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A Qualitative Study of Leadership in Saudi Arabian Early Childhood Education: Influential Factors and Critical Challenges

By

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Thesis submitted

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education

July 2018

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Acknowledgements

Ahamdullelah, praise be to Allah, the Most Merciful, for guiding me to this stage of my life journey. I would like to acknowledge the people who have made a difference in my life.

First, my deepest gratitude goes to my parents, who nurtured positivity and enthusiasm in me, opened limitless doors to enable me to explore the world around me, and encouraged me to keep learning. My gratitude also goes to my family—my husband and my two little girls—for their support and motivation. Without their encouragement and patience, I would not have completed this thesis.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my first supervisor, Dr Ioanna Palaiologou. I am grateful for her enthusiasm, patience, incredible support, prompt responses to my inquiries, insights, and careful, detailed feedback. I also thank her for pushing me beyond my limits throughout the years of her supervision. Without her support, it would have been difficult to produce original, high-quality work.

I am grateful for the support, kindness, encouragement, and guidance that I received from my second supervisor, Dr Catherine Meehan. My gratitude also goes to Dr Trevor Cooling, the chair of my supervisory panel, for creating a healthy learning environment in which I was able to keep progressing without distractions. Your efforts are genuinely appreciated.

I would like to thank my sisters and brothers for their immeasurable love and continuous encouragement and support. Their ambitious and successful journeys have been truly inspiring.

My special gratitude goes to all the preschool leaders who participated in my study. Your willingness to share your insights and experiences was much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the Clifton School and Nursery team, whose members have been inspiring. It was not until I joined them as a well-educated parent that I was able to correct my previous thinking about the gap between theory and practice in education and leadership. I am grateful for their eagerness towards innovative learning, thirst for continuous improvement and professional development, remarkable community/parental involvement, establishment of a shared vision that includes the children, and strong teamwork at all levels among the teachers, children, and community. Their leadership provision, which led to such a happy, thriving learning environment and the remarkable synergy among its community, has been truly inspiring.

Abbreviations

ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEs	Early Childhood Education Settings
MoE	The Ministry of Education
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him
PU	Public
PR	Private
L1	Leader and her labelled number
A	Alphabetical order for preschools locations
BA	Bachelor degree
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

Abstract

Despite the increasing volume of literature related to early childhood education (ECE) leadership (Moyles, 2006; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2009; Bush, 2012; Male, 2012; Rodd, 2013; Sims et al., 2014; Davis and Ryder, 2016), a key aspect of this qualitative study lies in its exploration of a relatively new area. This thesis aims to address the existing gap in the knowledge of ECE leadership in a non-Western context and to inform policy and practice in this context.

The purpose of this research is to explore leadership in Saudi ECE, focusing on leadership behaviour and whether it is compatible with the notion of pedagogical leadership. The factors that influence leadership in Saudi ECE and the challenges associated with ECE leadership in the Saudi context will be identified.

In this research, pedagogical leadership beyond the simplistic forms of teaching and learning aspects is considered and is examined from wide perspectives, from which interaction, relationship building, professional development, students and teachers' capacity building, and fostering creativity and innovation are taken into consideration (Sergiovanni, 1998; Cecchin and Johnsen, 2009; Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011). Additionally, departing from modelling leadership, pedagogical leadership here is concerned with the context in which leadership operates, which is shaped by the interaction of a set of "social realities" (Male and Palaiologou, 2016).

In keeping with the exploratory nature of this research and to seek an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in ECE in Saudi Arabia, a qualitative interpretive approach was employed. Therefore, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with twenty-four ECE leaders. An inductive analysis of the collected data was carried out using Nvivo to manage and organise the data transcripts.

This thesis suggests that *contextual pedagogical leadership* should be used to present the notion of context dependent pedagogical leadership. Since the rapidly changing 21st century and the implementation of dynamic educational processes, pedagogical leadership actions have been dependent on each situation. Despite the common leadership factors and challenges that are shared among educational institutions, there were contextual differences that were peculiar to each educational setting that was analysed in this research.

1 Chapter One: Introduction

This introductory chapter presents the research background, objectives and questions, followed by an overview of the research context, in which relevant aspects about the Saudi Arabian context are discussed. These include socio-demographic, social and institutional structure, education stages, investments in education, early childhood education (ECE), and women in leadership. The rationale and significance of the research are discussed next.

1.1 Research background

The purpose of this study is to employ the pedagogical leadership conceptual framework to explore leadership in the Saudi context, leaders' experiences and challenges they face. As pedagogical leadership is relatively new, underexplored area in Saudi context, the advantage of such an approach is that exploring an under researched area will contribute to the existing body of literature, bridging the gap in knowledge and examining the theoretical framework in a different culture. Moreover, this study informs policy implementation in Saudi Arabia. In this section, an overview of leadership will be offered and the research objectives and questions will be introduced.

1.1.1 Overview of Leadership

Leading a classroom activity, directing a group of people, coaching team players or leading during emergencies are some of the situations where people take a leadership role at some point in their lives. Thus, an element of leadership is demanded in daily life (Northouse, 2011). Equally, successful institutions always have professional leaders (MacBeath and Myers, 1999). Similarly, in ECE, the quality of the educational institution is influenced by the quality of leadership and management (Rood, 2006; Bush, 2011; Ang, 2012; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016).

