as the main topics in the pre-school curriculum. Each suggested topic includes several themes that can be integrated within the related units of the DKC, which can be provided gradually based on age-appropriateness throughout the academic year. This provides an opportunity for pre-school curriculum

designers to address the common related questions that can be raised by children of this age and provide age-appropriate answers. Implementing sex education topics should encourage policy makers to improve the current pre-school curriculum by adding knowledge, personal skills, and the values of sex education in Islam through related materials and activities that can improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching. Therefore, this study provides a chance to evaluate and develop all units in the DKC by adding the relevant knowledge, materials and activities to promote children's development.

This study focuses on starting sex education in the pre-school curriculum to build a foundation of sex education knowledge gradually and to make a contribution towards achieving greater equality of gender from the early years in Saudi society. Hence, it is important to gradually apply these topics at all educational levels based on age-appropriateness to effectively achieve sex education aims and avoid the negative impact caused by the current lack of it in Saudi society. This continuity will allow all students in the Saudi educational system to obtain appropriate sex education information based on their age, which could create a healthier environment in Saudi society. With regard to the appropriate name for this curriculum, this study suggests the term 'Family Life Education', for the separate sex education curriculum, which may be more appropriate for students in the upper levels in of the Saudi educational system. Although it is important to suggest respectable and acceptable terms for sex education topics, the primary focus should be on the content, to ensure the most effective education.

This study focuses on pre-school children between three and six years old, which is non-compulsory education in the KSA. However, children at home, who are not registered at pre-schools, cannot benefit from such a programme. Due to the importance of sex education for children and Saudi society, this study recommends that it be continued gradually at all educational levels, to promote the needs of all children, boys and girls, equally in all schools.

7.3.1.2 Training programmes

This study highlights the importance of designing training programmes regarding the sex education curriculum to train educators (teachers and parents) in the knowledge and skills needed to prepare them to provide sex education effectively to young children. Thus, it is recommended that the Saudi government should implement a full sex education policy for the pre-school curriculum and sex education training programmes, including supporting guidance and a Scheme of Work for the sex education curriculum.

The Saudi Ministry of Education should recognise a significant point, that only well-trained teachers are able to provide sex education for pre-school children; otherwise the provision could fail to benefit children or Saudi society. Policy makers should encourage specialists to design training programmes regarding sex education provision to promote teachers' knowledge and skills to be able to teach these topics and deal confidently with children's common sex-related questions. Therefore, teachers must be adequately qualified to deliver these topics, in order to achieve effectively a comprehensive sex education in pre-schools, which in turn should benefit children's development and Saudi society.

For this reason, this study highlighted the importance of pre-school supervisors receiving training in sex education before teachers. This study suggests that the first step in training programmes is the provision of 'training of trainers' (TOT) to the qualified pre-school supervisors from the 45 educational districts. This would create specialist trainers who could provide training programmes on the sex education curriculum. Subsequently, those well-trained supervisors can then train teachers, assist them, and ensure that the sex education topics suggested are provided effectively in all Saudi pre-schools. This would facilitate cost-effectiveness and contribute to the effective achievement of comprehensive learning.

Furthermore, pre-schools should allocate dedicated time to educate parents and develop their skills to ensure they have a correct understanding of sex education. This would be reflected positively in children and Saudi society. Therefore, it is important to involve parents in sex education programmes through training, monthly meetings, and brochures

to achieve an effective and comprehensive education for children. Parents' involvement with the sex education curriculum will create a healthy environment in pre-schools and the family for children to grow safely and will also spread awareness in Saudi society. Moreover, it is important to educate parents because much abuse may happen within the home, potentially being perpetrated by family members and household workers.

There is a need for provision of a positive approach in training programmes and avoidance of negative terminology. The current training regarding sex education in Saudi society includes a 'sexual harassment' course, for example, which is a negative term. This information could be provided under a more acceptable name, such as 'personal protection'; this suggests appropriate solutions that respect Saudi culture, thinking and beliefs with a positive approach.

This study suggests that the Saudi Ministry of Education should establish a specialist course in sex education in universities, for example under the Faculty of Education and Social Science, to prepare students to be professionals in delivering sex education based on Islamic values and social norms. Moreover, this suggestion could be a great opportunity to provide training courses about sex education to different age groups as one of the University's social responsibilities towards Saudi society. Child protection is the responsibility of all members of society; it is not sufficient for children to learn how to protect themselves, when they hold little power in the family or society.

Additionally, it is important for the Saudi government to fund the training programmes to present this sensitive topic carefully and respectfully, based on sociocultural studies of Saudi society. The training materials should be well-designed, to include appropriate sex education information for all age-groups, with specific care and awareness about depth of content and age-appropriateness.

7.3.2 Teachers

Previous studies, together with the findings of this research, reveal the potential significance of children's behaviour in signalling their readiness and need for sexual awareness and knowledge for children and teachers alike. This section provides some important implications for pre-school teachers providing sex education in the KSA. A sex

education curriculum in pre-schools is an opportunity for Saudi teachers to improve their skills and abilities in providing the sex education topics suggested, without ignorance or omission. It is important for teachers to undertake self-improvement by attending training programmes regarding sex education before they undertake sex education provision with children in the classroom. Use of tools and technology in sex education lessons should be based on three principles: age-appropriateness, Islamic values, and Saudi social norms. It is also recognized that some social norms, such as the shame culture, need to be addressed so that perceptions and feelings can be changed over time. Moreover, teachers should be confident in dealing with children's sexual questions in the classroom, providing simple, accurate, age-appropriate answers. An equal amount of time and attention should be given to all the sex education topics suggested in this study; teachers should not focus only on 'keeping safe' topics. It is important to acknowledge that all educators (teachers and parents) are equally responsible for protecting children in Saudi society; this responsibility does not lie with children themselves. Teachers can engage in appropriate communication with families to achieve effective education and child-protection in Saudi society.

7.3.3 Parents

The data presented in this research would also suggest that parents should be motivated to build their knowledge about children's needs in order to deal appropriately with children's sex-related questions. Parents can participate in sex education programmes by training or attending monthly meetings in the pre-schools. Therefore, it is important for parents to build a good rapport with teachers to discuss information related to sex education by 'asking, learning and practising'. This is a good opportunity for parents to learn and read about the sexual characteristics of children's development in order to be able to distinguish between problematic sexual behaviours and normal behaviours, thereby alleviating their concerns about sexual abuse in Saudi society. Parents also need to be proactive in preventing all types of harm and abuse towards their children.

7.3.4 Media

The media potentially play an important role in spreading awareness in Saudi society about childcare and sex education. Media producers should thus design awareness

programmes by inviting specialists in childcare, religion, physiology, and social and health fields to talk about sex education for all age-groups. All programmes and films should be clearly classified by age to identify the most appropriate viewing for young children. Furthermore, media designers should create programmes related to sex education topics by specialists for children, for example as cartoons in an interactive and entertaining way, to spread the appropriate awareness in Saudi society. At the same time, from the above discussion, it is important to emphasise that dealing with these sensitive issues of child protection is the responsibility of many sectors of childcare and health across many branches of Saudi society. This example suggests the value and feasibility of cooperation regarding sex education, not only between pre-schools and families, but also among the various sectors of society.

This section provides important implications related to sex education in terms of government policies, teachers, parents, and the media in providing age-appropriate sex education for children in Saudi society. Although this study presents significant findings related to sex education, there are some limitations that future researchers could avoid in future studies.

7.4 Limitations of the study

Despite the in-depth philosophical, methodological and ethical underpinnings to the research study that have been described here, which are all based around a desire to discover the most accurate and relevant possible results from the area being researched, there are a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. These limitations could restrict the generalisability of the research.

The first key limitation is the lack of relevant contemporary literature relating to the sex education curriculum for young children in the KSA, which may prevent an in-depth cross-literature analysis of the results obtained here. This means that most comparisons come from a Western context; therefore, I took into account the cultural and contextual differences between other contexts and the Saudi context.

Perhaps the most important limitation stems from the fact that the majority of the research was conducted with pre-school teachers and supervisors, who are all women. This is a result of the legal gender restrictions imposed by the Saudi Ministry of

Education, which allows only women to be employed in pre-schools. Samples of pre-school teachers and supervisors therefore only reflected the views of women. However, the interviews were conducted with specialists of both genders.

Another important limitation is that although this research was conducted in all 45 educational districts, it was confined to well-educated participants. Although these regions were selected in order to provide be representative of the population of the KSA, the results that were gathered may not reflect the opinions of all areas of Saudi society, in particular, opinions from rural communities, which may include those with little or no formal education. Arguably, these communities are most likely to be affected by the 'shame culture', and may not have access to information or educational provision that may help to challenge or change those beliefs.

This research aims to represent the suggested sex education curriculum for children aged three to six years old in Saudi pre-schools. Although sex education provision from an early age to both genders is highly important, this educational stage is not compulsory in the Saudi education system. However, in August 2018 a new Act was included in the policy of the Saudi Ministry of Education, to rename the pre-school stage early childhood stage, which would serve children from three to eight years old. The benefits of this research are therefore applicable to all young children. The aims of this research could be achieved more effectively if the Saudi Ministry of Education were to make it compulsory to encourage awareness of the importance of sex education to all of Saudi society, including families whose children do not attend pre-schools.

It also should be noted that this study was conducted in Arabic, which is the main language in the KSA. Although the results were translated as accurately as possible, there could still be translational issues, which I have taken into account. These limitations lead to some recommendations for future studies, which are presented in the next section.

7.5 Recommendations for future studies

This study discussed an important but sensitive topic related to sex education in the significant early childhood phase of human life. Furthermore, the research took place in

Saudi Arabia, which is a highly conservative society. Based on the findings of this study and the limitations, it is important to extend these studies in early childhood and sex education. There are some recommendations for researchers to develop this field of study in future. There are needs for:

1. Providing research on Islamic sex education, starting from the early years to all age-groups, to demonstrate the importance of sex education in Islam and highlight its values.
2. Extending this study to different educational stages, in private and mainstream schools, for boys and girls, to ensure that comprehensive sex education is provided effectively to all students in the KSA based on age-appropriateness.
3. Involving male and female educators in the sample of the study to obtain their perspectives and attitudes equally towards the sex education curriculum regarding Saudi society.
4. Conducting research with parents and children to investigate their attitudes towards the sex education topics suggested in this study.
5. Focusing more on empirical research based on a sociocultural perspective to solve social problems, such as these raised in the current study, and to implement its measures suggested, rather than just highlighting sex-related issues in Saudi society.

7.6 Contributions of the study

It is important to highlight that this study is unique in this field for many reasons; it discusses a sensitive topic worldwide regarding the implementation of sex education for young children. This is a critical phase in human life for all children. This study focused on children living in the conservative Saudi culture, which follows Islam in all aspects of society. The following contributions of this study would be classed as original.

One of the original contributions of this study is that, due to the lack of sex education curriculum research worldwide, particularly in the early years, this study provides a clear perspective of the importance of sex education for young children. Moreover, it suggested topics that could be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the KSA.

Furthermore, the findings of this study uncover the reasons for the lack of sex education in Saudi society. A major factor is the 'shame culture', which has strongly dominated Saudi society. Another factor is Islamic studies, even though Islam encourages people to learn about sex education as a significant part of Muslim family life. There is a clear lack of Islamic research on sex education for young children because most Muslim scholars have focused more on sex education for older children, to prepare them for future married life.

My research findings have suggested appropriate topics for young children based on Islamic values, as well as the culture and policies of the KSA. It is the first research study of this kind. Since the Saudi education system is based on Islam, the topics suggested for young children in this study may be useful to Muslims worldwide, especially in the context of increasing multi-cultural and multi-faith diversities in societies. The suggested sex education topics for young children in this study could provide opportunities for Muslim children worldwide.

Furthermore, the research offers a positive solution for sex-related issues that are currently causing problems in Saudi society by implementing a sex education curriculum for young children and providing related training programmes for educators.

7.7 Personal development achievements during my study journey

This section presents my personal development in sex education through attending self-funded training programmes during my PhD study. Being a member of professional organisations in the UK allowed me to participate and present parts of my thesis in their annual conferences. It was an opportunity to gain and share knowledge and experience with specialists in the fields of Education and Early Childhood Studies. For example, as a core member of the Sex Education Forum (SEF) organisation since 2014, I attended many training courses about designing and evaluating sex education curricula and facilitating a positive approach to the delivery of sex education topics for children and young people.

Furthermore, I obtained official certificates of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in:

- 1) Training of Trainers in child protection and safeguarding with the NSPCC 2015.
- 2) Level 6 Courses in Education and Training in 'Delivering Sex Education in the Classroom' from the Faculty of Health Sciences, Staffordshire University of London 2014.
- 3) Training in Delivering Sex Education in the Classroom from the Family Planning Association (FPA) in London 2013.

These programmes from professional organisations in the UK offered a great opportunity to investigate the appropriate resources for my research and improve my academic skills. Furthermore, in 2014, I achieved an award for the best paper in the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) conference in Greece. This award opened a great opportunity for my research because it highlighted the value of sex education for children in Saudi society. This also encouraged the Ministry of Education to support my study by distributing the questionnaire to pre-school teachers in all 45 educational districts.

All these experiences that I gained in the UK enabled me to share my knowledge with the Saudi Ministry of Education officially. I designed the training programme: 'Child Personal Safety' for children in pre-school, which is being officially programmed by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND), and the Saudi Ministry of Education. Then, I provided training of trainers (TOT) on this programme to 60 pre-school supervisors from all 45 educational districts in the KSA and prepared them to be trainers in child protection (see Appendix I). These trainers now provide this professional programme to all pre-school teachers. The significant feature of the content of this continuing professional programme is that it is a comprehensive programme that targets not only pre-school teachers, but also children and families, to help keep children safe from all types of abuse and neglect and to allow them to grow up in a safe environment in Saudi society. The positive outcomes of this programme have gained it a good reputation in Saudi education settings (Altyar, 2016; 2017; MOE, 2018b).

Additionally, while I was doing my research, I provided many training programmes on child protection in the UK for Arab families, including sex education, which were organised by Saudi clubs in the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London. Due to the clear existing regulations and policies about childcare and protection in the UK, as a trainer in child protection, I am aware that Saudis living in the UK may not have the same concerns about sexual abuse as they would in the KSA. However, they have concerns about how cultural differences would impact the teaching of sex education, for example the content that children might be shown or the messages they may receive about sex and relationships, which may run counter to their own cultural values. Thus, the child protection policy in the KSA could address the concerns about most local issues related to sex education.

It can be concluded that all the previous experiences during my academic journey in the UK have reflected positively on my knowledge, skills and abilities to link between my practical experiences and previous academic studies on sex education in conducting the current research. I hope that this research will provide a clear perspective about sex education for young children to specialists in the care of children, and researchers in the field of education in conducting future research. As well as this, it will assist educators to determine and implement proper ways of safeguarding children in this regard.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Excerpt from the Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC)

Definition of the DKC (Al-Samadi and Marwa, 2006).

المنهج المطور لرياض الأطفال «منهج التعلّم الذاتي» :
يعد المنهج المطور لرياض الأطفال (منهج التعلّم الذاتي) مصدراً متكاملاً وشاملاً لمعلومات رياض الأطفال في المملكة العربية السعودية وللمتدربات في هذا الحقل العلمي. وهو مصدر يحتوي على معلومات فنية متعددة النواحي وضعت في قالب تربوي تعليمي محدد الأهداف إذا دمجت النظريات ضمن الخبرات الحياتية اليومية. وهو أيضاً محاولة جديدة هادفة لتوضيح مفهوم مهنة معلمة روضة الأطفال إذ تستطيع القارئة بواسطته أن تستفيد منه وتتمي ذاتها، فتتطور مفاهيمها العلمية واتجاهاتها التربوية وأساليب التعليم التطبيقية لديها نحو الأحسن. ويأخذ المنهج بعين الاعتبار عوامل الواقع الميداني، ويسعى لإيصاله إلى غايته النموذجية تدرجاً؛ لأن فيه من المعلومات والنماذج والرسوم والأمثلة ما يكفي لمساعدة المعلمة على تحويل البيئة التربوية في صفها لتصبح مكاناً للبحث والاكتشاف والتجربة.

Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC) “self-learning curriculum”:

The Developed Kindergarten Curriculum is a self-learning curriculum that is an integrated and comprehensive resource for kindergarten teachers in Saudi Arabia and trainees in this field. It is a source of multi-faceted technical information that has been put into a targeted educational format in which theories are integrated into daily life experiences. It is also a new attempt to clarify the concept of the kindergarten teacher's career, as the reader can benefit from it and develop herself, and develop her scientific concepts and educational approaches and methods of applied education to the best. The curriculum takes into consideration the factors of the field, and seeks to reach goals gradually; because it contains enough information, models, drawings and examples to help the teacher to transform the educational environment in the classroom to become an appropriate place for children to gain knowledge through research, discovery and experience.

APPENDIX B (1)

Developed Kindergarten Curriculum (DKC) Units

1) National unit



2) Water unit



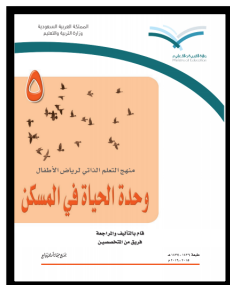
3) Sand unit



4) Food unit



5) Life at Home unit



6) Hands unit



7) One book of summarizing five units (Clothing, The Family, Friends, My Health and My Safety, and My Book)



APPENDIX B (2)

Excerpts From The Units Summarizes In The DKC

1- FRIENDS UNIT

Friends unit (MOE, 2016a, p.11)

الأهداف الإجرائية

يتوقع من الطفل في نهاية الوحدة أن :

- يسمي أصحاب الرسول محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم.
- يصف بعض جوانب أخلاق الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم.
- يصف بعض جوانب أخلاق أصحاب الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم.
- يسمي أصدقاءه.
- يصف نفسه.
- يصف صديقه.
- يعدد بعض الأنشطة التي يمارسها مع أصحابه.
- يصف بعض المهن التي يتعاون فيها الرفاق.
- يصف بعض الهوايات التي يتعاون فيها الرفاق.
- يصف بعض الأشياء التي تخصه.

Procedural objectives:

At the end of the unit, the child is expected to:

- Name the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him (PBUH)).
- Describe some aspects of the ethics of the Prophet (PBUH).
- Describe some aspects of the ethics of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH).
- Name his friends.
- Describe himself.
- Describe his friend.
- List the activities in which he engages with his companions.
- Describe some activities in which he cooperated with friends.
- Describe some hobbies in which he cooperated with friends.
- Describe some things that belong to him.

2- MY HEALTH AND MY SAFETY UNIT

My Health and My Safety unit (MOE, 2016a, p.56)

جوانب الخبرة

- تم اختيار المفاهيم الآتية، وصيغت لها أنشطة بدءاً من الحلقة وانتهاءً باللقاء الأخير، وهي :
 - السلامة في الطريق.
 - السلامة في البيت.
 - السلامة في الروضة.
 - الصحة في النظافة.
 - الصحة في الطعام.
 - الصحة في النوم.
 - الصحة في التعبير عن النفس.
 - الصحة في الملابس.
 - سلامة أجزاء الجسم.
 - المهن المرتبطة بالسلامة.
 - الأماكن المرتبطة بالسلامة.

Aspects of experience

- The following topics were chosen, and activities were formulated from the opening session of the last meeting, as:
 - Safety in the road.
 - Safety at home.
 - Safety in kindergarten.
 - Health in hygiene.
 - Health in food.
 - Health in sleep.
 - Health in self-expression.
 - Health in clothing.
 - Safety of body parts.
 - Safety-related occupations.
 - Places associated with safety.

3- THE FAMILY UNIT

The Family unit (MOE, 2016a, p.186)

الأهداف الإجرائية

يتوقع من الطفل في نهاية الوحدة أن :

- يسمي الأشخاص الذين يسكنون معه .
- يميز اسم والده .
- يذكر عادات بعض الشعوب ولغتها وثيابها وطعامها .
- يسمي بعض الأدوات الخاصة بالأمهات .
- يسمي بعض الأدوات الخاصة بالآباء .
- يسمي بعض أنواع الأطعمة التي يتناولها .
- يذكر بعض المعلومات عن طفل رضيع في عائلته .
- يسمي بعض الأدوات الخاصة بالطفل الرضيع .
- يصف بعض الصور لأدوار العائلة .
- يذكر بعض الأدوار العائلية التي تتم داخل البيت .
- يذكر بعض الأدوار العائلية التي تتم خارج البيت .
- يعد شجرة عائلته .

Procedural objectives

At the end of the unit, the child is expected to:

- Name the people who live with him.
- Recognise the name of his father.
- Provide information on some customs related to cultures, languages, clothes and food.
- Name some things that belong to mothers.
- Name some things that belong to parents.
- Name some types of foods that they eat.
- Provide some information regarding a baby in his family.
- Name some things that belong to a baby.
- Describe some family roles through images.
- Mention some family roles that take place inside the house.
- Mention some family roles that take place outside the house.
- Be able to draw his family tree.

APPENDIX C

Structured Questionnaire

This questionnaire is provided to pre-school teachers who teach children aged three to six years old.

This questionnaire is designed to obtain information on family life education (sex education) for children from three to six years of age. If you have received this questionnaire, you have been selected to participate in the research survey. It will take you only a few minutes. Although the researcher would greatly appreciate the information provided, you are reminded that participation is not obligatory. Please feel free to ignore this document and do not complete the questionnaire if you do not wish to participate.

Dear teacher,

The researcher would like to thank you for your willingness to participate and assure you that all the data you provide will be used exclusively for research purposes. All the privacy considerations put in place during the process of sampling are still in force, and your personal data are protected from any kind of unlawful use or application without your consent. You will not be required to provide any personal information that could put you at risk.

As already mentioned, the major purpose of completing this questionnaire is to allow the researcher to study the importance of sex education for children between the ages of 3 to 6 years old and how it can be implemented in in the pre-school curriculum. The findings of the questionnaire are expected to be beneficial for you, for the researcher, and for the educational system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

I agree to participate in this study to be undertaken by Amal Banunnah and I understand that the purpose of the research is to examine how sex education could be properly and respectfully implemented in the pre-school curriculum in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Please answer the following questions to reflect your opinions as accurately as possible by choosing one answer please:

1. Your Experience

- Less than 5 years
- 5- 10 years
- 11- 20 years
- 21- 29 years
- 30 years and above

3. Residential Area

- Northern Region
- Central Region
- Western Region
- Eastern Region
- Southern Region

4. Classroom level

- 3-4 years old
- 4-5 years old
- 5-6 years old

1. School is a significant source of social development and awareness of individual and family life of children through the provision of knowledge and required skills.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2. Pre-school teachers play an important role in developing the awareness of children and protecting their physical, emotional and mental health.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. When children play with their friends in adult roles (father, mother, doctor and driver) some sexual behaviours could be displayed, and could raise teachers' concerns.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4. Early sex education may lead to problems through children trying to experiment.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. Global Multimedia contains some information unsuitable for our conservative society that can encourage children to ask about it.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6. Almost all children from age 3 to 6 years question the world around them to explore for themselves.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. I am embarrassed and find it is difficult to discuss some topics with children, especially topics related to sex and gender.

- Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

8. Some teachers lack adequate knowledge to discuss children's questions which are related to health and sex education.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

9. Teachers may provide wrong information to avoid embarrassment.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

10. My lack of knowledge about information appropriate for their age is the main reason why I ignore children's embarrassing questions.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

11. I avoid talking on sensitive topics related to sex education due to our old socialization in the ‘culture of shame’.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. In our society, traditions and customs play a significant role in avoiding discussions with children about some sensitive topics, for example, sex education.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. Islamic education provides adequate information to assist and protect individuals and discusses accurate details.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. The correct sex education awareness helps children to be prepared for puberty, especially with the early onset of puberty age (8 years).