This demonstrates the significant role that leaders play in the success of any organisation. The importance of leadership as an area of research was also noticed, as Davis and Ryder stated, "*leadership is a hot topic for early childhood and we advocate the use of leadership for all those who work in the field of early childhood education and care*" (Davis and Ryder, 2016: 1).

Today, not only the involvement of the stakeholders but also the workforce and the community in taking part of leading institutions have emerged. An indicative description of the

revolution in conceptualising leadership throughout the years is best described by Kezar et al.: as,

> *In the past twenty years, a revolution has occurred in the way leadership is conceptualized across most fields and disciplines. Leadership has moved from being leader centered, individualistic, hierarchical, focused on universal characteristics, and emphasizing power over followers to a new vision in which leadership is process centered, collective, context bound, nonhierarchical, focused on universal characteristics, and focused on mutual power and influence*
> (Kezar et al., 2006: ix).

Such a shift in the definition of leadership has changed leadership provision and the way it operates today. Examples of this change include focusing on shared visions, collective efforts to achieve the vision, becoming more family and community involved and celebrating achievements (Sims et al., 2014; AlAmeen et al., 2015; Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016; Davis and Ryder, 2016; Male and Palaiologou, 2016).

Leadership research in the early years' education discipline is considered a new area that needs more exploration, as stated by Hujala et al. (2016): "*leadership research in early childhood education and care is a relatively new undertaking. It combines leadership concepts from school research as well as from business*" (Hujala et al., 2016: 406). The current studies predominately addressed aspects such as models of leadership, dominantly distributed leadership (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007; Jappinen and Sarja, 2011; Bøe and Hognestad, 2015), roles and responsibilities, and team-building (Muijs et al., 2004; Moyles, 2006; Rodd, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2015; Davis and Ryder, 2016), characteristics and emotional intelligence (O'Sullivan, 2015a), and school leadership and neuroscience (Lyman, 2016). However, a more holistic research approach needs to be carried out as there is a need for a theoretical expansion of ECE leadership. Therefore, this study aims to address this absence and fill in this gap through a detailed discussion of ECE leadership, focusing particularly more on pedagogical leadership. Research on ECE pedagogical leadership focused mainly on elements such as teaching and learning.

None of the previous studies yet have examined ECE leadership in a non-Western context. In such a study, cultural and lifestyle differences emerge. Research on ECE leadership has focused primarily on the Western context. Little attention, however, has been given to the Middle East educational leadership. According to (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 311), "*Yet, little is actually known about preschool in Saudi Arabia, especially beyond the Arabic-speaking world"*. Thus, this research is addressing the lack of knowledge in this context.

As will be demonstrated in the literature review chapter, leadership and pedagogy are individually complex constructs. When combined, however, they are argued to be ambiguous and still require further scrutiny (Male and Palaiologou, 2013). Research on pedagogical leadership, particularly in the context of ECE and in Saudi, is limited similar to other countries as "*There has been limited theoretical advancement in writing about pedagogical leadership in early childhood education*" (Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011: 501).

Nevertheless, several perspectives on pedagogical leadership arise. For example, one perspective perceives pedagogical leadership as concerned with the creation of a learning community, interaction and building teachers' and students' capacities (Sergiovanni, 1998). Another perspective is concerned with ensuring appropriate practice for children and the existence of a shared process of decision making (Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011). Therefore, reflecting a deep understanding of children's learning and development was an important component of pedagogical leadership highlighted by Coughlin and Baird (2013). They perceive the pedagogical leader as a facilitator, observer, co-learner, researcher and a creator of reflective teaching.

Other perceptions of pedagogical leadership concerned with the importance of the context, for instance, take account of home school contexts and highlight the importance of relationship in these contexts (O'Sullivan, 2015), perceiving the context as an element which is combined with theory and a set of social axes that shape pedagogical leadership (Male and Palaiologou, 2016).

The next sections will present the research objectives and questions, followed by an overview of the research context.

1.1.2 Research Objectives

Because of the relatively limited research available regarding pedagogical leadership in the Saudi ECE context, this study aims to:

- Explore leadership in ECE in Saudi Arabia, through the lens of pedagogical leadership principles.
- Identify the pedagogical factors in the Saudi context and whether there are other additional factors not introduced in the literature.
- Determine the challenges faced by leaders.

1.1.3 Research Questions

To meet the identified objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the influential pedagogical factors of ECE leadership in the Saudi context? How and why are they influential?
2. What challenges do ECE leaders face in order to be effective pedagogical leaders?
3. Is pedagogical leadership enacted in ECSs in the Saudi context? If yes, how and to what extent?

1.2 Overview of the research context

As this research focuses on the Saudi Arabian context, a brief historical and cultural background is offered below.

1.2.1 Socio-demographic

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1902, and is ruled by an Arab Muslim Monarchy. Its population is around 32 million, 31.4% of whom are young people aged less than 20 years old (General Authority of Statistics, 2016).

Being the guardian of the two holy Shrines, Mecca and Medina, the destination of pilgrimage and the storehouses of history, it is the heartland of Islam, making it predominantly Islamic. Islam in Saudi Arabia is strengthened by the country's association with the personality and life of the prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him (PBUH), the prophet of Islam (MOE, 2012). Consequently, the Saudi constitution and law are based on the Quran (Holy book) and Sharia (Islamic law). Thus, every aspect of life is influenced by the Islamic religion. Hence, the education system and policy reflect Islamic values with the Quran, Jurisprudence, Islamic tradition and theology at the core of the curriculum.

1.2.2 Social & Institutional Structure

As will be discussed more fully later in the literature review in section 2.2, leadership in education takes place in a social context and is influenced by various factors. This section identifies the social structure that sits outside the educational institutions but has influence on their leadership.

There was a time when Saudi society was casteless. This was noted by Walpole et al. (1971: 59), who stated that

> *The society, strongly influenced by the Islamic teaching that all Muslims are brothers in the religious community, shows remarkably little differentiation by social rank. High individual status depends on family affiliation, good financial resources, higher education or an important position in government service, but there is no discrimination in social relations between individuals of differing status.*
> *(Walpole et al., 1971: 59).*

Nevertheless, AI-Awaji (1971) claimed that, due to the present social and economic conditions, such as the growing population and the discovery of oil, society began to "*widen the disunity between layers of the social strata and approach a sharper socio-economic stratification by creating a new middle class*" (p. 63). Since then, society has been divided into four distinct clusters: the Royal Family, upper class, middle class, and lower class. The Royal Family includes components of the power structure, whereas the upper class is a small cluster of wealthy families, comprising top officialdom, former high-ranking officials and very rich businessmen. The middle class comprises small businesses and professionals, such as civil servants and university staff. Lastly, the lower class consists of skilled and unskilled workers who commonly struggle for their daily food and shelter. This social structure has resulted in centralisation in decision making and a hierarchical leadership system. Al-Fozan (1997) concludes that Saudi Arabian society is mainly influenced by three factors, its own traditions, the economic conditions and Islamic teachings.

ECE leaders in Saudi Arabia usually come from the wide middle class, and are thus directly influenced by the socio-economic strata. Moreover, ECE leadership, policies and regulations are influenced by the formal structure in which the ECE policies were established. Figure 1 below indicates the institutional structure in Saudi Arabia, which shows the leadership hierarchy and those people in top leadership positions, starting from the King to the preschool leader, and their respective authorities.