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. The main reason for providing 'sex education' is to make children aware of religious, health and social guidance regarding the undesired consequences of illegitimate sex, for example, sexual abuse.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. Lack of sufficient and correct awareness to protect themselves can lead to children being harassed and exploited.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17. Due to lack of some information in the curriculum, I try personally to advise children regarding a healthy body and protect them from sexual abuse.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

18. I trust any information that is provided regarding children being harassed and exploited.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

19. Currently, I am against providing information about sexual harassment in our society.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. Non-organised awareness of sexual abuse leads children and their parents to be scared of people and feel unsafe in the society.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

21. The school's curriculum contains some interesting topics about Human Physiology.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

22. Usually, I use teaching aids from external sources to teach children about sex education.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

23. There is a need for more information and materials about sex education to support the curriculum topics and teachers.

- Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

24. Pre-school teachers need knowledge of sex education information and its topics, which are provided to children in this age range.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

25. It is important to apply a scientific compulsory sex education curriculum in schools to assist children to be aware and maintain their physical, social and psychological health.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

26. Sex education topics in the curriculum should respect our traditions and customs.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

27. It is necessary for family and school to cooperate on provision of the appropriate topics of sex education for children.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

28. Sex education topics should be taught through all the current units of the curriculum.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

29. The current curriculum needs to add these topics: (you can choose more than one)

- The differences between genders (boy, girl)
- Personal Hygiene
- Life cycles (pregnancy, birth, care of the newborn)
- Relationships (family, house worker, driver, friends, society)

- Expressing feelings and different attitudes
- Keeping safe and looking after myself
- People who can help me and how I can contact them

30. The current curriculum covers all the previous topics and explains all its activities and materials.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

31. It is necessary to provide training courses and programmes to educate teachers in the protection of children and provision of sex education appropriate to their age.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

32. It is important to provide a guidance booklet for teachers to answer the typical questions related to sex education.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Unsure

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Any other general comments or suggestions:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

If you have any question regarding this topic please email me at:

Email:

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Instruction: the order in which questions in the interviews are posed to supervisors and specialists is based on the way of the conversation; some questions are repeated to ensure all questions are answered honestly. A digital recorder will record your responses and they will be kept anonymously and confidential. From your experience:

- 1) What is the status of early childhood in the KSA?
- 2) What are the major issues regarding children between three and six years old in the KSA?
- 3) What is your attitude on sex education? Is it appropriate for young children?
- 4) What is the importance of sex education for young children?
- 5) Do children of this age ask about sex and gender?
- 6) Who has the main responsibility to answer these questions to children?
- 7) How do educators (parents, teachers) respond towards sexual questions or behaviours?
- 8) Do educators have adequate knowledge and abilities to deal with children's sexual issues?
- 9) What is the appropriate way to protect children from sexual abuse in Saudi society?
- 10) Do you think the current awareness of sex education in Saudi society is effective to protect children?
- 11) What is the perspective of Islam on sex education?
- 12) What are the roles of parents, teachers and Saudi culture on sex education for children?
- 13) Does the pre-school curriculum have a role in building children's knowledge and skills regarding sex education?
- 14) Does the curriculum contain sex education topics? Can I have some examples?
- 15) What are the appropriate sex education topics for those children?
- 16) Have young children the ability to understand sex education topics?

- 17) What is the appropriate approach to implementing the suggested topics in the pre-school curriculum? As a separate topic, or integrated within the curriculum?
- 18) Do you have any suggestions regarding sex education provision for young children?

APPENDIX E

Ethical Approval from the University of Sheffield



30/06/2014

Amal Banunnah
School of Education

Dear Amal

PROJECT TITLE: Sex Education In Early Childhood Education In The Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia: An Examination of how Sex Education can be Implemented in the Preschool Curriculum

APPLICATION: Reference Number 000355

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 19/06/2014 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 000355 (dated 21/05/2014).
- Participant information sheet 000385 (21/05/2014)
- Participant consent form 000386 (21/05/2014)

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

Professor Daniel Goodley
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

APPENDIX F

Consent Letter for participants



Informed Consent Letter

Title of Study: Sex Education in Early Childhood Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An Examination of how Sex Education can be Implemented in the Preschool Curriculum.

Principal Investigator:

Name: AMAL MOHAMMED BANUNNAH

Department: PhD Education, UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Address:

Phone:

E-mail:

Dear Madam/ Sir.....

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being carried out, and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is: to investigate sex education topics that can be implemented in the preschool curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Study procedure: This study will involve the collection of data from five regions in Saudi Arabia during the summer period. A questionnaire will be sent out to teachers in training centres, and interviews will be carried out with specialists and curriculum policy makers in early childhood who deal with children in the defined age group (3 to 6 years of age).

Risks: Although the topic of this research may be a sensitive topic in Saudi Arabia, the risks of this study are minimal. These risks are similar to those you experience when disclosing work-related information to others. The topics in the survey may upset some respondents. You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

Benefits: There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from this study may improve the educational system in Saudi Arabia broadly. Moreover, this study will potentially help

children to avoid multiple problems in relation to their sex development, and also, potentially help protect children from sexual abuse. It is also hoped that guidelines will be developed out of this research to support teachers and policy makers to deal with sex issues with children in early years.

Alternative Procedures: If you do not want to be in the study, you may choose not to participate and leave your answers blank, or you may read quietly at your desk.

Ethical Approval: I will follow the British Educational Research Association's ethical guide. I will seek ethical approval for the project from the University of Sheffield.

Person to Contact: Should you have any questions about the research or any related matters, please contact the researcher at:

Faculty of Education: If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher, please contact my supervisor Professor Elizabeth Wood, Department of Education.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form (below). If you decide to take part in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. You are free to not answer any question or questions if you choose. This will not affect the relationship you have with me.

Costs to Subject: There are no costs to you for your participation in this study.

Compensation: There is no monetary compensation to you for your participation in this study.

Consent: By signing the consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX G

Ministry of Education Approval Letters

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KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
(280)
Ministry's Deputy of
Planning and Development
General Administration of Research



General Administration of
Educational Research
No.: 36505880
Date: 01/03/1436H
22/12/2014G
Attachments: Without

Subject: Facilitate the task of researcher , Amal M. Bannunah

M/S: Director General of Kindergartens

Peace be upon you.

Please find the search tool of PhD student, **Amal M. Bannunah** of the research entitled "**Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia from the point of view of Kindergarten Teachers**".

I hope you will instruct to facilitate her task so that it does not affect the course of the study.

Peace be upon you.

Director General of Research
Dr. ALI BIN MOHAMMED ALRBIAN
(Signed)



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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
(280)



General Directorate of Education
at Jeddah Province

Planning and Development Department - Studies and Research

No.: 109/1/3D

Date: 08/03/1436H

29/12/2014G

Attachments:.....

To : Director of the Department of Kindergartens Education, Jeddah Province

From : Director of the Planning and Development Department

Subject: Facilitate the task of researcher , Amal M. Bannunah

Peace be upon you.

Based on the letter of the Director General of Research and Studies at the Ministry's Deputy of Planning and Development (attached) No. 36496500, dated on 02/03/1436H = 23/12/2014G, about facilitating the researcher's task to implement her research entitled "**Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia from the point of view of Kindergarten Teachers**". The researcher wishes to apply her research tool (questionnaire) on a sample of kindergarten's female teachers in Jeddah education, as the search tool was checked and found to meet the controls of the Ministry in this regard.

We hope you will facilitate the researcher's task by enabling her to apply her research tool on the study sample of your department. Thank you and we appreciate your cooperation and interest in scientific research.

Peace be upon you.