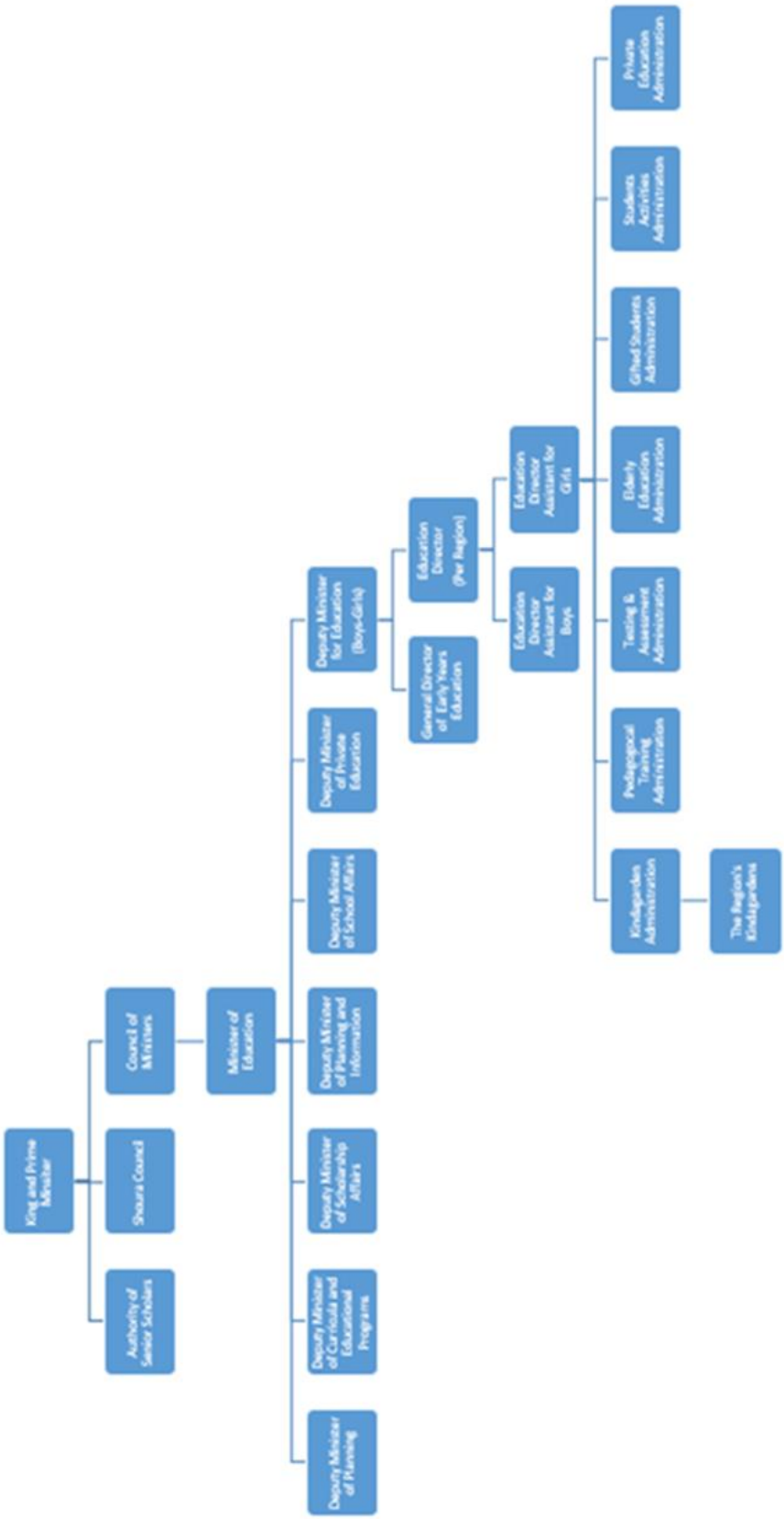


Figure 1: Institutional Structure in Saudi Arabia (Summarised from MoE, 2017b)

Because of the gender segregation, mainly in government's institutions, the ECE, female only sector, is located under the supervision of the Girls Education Director and supervised by the MoE. ECE policies and regulations, however, are set collaboratively by both genders in the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2017b). As a result of long-standing social and cultural factors, genders are segregated in educational institutions. In addition, the Saudi community views motherhood as a cornerstone in raising and educating preschool children. For this reason, both ECE leadership and staff are female only.

Furthermore, there are two types of educational institutions. On one hand, there is public education where both citizens and non-citizens are provided with tuition and textbooks. Public education in Saudi stretches from preschool to postsecondary education, to university level. Private education, on the other hand, mostly provides free textbooks but students are required to pay the tuitions fees, and there is private education from preschool to university levels (MoE, 2017a). Both public and private institutions vary in terms of their reputations and quality, depending on the context and resources available.

Public preschools are free for all and financially supported by the MoE. In fact, acquiring fees from parents is against the MoE's regulations, whereas fees are required in private preschools, and both sectors are supervised by the MoE (MoE, 2017d). The next section will briefly present the stages of education in Saudi Arabia, including age and gender.

1.2.3 Education Stages

Formal education in Saudi Arabia dates from the formation of the first Government Education Department, charged with establishing an education system, in 1924. It was replaced in 1953 by the current Ministry of Education.

It is beneficial to shed light on the stages of education in the country in order to understand the research context. Five stages of education exist in Saudi Arabia, as shown in the table below:

Stages	Grades	Ages	Gender
Preschool	Kindergarten	3 - 6	Mixed
Elementary	Six grades (1-6)	6 - 12	6-8 mixed 9 -12 segregated

Intermediate	Three grades (7-9)	12 - 15	Segregated
Secondary	Three grades (10-12)	15 - 18	~
Postsecondary-University level	Separate men's and women's universities and colleges mainly in public institutions		

Figure 2: Stages of Education in Saudi Arabia

General education in Saudi includes preschool, which is called Kindergarten (KG), six years of primary school, and intermediate and high school, three years each (MOE, 2012). Although preschool education for children between 3-6 years old is not compulsory, the MoE considers it as a preparatory stage and "*an independent stage in its curricula and structure*" (MoE, 2004: 18). Moreover, the MoE (2012) states that not only does a child need to have reached the age of six to be accepted in elementary education, but he/she is also highly recommended to have preschool education. Indeed, the government is heavily investing in this sector, which indicates its emphasis on, and realisation of, the importance of preschool education.

1.2.4 The importance of Education in Saudi Arabia

The Ministry of Education (MoE) of Saudi Arabia acknowledges the 21st century dramatic changes, an era of globalisation, educational and technological advancement, intellectual and cultural openness, falling of political and geographical boundaries, invasion of media, and fierce competition intellectually, politically and economically, where education is given a great attention (MoE, 2004; Al-Mousa, 2010; Alnahdi, 2014). According to the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia,

> *The Kingdom is now facing a new era which will witness a cultural leap forward that leads it to the ranks of developed nations, it is imperative that this present and future generations be equipped to achieve a safe and successful transformation to the future that awaits us*
> *(MoE, 2004: 8).*

Thus, the Saudi government aims to support a generation able to face the present and future challenges (Aljabreen and Lash, 2016; Alqassem et al., 2016). One way to do so is to invest in education and set strategies for improvement. In 2016, the Saudi government spent 124.3bn SAR (£25.7bn) on education (MoE, 2016), which highlights the Kingdom's willingness to

improve its educational system, and its emphasis on the role education plays in the national development of the country.

Nevertheless, a number of drawbacks of the Saudi education system were highlighted by Al-Issa (2010). The MoE oversees the education system in the country. It is the biggest institution in terms of responsibilities, diversity of administrative decisions and complexity of interests. It is the Ministry of Education's responsibility to plan, implement and evaluate education strategies. This makes it more centralised or "bureaucratic" and less able to move forward and interact with developmental projects for the education system. Besides, as the leaders and managers of educational settings or schools are involved in implementing and supervising these strategies in practice, conflicting views and interests may occur in their implementation, which may lead to inappropriate decisions. Consequently, this impedes the strategy being delivered to teachers and students as planned by the Ministry. Moreover, this prevents teachers and students from being involved and stops their voices from being heard by the Ministry, as well as "*hierarchy and power conditions often isolate people and make their biases more extreme"* (Kezar et al., 2006: 129). Thus, Al-Issa (2010: 94) claimed that the Ministry's "*inability to change the reform bureaucracy*" is an obstacle facing the education system in Saudi.

Nonetheless, the demand for education reform is well recognised by policymakers, who have set a progressive and dynamic strategy for the future of education in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, in the past few years, the Minister of Education has called for decentralisation and asserted the importance of considering leaders', managers', teachers' and students' voices for the effective implementation of educational reform. As a result, leaders in public schools were given more freedom in leading and managing their schools, allowing them to innovate to achieve their schools' aspirations (Al-Sahrbi, 2012; Faya, 2012).

Policymakers recognise that,

> *The education system with its tools and methods has not had the desired effect on students' behaviour and has not contributed to the vision of the present circumstances in relation to the immediate and distant environment. This makes it imperative to provide a clear vision and mature recognition of the contents of the education system that fulfil the society's needs and aspirations*
> *(MoE, 2004: 10).*

A ten-year strategy, from 2004-2014, was established for developing the educational system in Saudi Arabia (Maroun et al., 2008). Nevertheless, according to Maroun et al. (2008), a proper successful implementation of any reform strategy rests on several factors, for instance, dividing projects into subprojects, ownership and consensus among stakeholders and

accountability for action, consensus measurement of results, and being patient. Being patient means that:

> *Changing course should not happen at the first sign of problems (or delays in improvement). Reform requires time to be translated into meaningful outcomes. In addition to diligence, patience is necessary for the success of any plan as it allows one to step back, look at the problem, and initiate efforts to solve it*
> *(Maroun et al., 2008: 21).*

Consequently, in 2007 a development program named the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz programme to develop education (Tatweer) was launched. The programme had two phases, while this first started in 2007, the second phase was in 2011. The former started with implementing its strategies in 25 boys' schools and 25 girls' school across the Kingdom. These schools were called smart schools because of their excellent performance. The programme changed the schools' managerial system to empower the schools' leaders to solve the schools' own problems with more freedom and power. The programme also implemented smart technologies in order to develop and ease the way students are taught. Nevertheless, maintaining these technologies proved to be costly, thus the second phase of the programme was executed to solve the first phase's problems and challenges and introduce more developmental plans (Alyami, 2016).

The second phase was further divided into three chronological phases. First, the design phase 2011-2012, which aimed to devise a theoretical framework for the programme to limit any expected disadvantages and solve any foreseen challenges. Second, the application phase which was in 2012, whose goal was to execute the theoretical plan designed in the first phase in 210 schools in seven provinces across Saudi Arabia. The last phase was aimed simply at generalising the implementation of programme development in all public schools. According to Alyami (2016), an official at Tatweer, pointed out that the programme should be fully implemented by 2017. Nevertheless, the official Tatweer website indicates that only 2100 schools have been developed. It is not clear, however, why the programme was not implemented in all schools, but reasons, such as bureaucracy and changes in leadership, positions could be possible explanations.

In January 2015, the government created the Council of Economic and Development Affaires (CEDA), recognising the role of the country's economy in the success of its development and growth and to ensure the continuity of the developmental progression. It consists of 22 members of policy makers drawn from all ministries, including its chair, the Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman. They work collaboratively to set strategies for

improving "the Saudi Vision 2030", implementing it and ensuring transparency and accountability. "*The Vision's governance model promotes efficient planning within government agencies and boosts coordination among them in order to achieve common national goals"*, focusing on three main themes: *a vibrant society, a thriving economy*, and *an ambitious nation*. Not only that ten programmes have been identified as part of the Kingdom 2030 Vision, but also "*innovative methods to identify challenges, seize opportunities, adopt effective planning tools, activate the role of the private sector, bring about implementation, and evaluate performances*" has been used (CEDA, 2016: 7). Besides, timeframe and quality are taken into consideration as "*It also guarantees speedy completion of projects and initiatives and achieves sustainable action and impact through regular implementation reviews and performance evaluations"* (p.7).

This vision was established as a roadmap for developmental actions and economic growth. According to (CEDA, 2016),

> *Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030" was adopted as a methodology and roadmap for economic and developmental action in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In its aim to grant the Kingdom a leading position in all fields, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 sought to identify the general directions, policies, goals, and objectives of the Kingdom.*
> (CEDA, 2016: 6).

The King has also showed his support and encouragement of the vision's success: "*My first objective is for our country to be a pioneering and successful global model of excellence, on all fronts, and I will work with you to achieve that"* King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. One of the Vision's objectives is to "*provide the education that builds our children's fundamental characters and establish empowering health and social care systems"*. Another objective is to "*deepen the participation of parents in the education process, to help them develop their children's characters and talents so that they can contribute fully to society"*. "*Families will be also encouraged to adapt a planning culture to plan carefully for their future and for the future of their children"*. "*We intend to embed positive moral beliefs in our children's characters from an early age by reshaping our academic and educational system*". "*we will invest particularly in developing our early childhood education, refining our national curriculum and training our teachers and educational leaders*" (CEDA, 2016: 28,29,36). These quotes from the strategy show the government's intention to lead education to excellence by putting children and their families at the heart of the educational reform and recognising the importance of teamwork culture and collaboration to support it provision.