KHALIL BIN FRAJ ALWAFI

(Signed)






STAMPED WITH THE SEAL OF
Ministry of Education - General Directorate of Education at Jeddah Province
Planning and Development Department

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Holy Makkah-North Aziziah -Umm Al-Qura University- Main Gate
E-mail:egytranslator36@hotmail.com

APPENDIX H

Letters for all Educational Districts in all Geographical Regions in the KSA

Bin Baz for Translation License: 692 Membership: 202001165073	 Bin Baz for Translation	مكتب بن باز للترجمة المعتمدة ترخيص رقم: 692 غرفة مكة: 202001165073
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (280) General Directorate of Education at Riyadh Region Planning and Development Department	 وزارة التربية والتعليم Ministry of Education	General Directorate of Education at Riyadh Region No.: 351532898 Date: 14/08/1435H 12/06/2014G Attachments:
"TO FACILITATE THE TASK OF RESEARCHER"		
Research / University Name	Amal M. Bannunah / University of Sheffield	
Purpose of the Study	Requirement to obtain a doctorate degree	
Study Title	Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia	
Type of Facilitation	To provide the researcher with data and information about the subject of the research through holding an interview with the supervisors of the administration to prepare and design a questionnaire in the subject of the research	
M/S: Director of the Department of Kindergartens		
<i>Peace be upon you.</i>		
<p>Based on the circulation of the Minister of Education No. 610/55 dated 17/09/1416H = 06/02/1996G about the authorization of the General Directorate of Education to issue letters of permission to researchers to carry out research and studies, and based on the delegation of the Director General of the Department of Education, Planning and Development Department to facilitate the tasks of researchers in the letter No. 33674823/11 dated 14/04/1433H = 07/03/2012G. While the researcher (with the abpve mentioned data) applied to us to carry out her study. We hope to facilitate her task and provide her with the required statistics, noting that the researcher bears the full responsibility of the distribution of tools and receiving them from the sample of the research after completing. The allowing of the General Directorate of Education does not mean its necessary approval to the research problem or to the methods and means used in her study and treating.</p>		
<i>Thank you for your kind cooperation.</i>		
Director of Planning and Development Department SAUD BIN RASHID AL ABDULATIF (Signed)		
مكة المكرمة - العزيزية الشمالية - مدخل جامعة أم القرى - البوابة الرئيسية Holy Makkah-North Aziziah -Umm Al-Qura University- Main Gate E-mail: egytranslator36@hotmail.com		

1- Central Region

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KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
(280)
Ministry's Deputy of
Planning and Development
General Administration of Research



General Administration of
Educational Research
No.: 36463500
Date: 30/02/1436H
22/12/2014G
Attachments: Questioner

Subject: Facilitate the task of researcher , Amal M. Bannunah

M/S : Director General of Kindergartens

General Directorate of Education in Riyadh Region

Peace be upon you.

Please find the search tool of PhD student, **Amal M. Bannunah** of the research entitled "**Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia from the point of view of Kindergarten Teachers**".

I hope you will instruct to facilitate her task so that it does not affect the course of the study.

Peace be upon you.

Director General of Research

Dr. ALI BIN MOHAMMED ALRBIAN

(Signed)



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2- Eastern Region

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Ministry's Deputy of
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General Administration of Research



General Administration of
Educational Research
No.: 36493500
Date: 30/02/1436H
22/12/2014G
Attachments: Questioner

Subject: Facilitate the task of researcher , Amal M. Bannunah

M/S : Director General of Kindergartens

General Directorate of Education in Eastern Region

Peace be upon you.

Please find the search tool of PhD student, **Amal M. Bannunah** of the research entitled "**Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia from the point of view of Kindergarten Teachers**".

I hope you will instruct to facilitate her task so that it does not affect the course of the study.

Peace be upon you.

Director General of Research
Dr. ALI BIN MOHAMMED ALRBIAN
(Signed)



3- North Region

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(280)
Ministry's Deputy of
Planning and Development
General Administration of Research



General Administration of
Educational Research
No.: 36493500
Date: 30/02/1436H
22/12/2014G
Attachments: Questioner

Subject: Facilitate the task of researcher , Amal M. Bannunah

M/S : Director General of Kindergartens

General Directorate of Education in Hail Region

Peace be upon you.

Please find the search tool of PhD student, **Amal M. Bannunah** of the research entitled "Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia from the point of view of Kindergarten Teachers".

I hope you will instruct to facilitate her task so that it does not affect the course of the study.

Peace be upon you.

Director General of Research

Dr. ALI BIN MOHAMMED ALRBIAN

(Signed)



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4- Western Region

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(280)
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Planning and Development
General Administration of Research



General Administration of
Educational Research
No.: 36493500
Date: 30/02/1436H
22/12/2014G
Attachments: Questioner

Subject: Facilitate the task of researcher , Amal M. Bannunah

M/S : Director General of Kindergartens

General Directorate of Education in Makkah Region

Peace be upon you.

Please find the search tool of PhD student, **Amal M. Bannunah** of the research entitled "**Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia from the point of view of Kindergarten Teachers**".

I hope you will instruct to facilitate her task so that it does not affect the course of the study.

Peace be upon you.

Director General of Research
Dr. ALI BIN MOHAMMED ALRBIAN

(Signed)



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5- South Region

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Ministry's Deputy of
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General Administration of Research



General Administration of
Educational Research
No.: 36493500
Date: 30/02/1436H
22/12/2014G
Attachments: Questioner

Subject: Facilitate the task of researcher , Amal M. Bannunah

M/S : Director General of Kindergartens

General Directorate of Education in Asir Region

Peace be upon you.

Please find the search tool of PhD student, **Amal M. Bannunah** of the research entitled "Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia from the point of view of Kindergarten Teachers".

I hope you will instruct to facilitate her task so that it does not affect the course of the study.

Peace be upon you.

Director General of Research
Dr. ALI BIN MOHAMMED ALRBIAN
(Signed)



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APPENDIX I

Distribution of Questionnaires to 45 Educational Districts

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Ministry's Deputy of Education
Girls' Education
General Administration of Kindergartens



Sample of Kindergarten Female Teachers in Regions and Provinces in Saudi Arabia
for forms of researcher, Amal M. Bannunah 1436H

S	Region / Province	Number of the Sample (Forms)
1	Riyadh Region	815
2	Makkah Region	235
3	Medina Region	192
4	Qassim Region	150
5	Eastern Region	460
6	Asir Region	200
7	Hail Region	50
8	Tabuk Region	58
9	Al Baha Region	80
10	(Arar) Northern Border Region	50
11	Al Jouf Region	40
12	Jazan Region	130
13	Majran Region	40
14	Majmaa Province	24
15	Ghat Province	24
16	Shakra Province	24
17	Afif Province	70
18	Zulfi Province	24
19	Aflaj Province	24
20	Quwaia Province	24
21	Houta and Hariq Province	24
22	Al Kharj Province	34
23	Al Dawadmi Province	24
24	Wadi Al Dawasir Province	24
25	Jeddah Province	143



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E-mail:egytranslator36@hotmail.com

Ministry's Deputy of Education
Girls' Education
General Administration of Kindergartens






Sample of Kindergarten Female Teachers in Regions and Provinces in Saudi Arabia
for forms of researcher, Amal M. Bannunah 1436H

S	Region / Province	Number of the Sample (Forms)
26	Taif Province	53
27	Qunfudah Province	24
28	Leith Province	24
29	Al Ala Province	24
30	Yanbu Province	24
31	Al Mahd Province	24
32	Onaiza Province	24
33	Al Mozneb Province	24
34	Al Ras Province	24
35	Al Bakiriah	24
36	Al Ahsa Province	70
37	Al Baten Province	24
38	Mohail Asir Province	24
39	Namas Province	24
40	Bisha Province	40
41	Rejal Al Ma'i Province	24
42	Sarat Obaida Province	24
43	Al Makhwah Province	33
44	Al Qaryat Province	24
45	Sabia Province	24



APPENDIX J

Permission Letters from Specialists

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KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA MINISTRY OF EDUCATION Girls Education Ministry's Deputy of Education General Administration of Kindergartens	 وزارة التربية والتعليم Ministry of Education	No.: Without Date: 03/03/1436H 24/12/2014G Attachments:
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN		
<i>Peace be upon you.</i>		
<p>Based on the letter of the Director General of Studies and Research No. 36493500 dated 30/03/1436H = 20/01/2015G about facilitating the research of the PhD student, Amal M. Bannunah</p>		
<p>We would like to inform you that the task of researcher, Amal M. Bannunah will be facilitated in partnership with the researcher in the circulation of the forms in the educational. She is a lecturer at Umm Al-Qura University and a scholarship holder at the University of Sheffield, United Kingdom, specialization in Childhood Studies, which aims to collect data to support the graduation research entitled "Providing Sex Education for Children in Saudi Arabia". It is an integral part of the requirements for obtaining her doctorate degree from the Faculty of Education at the University of Sheffield, UK. We also inform you that the lecturer had an interview with us at the headquarters of the General Administration of Kindergarten on 22/12/2014G.</p>		
<i>We wish her success.</i>		
Director General of Administration of Kindergartens HESA BINT ABDULAZIZ ALDABAS 03/03/1436H = 24/12/2014G (Signed)		
STAMPED WITH THE SEAL OF Ministry of Education - General Directorate of Kindergartens		
مكة المكرمة - العزيزية الشمالية - مدخل جامعة أم القرى - البوابة الرئيسية Holy Makkah-North Aziziah - Umm Al-Qura University- Main Gate E-mail:egytranslator36@hotmail.com		



Permission Letter

To whom it may concern,

I **hereby agree** to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by the researcher Amal Mohammed Banunnah, and I understand that the purpose of the research is ***to examine how sex education can be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.***

I understand that this is deemed to be an integral part of the requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in national and International scientific conferences and academic journals.