1.2.5 Early Childhood Education in Saudi Arabia

The absence of ECE Saudi perspective in English language has been noted, which could have resulted in the dominance of the Western perspectives in the field. For example, it was argued that,

> *It is common in Gulf countries to see U.S. early childhood education explained and demonstrated in illustration of "best practice" or as strong educational options. But the reverse is almost non-existent: very little information is available about Middle Eastern early childhood education (ECE) school and culture for the rest of the world to consider*
> *(Aljabreen and Lash, 2016: 312).*

The benefits of exploring a non-western context is to open an international dialogue and share experiences, especially in dramatically changing economy, environment and technology (Rogoff, 2003; Al-Mogbel, 2014). Thus, it reflects the important role that this research can play in the field nationally and internationally. This section provides an overview of ECE in Saudi, its history and current state.

The government has been investing in the ECE since the early 1900s, as the first private pre-schools were founded in 1955, whereas the formal state ECE began in the early 1980s. Both private and public settings are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (Samadi and Murowa, 2001; Alsunbul et al., 2008). The sector has been evolving since then and has been one of the targets for development; for example SR9 billion (£1.5bn) have been allocated for training, buildings, policies and curriculum (Tatweer, 2010). The Saudi education system has recognised remarkable achievements, such as providing free education for all, the expansion of the formal education across the country, the increasing number (99%) of children enrolled in primary schools, equity of access to education by both genders, and the increase of adults' literacy rates. Nevertheless,

> *Despite these major achievements, the education system faces new challenges; many of which are the result of advances in information communication technologies, and increased globalization and competition among of nations, which has created demand for skills that the Saudi Education needs to promote*
> (Tatweer, 2010: 4).

Therefore, the government intended to provide students with the 21st century competences and attitudes in response to the needs of the current informational and technological era. Thus, the government focused on quality improvement and putting students and their learning at the heart of the educational system (Tatweer, 2010).

The vision of the ECE in Saudi Arabia is to accomplish a globally leading pedagogical system that is derived from Islamic teachings. This strategy was planned by the government to

be accomplished by reaching few sub-goals: enrolling 20% of the children in the designated ages, specifying the programmes and activities, authorising capable and trained faculty, devising standardised methods to measure preschool children's readiness for elementary education, and provide suitable facilities (MoE, 2017c). The government have put intensive efforts to establish a number of policies and regulations for schools in general and preschools especially, that allow leaders and practitioners to recognise their specific roles and responsibilities and practice their roles securely. For example, they introduced four educational procedural and organisational guides for state schools, among them was the Organisational Guide for Early Childhood Education and the Procedural Guide for Early Childhood Education, first editions 2015/2016 handbooks. The purpose of these guides is to raise the awareness of the importance of the organisational administration process, forming the organisational structure of the ECE sector, identifying and keeping a record of the specific roles and responsibilities of leaders and practitioners in the ECE, empowering the ECE sector and raise their professional status, enhancing the collaboration among ECE leaders and practitioners with families and the community, and keeping up with and contributing to the ECE changes taking place nationally and internationally (Tatweer, 2017).

The success of such strategies has resulted in increasing the number of children enrolled in ECE institutions, which has grown dramatically in recent years because more women are entering the workforce. The number of children enrolled in ECE only between 2013-2015 were 182,556 (King Khalid Data Base, 2015). *"These numbers underscore the importance that Saudi parents attach to early childhood education and its role in the overall education program of Saudi children"* (Alqassem et al., 2016: 1), and highlight society's increasing awareness of the importance of children's education from an early age.

Furthermore, different ECE programmes have been launched collaboratively by the MoE, the private sector and qualified individuals. For example, Obeikan Research and Development Company initiated a programme to provide further materials and trainings to specific preschools, along with the required research and evaluation required to execute such a programme successfully. Also, there was an initiative by Sheikh Abdulhadi Alqahtani seeked to build few non-profit preschools in three provinces in Saudi Arabia (MoE, 2017).

As part of the extensive reforms sweeping Saudi Arabian education, leadership roles and responsibilities have become a key focus of attention, by strengthening the leadership capacity of principles. ECE, as a part of the formal education system, has certain distinctive

characteristics in common with the Saudi education system as a whole, derived from the Kingdom's religion and culture. For example, ECE, unlike the later education stages in terms of formal teaching and learning as it is play-based learning whereas the later stages are formal education (Samadi and Murowa, 2001; Alsunbul et al., 2008). Also, early childhood education in Saudi is not gender segregated in terms of children involved, it is, however, staffed solely by female, reflecting the stereotyping of the society in which children are mainly, but not only, raised by women, and supporting the notion that females mostly are more capable of nurturing children as a part of their emotional nature.

Since leadership in ECE in this research context is only performed by women, it is essential to address the issue of women's leadership in Saudi and their role in education and administration. In Saudi Arabia, the MoE have regulated preschool teaching to be offered strictly by female teachers for both genders. During the past ten years, the MoE have further allowed and encouraged schools to have the boys in early education (up to grade three) taught by the female teachers in the girls' section but in separate boys-only classes with different recession times. There is a wide perception that female teachers deal better with early school age than their male counterparts. Further studies may have been conducted before the MOE have reached this decision. It is not the intention of this PhD thesis to challenge or study this notion.