I confirm that I have no objection on her using or publishing my name, and the relevant results from our interactions, for academic or research purposes, hopefully for the benefit of children and Saudi society.

I wish her all the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mohammed Alduhaim".

Mohammed Alduhaim

Former Judge and Member of the KSA Shura Council



Permission Letter

To whom it may concern,

I **herby agree** to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by the researcher Amal Mohammed Banunnah, and I understand that the purpose of the research is ***to examine how sex education can be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.***

I understand that this is deemed to be an integral part of the requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in national and International scientific conferences and academic journals.

I confirm that I have no objection on her using or publishing my name, and the relevant results from our interactions, for academic or research purposes, hopefully for the benefit of children and Saudi society.

I wish her all the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Ibrahim Alsheddi', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke above the main signature.

Dr. Ibrahim Alsheddi
Children's Rights Advocate
Council Member of the Human Rights Commission



Permission Letter

To whom it may concern,

I **herely agree** to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by the researcher Amal Mohammed Banunnah, and I understand that the purpose of the research is ***to examine how sex education can be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.***

I understand that this is deemed to be an integral part of the requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in national and International scientific conferences and academic journals.

I confirm that I have no objection on her using or publishing my name, and the relevant results from our interactions, for academic or research purposes, hopefully for the benefit of children and Saudi society.

I wish her all the best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Wafaa Alsaleh'.

Dr. Wafaa Alsaleh

General Secretary of the National Commission for Children

The Ministry of Education



Permission Letter

To whom it may concern,

I **hereby agree** to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by the researcher Amal Mohammed Banunnah, and I understand that the purpose of the research is ***to examine how sex education can be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.***

I understand that this is deemed to be an integral part of the requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in national and International scientific conferences and academic journals.

I confirm that I have no objection on her using or publishing my name, and the relevant results from our interactions, for academic or research purposes, hopefully for the benefit of children and Saudi society.

I wish her all the best,

Mrs. Hessah Aldabass
General Director of Pre-school
The Ministry of Education

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Hessah Aldabass'.



Permission Letter

To whom it may concern,

I **hereby agree** to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by the researcher Amal Mohammed Banunnah, and I understand that the purpose of the research is ***to examine how sex education can be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.***

I understand that this is deemed to be an integral part of the requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in national and International scientific conferences and academic journals.

I confirm that I have no objection on her using or publishing my name, and the relevant results from our interactions, for academic or research purposes, hopefully for the benefit of children and Saudi society.

I wish her all the best,

Mrs. Hamdah Alghamdi
Specialist in Children's Curriculum
Head of Institutional Excellence Department in Jeddah

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Hamdah Alghamdi", written over a horizontal line.



Permission Letter

To whom it may concern,

I **hereby agree** to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by the researcher Amal Mohammed Banunnah, and I understand that the purpose of the research is ***to examine how sex education can be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.***

I understand that this is deemed to be an integral part of the requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in national and International scientific conferences and academic journals.

I confirm that I have no objection on her using or publishing my name, and the relevant results from our interactions, for academic or research purposes, hopefully for the benefit of children and Saudi society.

I wish her all the best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Aishah Zaher', written over a horizontal line.

Mrs. Aishah Zaher

Trainer and Author in Protection from Abuse



Permission Letter

To whom it may concern,

I **hereby agree** to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by the researcher Amal Mohammed Banunnah, and I understand that the purpose of the research is ***to examine how sex education can be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.***

I understand that this is deemed to be an integral part of the requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in national and International scientific conferences and academic journals.

I confirm that I have no objection on her using or publishing my name, and the relevant results from our interactions, for academic or research purposes, hopefully for the benefit of children and Saudi society.

I wish her all the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Hussain Alshamrani'.

Dr. Hussain Alshamrani

Asst. Prof. Consultant of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics

King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Centre



Permission Letter


To whom it may concern,

I **hereby agree** to be a participant in this study to be undertaken by the researcher Amal Mohammed Banunnah, and I understand that the purpose of the research is **to examine how sex education can be implemented in the pre-school curriculum in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.**

I understand that this is deemed to be an integral part of the requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I understand that aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in national and International scientific conferences and academic journals.

I confirm that I have no objection on her using or publishing my name, and the relevant results from our interactions, for academic or research purposes, hopefully for the benefit of children and Saudi society.