As Islam governs every aspect of Muslims' lives, it guides women in how they interact, dress and move in public. It does not, however, prohibit women from participating in activities whether social, political and economic. Rather, it encourages people regardless of their gender to seek knowledge and attain the highest possible level of professionalism and efficiency while maintaining Islamic values (Al-Hariri, 1987).

Nonetheless, it is argued that the delay for women reaching high leadership positions in Saudi is the result of conservative attitudes towards women's education and work by those who misinterpret the Islamic view of women's participation to support their opinions (Hamdan, 2005). Tribal community customs and cultures dominated the Arabian Peninsula before Islam, with women playing a passive role in the family and work. These have contributed to the conservative views in relation to women. However, since the 1960s such traditional cultural attitudes have been easing increasingly (Al-Rawaf and Simmons, 1991; Effendi, 2003). Nevertheless, such attitudes influenced women's education and participation in public and private leadership activities, especially in a male dominated society. Yet, according to Taleb

(2010), such difficulties in securing women's rights in education were not confined to Saudi Arabia, but occurred also in other counties over the world, where equality of opportunity for women in education is relatively recent.

Despite early constraints and opposition, in the last ten years the participation and involvement of Saudi women in education and public life have increased. Along with women's willingness and ability to hold high positions, the government has embraced a strategic direction towards involving women in top leadership positions. The government emphasises the empowerment of women, focusing on their role instead of their right to employment and education. Thus, qualified women were recruited into leadership positions at the top of the hierarchy, being involved in the decision-making process in both sectors, public and private. Examples of such positions are deputy minister, Shura (the parliament) Council consultants, university president, board members of Chambers of commerce and other positions in the public and private sectors (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Nonetheless, the notion of women accessing such top leadership positions remains highly controversial.

Early years leaders are not living in an isolated context, but are influenced by such changes taking place in the surrounding environment. Therefore, this research explores their experiences and the challenges they face.

1.2.6 Women in Leadership

Despite the leading roles women are reaching, it was argued that female leaders face a number of obstacles in Saudi Arabia. According to Al-Ahmadi (2011), who attempted to find out what challenges are experienced by women leaders in government sectors in Saudi Arabia, it was found that the main challenges are "*structural challenges, lack of resources and lack of empowerment, while cultural and personal challenges ranked last*" (Al-Ahmadi, 2011: 149). This could be due to women's recent involvement in senior leadership positions, which raised concerns in relation to their capabilities and managerial effectiveness (Al-Halawani, 2002). Nevertheless, with the recent changes by introducing the 2030 vision, more woman have been empowered to lead and generally considered as important and effective part of a growing and productive society.

In relation to obtaining a school principal position within Saudi educational institutions, it is required by the MoE to have a minimum of a bachelor degree and eight years of experience as an administrator or a teacher. Furthermore, candidates should demonstrate an excellent performance rating in the two years preceding application for the position. Showing ability for

leadership is also seen as crucial for holding such a position. Then, ongoing training is given to the candidate once she is placed as a principal; nevertheless, such training is not a prerequisite for securing her position. Besides, for a new school principal, visits to other well-experienced principals for mentoring take place. It is also important to note here that, in government schools, principals are rotated every four years (Mathis, 2010).

1.3 Significance and rationale of the research

This research aims to explore ECE leadership in Saudi Arabia from preschool leaders' perspective by investigating the notion of pedagogical leadership in this context and identifying the factors and challenges that influence preschool leadership.

The vital role that leadership plays in the success and quality of the ECE institution is well recognised (Sims et al., 2014; AlAmeen et al., 2015; O'Sullivan, 2015), and leadership is seen as "*a hot topic for early childhood"* (Davis and Ryder, 2016: 1).

There has been, however, limited theoretical advancement in general in ECE leadership: *"leadership research in early childhood is relatively new undertaking"* (Hujala et al., 2016: 406). This is especially the case in relation to pedagogical leadership, according to Heikka (2014: 36): "*in the ECE literature specifically, the lack of rigorous research on pedagogical leadership in this sector has inhibited the coherent development of the concept in a meaningful way*".

Despite the recently growing research in countries such as Australia, New Zeland and Scandinavian countries (Cecchin and Johnsen, 2009; Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011; Bøe and Hognestad, 2015), it is not yet evident that there is previous research in ECE leadership in the Saudi context.

This research is significant in terms of the unique nature of its context as a non-Western one, where the ECE is a female only sector, the only non-segregated stage of children's education, and it is influenced by Islamic values. The rationale of the research has emerged not only from the importance of the research area and its context, but also from the researcher's interest in exploring a relatively new area of research and contribute to the field, and from her desire to understand the complexity of pedagogical leadership, and therefore impact positively on her future career and research. My interest in this area has begun with my master's dissertation research which was developed in more depth in the current study.

This research may contribute to the field of ECE by creating an international dialogue from different cultural and contextual backgrounds, from which pedagogical leadership in the 21st Century can be derived. It will provide an understanding of how different stakeholders and

preschool leaders in ECE operate and identify each stakeholder's experience and perspectives. Therefore, it might be of interest to preschool leaders, policy makers and academics in the fields of ECE and leadership in Saudi.

In order to gain in depth understanding of preschool leaders' perspectives and experiences, a close interaction with the participants took place by conducting 23 face to face semi-structured interviews with female preschool leaders. Therefore, a qualitative interpretive approach to research was used to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences. Prior to interviews, a pilot study was conducted with six leaders to assess the clarity of the interview questions and avoid any language confusion that may result from their translation from English to Arabic. Some of the questions were edited to clarify their meanings.