I wish her all the best,


1/7/2018
/ Mr. Ahmed Almuhamid

Council Member of the National Family Safety Programme

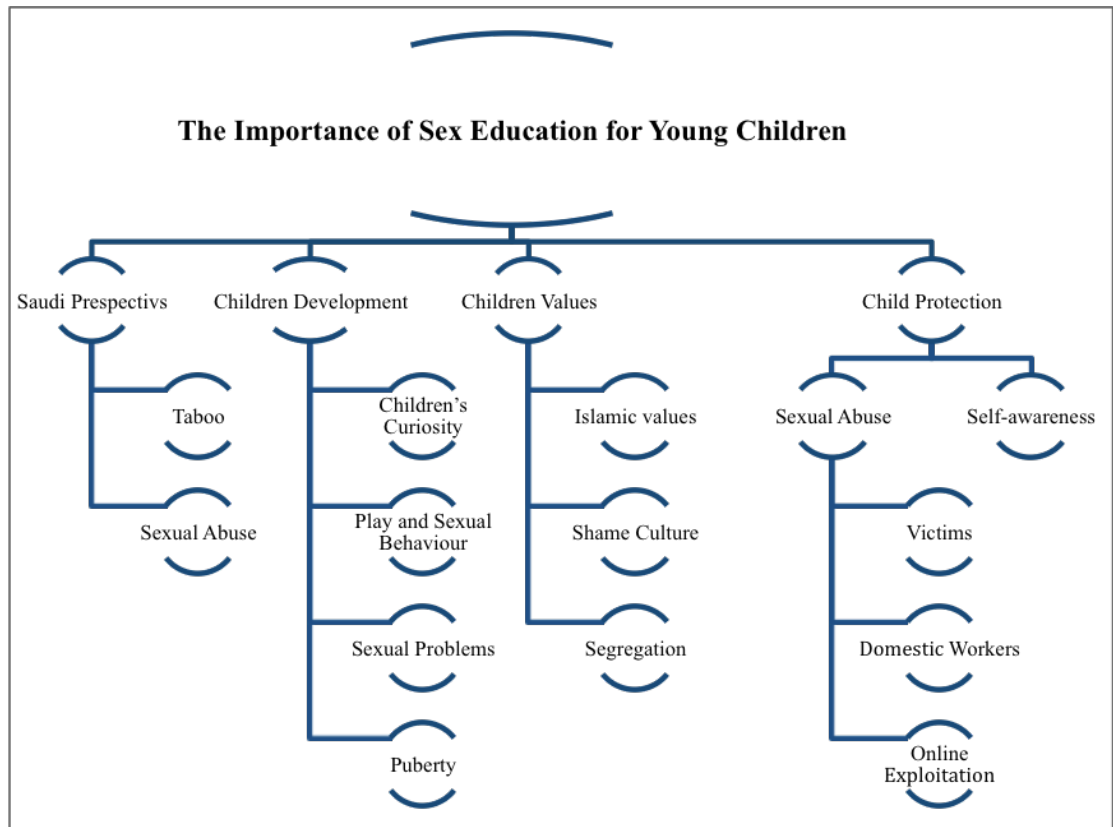
APPENDIX K

Sample of Data Analysis and Coding Transcripts

<p>Sexual development (SD)</p>	<p>Our society is against sex education due to the 'shame culture', while children, particularly, those who live in a globalised world, are curious (pre-school supervisor10) PS10. Actually, sex is an essential part of human life, so sex education is not just for protection from sexual abuse. It is, for example, important for reproduction, hygiene, respect, values, relationships, equality between genders, expressing feelings, and Islam (pre-school supervisor12) PS12. In primary schools girls who start menstruating do not know about their hygiene (pre-school supervisor6) PS6. Also, most students in secondary schools do not have the knowledge to care for themselves in this area or to deal with puberty and self-hygiene (pre-school supervisor19) PS19. Yes I agree pre-school PS1, PS2, PS3, PS4, PS5, PS6, PS6, PS7, PS8, PS9, PS10, PS11, PS12, PS13, PS14, PS15, PS16, PS17, PS18, and PS20. So, children need awareness and basic information at an early age about their own body and the other gender (PS6, PS7, PS9, PS10, PS11, PS12, PS13, PS14, PS15, PS16, and PS20.</p>
<p>Child protection (CP)</p>	<p>The lack of sex education and shame culture can therefore cause many problems, such as sexual abuse (pre-school supervisor14) PS14. We have many cases of sexual harassment, mostly from domestic workers, relatives, sport clubs and schools, but we ignore them because of the 'shame culture' (pre-school supervisor8) PS8. The current awareness can lead to a social phobia of others, even relatives, and which can indirectly promote and encourage sexual abuse (pre-school supervisor16) PS16. Parents usually underestimate children and feel that they still do not have adequate capabilities (Pre-school supervisor18) PS18. Do Not Harass' promotes the idea and spreads it in society pre-school (pre-school supervisor11) PS11. I am against this awareness because the meaning of the word is disgusting (pre-school supervisor17) PS17. They make children afraid even of their fathers' normal touches (pre-school supervisor20) PS20. There was an Act issued by the Ministry to guide schools to make a report if they found a case of a child who suffered or was suspected of being abused (pre-school supervisor16) PS16. Pre-school teachers should be aware of sexual problems from the early years (pre-school supervisor9) PS9.</p>

APPENDIX L

Sample of Themes Scheme



APPENDIX N (1)

Arabic Sample of Data Analysis of Teachers' Comments

يعطيكم العافية على الجهود
اتمنى ان يكون الاهتمام الرئسي لتدريس السيرة النبويه والشخصيات الاسلاميه و اخلاق الرسول عليه السلام ففي سيرة نبينا نربيه جنسيه و تربيه اجتماعيه واسريه فهو فنوتنا في الحياه
لم اتفق مع فكرة جسدي ملكي وهذه الصيحات التخريبية لا التعليمية ,, من وجهة نظري التعليم يأتي بمعلومة طارئة بين الحين والآخر
لا يوجد لدي اي معلومات اضافية او مقترحات
ارى ان التعمق في التربية الجنسية لدى الطفل قد ينمي فيه حب الاكتشاف و يتنبه الامور لم يكن يلي لها بالان ذلك الاقتصاد فيها مطلب مهم
تتمنى ترويدا بكتب ومطويات عن التحرش الجنسي وكيفية حماية الأطفال وتربيتهم تربية اسلامية سليمة توأكب العصر الحالي وشكراً وفقك الله لما يحب ويرضى ونفع بعلمك المسلمين
ضرورة تعليم الطفل كيف يدافع عن نفسه.. وأن يتعلم الطفل أن والدين هما مصدر أمن له ولا بد من أخبارهم بكل ما يتعرض له ..مع تمنياتنا بالباحثه بالتوفيق ..معلمة برياض الأطفال ..شمعه
اتمنى زيادة الدورات التدريبية لمعلمات رياض الأطفال في مجال التحرش الجنسي ومجال تعبير الطفل عن مشاعره والدفاع عن نفسه
أتمنى أن يكون المنهج الخاص لرياض الأطفال يناسب المرحلة القادمة من حياتهم التعليمية فبعض الوحدات بعيدة كل البعد عن المنهج التعليمي للمرحلة الابتدائية ولأن العالم الصغير الذي كان يعيش فيه الطفل يختلف نهائياً عن العالم الكبير الذي سوف يذهب إليه وخاصة أن أغلب مدارس المملكة جمعت لجميع المراحل الابتدائية والمتوسطة والثانوية يجب توعية الأطفال من خلال المناهج التعليمية المحفز للحماية الجنسية ومن خلال المعلمة والاسره لأنهم هم مصدر الثقة والأمان لهذا الطفل أسأل الله السلامه لبياناتنا وبيعتهم عنهم الشر ...و
ان تربط جميع التوجيهات بالشريعة الاسلاميه
هذا الموضوع مهم أيضا للمراحل الأخرى، اقترحي أن يكون هناك يوم عالمي مثل اليوم العالمي لمرضى السرطان وغيره بحيث يكون حدث عالمي يجذب الصغار والكبار ليدركوا أهمية التربية الجنسية في التنشئة الصحيحة. أتمنى أن أكون قد وفقت في هذا الإستبيان رغم خيرتي التي لم تتجاوز السنه وأن يوفقني الله وليكنم لكل خير
تدريب معلمة في هذا المجال لتقوم بهذا العمل
بالتوفيق
لا هذا يكفي
يرجى اعداد قصص تعليمية هادفة تهتم بتصحيح الافكار الجنسية وبعض الامور للأسرة والطفل والتمنى وجود مرشدة نفسية برياض الأطفال لدراسة بعض الحالات التي تحدث فجاء ومن ثم حلها.
تعليم الأطفال بحدود ما علمنا به الرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم من تفريق المضاجع والتستر عند قضاء الحاجة وعند تبديل الملابس يتعلم الطفل ان هناك مناطق لايسمح لاحد ان يراها او يلمسها

google.com/forms/d/1NtzD2r4yMY6A-fz3LjIjNA3C99AFvIks55L9M2x6gxbc/viewanalytics

APPENDIX N (2)

Translated Sample of the Data Analysis of Teachers' Comments

<p>God gives you wellness on this effort.</p>
<p>I wish that the main interest would be the teaching of the Prophet's life, and the Islamic personalities and the ethics of Prophet Muhammad. In the biography of our Prophet, teaching about him and his sex, social education and family is a great example for us in life.</p>
<p>I do not agree with the idea of 'my body is mine, do not touch me', because these claims based on intimidation are not helpful. In my view, education comes with up-to-date information from time to time.</p>
<p>I do not have additional information or suggestions.</p>
<p>In my view, the deep coverage of the sex education topic may develop a love of discovery in children and a wake them to things that are not appropriate to be acknowledged, so moderation in this topic is an important requirement.</p>
<p>We hope to receive pamphlets or books on sex education for young children and how to protect them from sexual harassment, and educate children based on sound Islamic education and keep them up with the present age. Thank you, I ask God to love and please you and benefit Muslims by your knowledge.</p>
<p>The need is to teach the child how to defend himself, and that the child learns that the parents are a source of safety for him and it is necessary to tell them everything that happens to him.. With our wishes for the researcher's success. Pre-school teacher.. Shama</p>
<p>I wish to increase the training courses for pre-school teachers in the field of sexual harassment, expression of feelings and how to defend the self.</p>

I hope that the special curriculum for kindergartens is suitable for the next stage of their educational life. Some units are far from the primary school curriculum and completely different. And secondary education must be made aware of children through educational curricula that are motivated by sexual protection and through the teacher and family because they are the source of confidence and safety for the child. I ask God's peace for our daughters and our children and to keep them away from dangers.

All awareness should be linked to Islamic teachings.

This topic is also important for the other stages. My suggestion is that there should be a global day like World Cancer Day and others, so that it is a global event that attracts young people and adults to realize the importance of sex education in the correct form. I hope that I have succeeded in this questionnaire despite my [limited] experience, which has not exceeded a year. God and I will help you for all good.

Train a teacher in this field to do this work.

Good luck.

No, that is enough.

Please prepare educational stories that aim to correct sexual thoughts and some things in the family and child. I wish there is a psychologist in kindergarten to study some sexual behaviours that could be shown suddenly by children, then solve them.

Teach children the limitations of what we learned from the Prophet, peace be upon him; to sleep in separate beds, cover up the body when changing clothes and in the toilet. It is important that every child learns there are areas that no one should see or touch.

APPENDIX O

Sample of an Interview Transcript

Interview 7. Date 22/08/2016 - 10 am Name: Mrs. Zaher

Amal: Could you tell me about your work experience and teaching background please?

Mrs. Zaher: I am an author and trainer in protection from abuse. I worked as a pre-school supervisor for 20 years at the Ministry of Education.

Amal: What is the status of early childhood in the KSA?

Mrs. Zaher: The status of early childhood has become much better than previously. Saudi society has become more aware about the importance of this phase. Also, the government provides facilities to educate people about children's rights.

Amal: What are the major issues regarding children between three and six years old in the KSA?

Mrs. Zaher: We have concern about sexual abuse of children. I know this is a globally sensitive problem. However, dealing with sexual problems varies in societies depending on the culture, social values, religions and intellectual development of society. Actual studies about sexual abuse of children in our society are still not accurate and do not reflect the reality, due to the 'shame culture'. The likelihood of children being exploited is high, through domestic workers, and strangers in society and through technologies.

Amal: What is your attitude on sex education? Is it appropriate for young children?

Mrs. Zaher: Sex education is an important topic for individuals, children and adults. The concept of sex education is deeper and more comprehensive than just topics to be taught, or information to be acquired. It is the basis of human values and sexual ethics for all stages of life.

Amal: What is the importance of sex education for young children?

Mrs. Zaher: Sex education can be a great way to provide correct and reliable information to children, who might otherwise find out about it through friends or the Internet. It can protect them from untrustworthy sources, which could be dangerous. Also, it can prepare children for puberty and a healthy life.

Amal: Do children of this age ask about sex and gender?

Mrs. Zaher: Yes, they have embarrassed their parents and teachers with these types of questions. For example, where do babies come from?

Amal: Who has the main responsibility to answer these questions to children?

Mrs. Zaher: I think it is the responsibility of the mother, then teachers.

Amal: How do educators (parents, teachers) respond towards sexual questions or behaviours?

Mrs. Zaher: Actually, some teachers believe that if they are unmarried, they are unable to talk about this topic. This must be due to the old customs and socialisation from their childhood. Therefore, they ignore children's sexual questions. Teachers themselves cannot find answers for those questions. Also, parents could punish their children for sexual questions or behaviours that could be raised. So, if sex education is provided at

schools, teachers may face the problem of convincing parents to accept the information that children receive; teachers should therefore be patient and appreciate the positions of the parents. Furthermore, the family environment should encourage children to communicate, ask questions and express themselves; otherwise, they will suffer from many problems, like sexual abuse.

Amal: Do educators have adequate knowledge and abilities to deal with children's sexual issues?

Mrs. Zaher: Unfortunately, they do not have enough abilities and knowledge to deal with sexual issues, such as sexual abuse. They need to attend training courses in this regard. Actually, some Saudis have misunderstandings about the concept of sex education by explaining (some people think) that sex education helps pornography and the spread of moral decay, which is contrary to the truth.

Amal: What is the appropriate way to protect children from sexual abuse in Saudi society?

Mrs. Zaher: Children need to learn their rights and how to protect themselves; also, society should be aware of protecting and respecting children. So, providing sexual education in the curriculum can alleviate many problems in Saudi society. In my opinion, educating individuals about sexual life can protect them from bad experiences.

Amal: Do you think the current awareness of sex education in Saudi society is effective to protect children?

Mrs. Zaher: The current awareness is low; most initiatives are run by non-specialists efforts. Unorganized awareness promotion efforts cause confusion of information and

ideas; they cause fear and concern in families and their children. They may use sources from different societies' experiences obtained through the Internet. However, there are different perspectives due to the cultural values and beliefs in each society.

Amal: What is the perspective of Islam on sex education?

Mrs. Zaher: In fact, Islam encourages people to learn about sex education. For example, there are some sex education topics in Islam, such as Islamic jurisprudence deals with sexual issues openly and clearly and is logical and rational...Islam has committed the child to sexual care from the earliest age, beginning with circumcision, as well as in adolescence, teaching children about puberty, the rules of purity, training and separation in sleep time. Furthermore, the life cycle topic is explained in Islamic teachings. It is preferable to start teaching about pregnancy, childbirth and foetal formation, and clarify that marriage is the right way to make a Muslim family. Furthermore, the curriculum should include advice on not being alone with foreigners, and no one should look at the genitals or touch them. However, the perspective towards sex education is still limited, and the shocking thing is that some people have thought it is against Islam.

Amal: What are the roles of parents, teachers and Saudi culture in sex education for children?

Mrs. Zaher: They have to protect children from all abuses. Also, they should provide correct information regarding sex education based on children's age and respect Saudi society.

Amal: Do you agree with renaming sex education as 'family life education', to be acceptable in Saudi society?

Mrs. Zaher: Sex education is a comprehensive topic and deeper than just ‘family life education’, so it would not be helpful to change the name of sex education to personal protection, except for the purpose of overcoming opposition. People should be aware about the accurate concept of sex education and its contents , for it to be more acceptable.

Amal: Does the curriculum contain sex education topics? Can I have some examples?

Mrs. Zaher: I think there is a clear lack of sex education topics in the DKC.

Amal: What are the appropriate sex education topics for those children?

Mrs. Zaher: Children need to know about gender equality between men and woman, the life cycle, how to clean their body, expressing their feelings, and especially how to keep themselves safe from sexual abuse. In Saudi society, we need a topic about friendships and relationships and their frames. Children should understand, also, the special relationship between a couple and respect for personal privacy.

Amal: Have young children the ability to understand sex education topics?

Mrs. Zaher: Yes, if sex education information is provided gradually, at their appropriate age.

Amal: What is the appropriate approach to implementing the suggested topics in the pre-school curriculum? As a separate topic, or integrated within the curriculum?

Mrs. Zaher: Sex education should be in one curriculum or a separate unit, due to its importance and coherence.

Amal: Do you have any suggestions regarding sex education provision for young children?

Mrs. Zaher: No thanks; I wish all the best for you and your research. I hope this study improves the concept of sex education and helps educators and Saudi society to protect children.

Amal: Many thanks for your participation.

APPEDIX P

UNICEF's Letter for Training of Trainers in Child Protection

United Nations Children's Fund
Gulf Area Office
P.O.Box 18009
Riyadh 11415
Tel: 966 1 4881705/15/25
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة للطفولة (اليونيسف)
لدى الدول العربية في الخليج
ص.ب. 18009
الرياض 11415
هاتف: 9661 4881705/15/25

17 March 2016

RE. Amal Banunnah's Technical Support of the UNICEF Child Safety Project in Riyadh, KSA


Dear Elizabeth Wood,

Greetings from Riyadh.

As you may be aware, Amal Banunnah (PhD Researcher at the University of Sheffield), has been supporting UNICEF's Gulf Area programme in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. To this end, Amal will be facilitating two 'Training of Trainers' workshops targeting teachers around child safety and protection. Amal's participation will be critical not only in facilitating the training but in ensuring that we adequately address any concerns, suggestions and inputs from the participants on conclusion of the two planned workshops.

To this end, we write to seek her support between the dates of 23 March and 07 April 2016. Please feel free to be in touch (nawi@unicef.org) should I be able to provide any clarification.

Kind regards,


Naseem Awi
Deputy Representative
UNICEF Gulf Area Office
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

unite for
children

unicef 