There seem to be a lack of transparent and direct communication between the MoE and preschool leaders, along with the MoE bureaucracy, which created difficulty in some preschools in terms of delivering their needs and requirements to the MoE (AlAmeen et al., 2015). This research identifies the challenges preschool leaders face, understanding of which could be helpful to the MoE.

1.4 Structure of the study

This thesis is composed of six chapters. Chapter one above was an introduction to the research. It discusses related aspects of the research context, its socio-demographics, institutional structure, education stages the government investments on education, ECE in Saudi, and women's role in leadership. It also presents the rationale of the research and the research questions.

Chapter two begins by laying out the key theoretical perspectives related to the research. It is divided into four main themes: (a) understanding leadership, where the difference of leadership and management is discussed, along with leadership constructs and ECE leadership. The second aspect discusses (b) pedagogy followed by (c) perspectives on pedagogical leadership, the factors influence leadership and challenges face leaders. The research (d) conceptual framework is discussed thereafter.

The methodology used in this research will be discussed in the third chapter, including the nature of the research, its philosophy, methodology and methods used. The research implications, limitations, ethics, the researcher's role and data analysis are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter four presents the results of this study, answering the research questions, followed by the analysis and discussion of these results in chapter five. Finally, the sixth chapter which presents the conclusion of the research, summarises the key findings and discusses the implications of the research for theory and practice, as well as identifying the limitations of the study, contribution to knowledge, recommendations, and further studies.

1.5 Summary

This introductory chapter presented the background of the research, identifying the research objectives and questions. The research context was also presented here by discussing aspects, such as its socio-demographics, social and institutional structure, education stages, importance of education, ECE in Saudi and the role of women.

In summary, the purpose of the current research is to explore leadership in ECE Saudi context, identify the factors influencing leadership and the challenges facing preschool leaders. Saudi Arabian Peninsula is the heartland of the Islamic religion, where every aspect of life is influenced by the personality and teachings of its Prophet, Mohammad PBUH. More than 30% of Saudi Arabian society are young people aged less than 20 years old. Consequently, the Saudi government recognises the importance of education for the country's future development and is heavily invested financially and by setting new strategies in developing the education system.

The role of women as contributors to society has been given much attention by the Saudi government in recent years. As a result of the increasing number of female workers along with the social awareness of the importance of ECE, the number of children enrolled has increased. The government, therefore, has paid great attention to education and invested heavily in expanding and developing the ECE sector. Thus, educational reforms have focused not only on ECE development, but also on leadership. This research has implications for practice, as it can inform policy implementation and the development of ECE leadership.

2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Leadership in education, particularly in ECE, is evolving "*with most constructs proposed for adaption arguably being inadequately justified in the reality of everyday life*" (Alameen et al., 2015: 1). In educational institutions, pedagogy is typically perceived to represent the core activity (Watkins and Mortimore, 1999), and since school leaders are subscribed to pedagogy, they are considered as pedagogical leaders (Sergiovanni, 1998). Therefore, "*the conventional assumption appears to be that if an educational organisation exists then the leaders within must subscribe to pedagogy and, therefore, are pedagogical leaders"* (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 215).

Several scholars have attempted to link the terms 'pedagogy' and 'leadership' (e.g. Sergiovanni, 1998; Webb, 2005; Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011; Male and Palaiologou, 2011; Male and Palaiologou, 2013). However, it is argued that when 'pedagogy' is attached to 'leadership' the result is an ambiguous term in need of further examination (Male and Palaiologou, 2013). Thus, this research aims to explore aspects in relation to this notion, pedagogical leadership, in the Saudi ECE context.

In this chapter, the literature about educational leadership and leadership in ECE is reviewed. It is presented in three main sections. The first is understanding leadership, where a general overview of leadership and management, leadership constructs such as Transactional and Transformational leadership, which have emanated from business studies and been adapted to suit the nature of educational institutions, and Instructional and Pedagogical Leadership, which are education specific (Algarni and Male, 2014), are presented. The shift of leadership in the 21st century, and leadership in early childhood education, are discussed next. The second section is understanding pedagogy, followed by the combination of both concepts, leadership and pedagogy, in the third section that is understanding pedagogical leadership, where pedagogical leadership, factors influence pedagogical leadership, and the challenges face leaders, are discussed. Finally, the conceptual framework, the research questions, and the rational of the research, where the gaps in literature is identified and the reasons I carried this research are explained.

2.2 Understanding leadership

The term 'leadership' is frequently used in the literature, yet there is little consensus about

its meaning. As Bennis argued,

> *Always, it seems the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So, we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it… and still the concept is not sufficiently defined (Bennis, 1959: 259).*

The difficulty of conceptualizing leadership with an agreed upon definition could be the result of its being considered as a controversial term. The various individual experiences and the context where leadership operates, therefore, is often debated.

> *Like all concepts in social science, the definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective. Some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no 'correct' definition*
> *(Yukl, 1994: 4).*

Elsewhere, Northouse (2013: 2) expressed this lack of consensus by stating, "*There are many ways to finish this sentence, 'Leadership is...*' ". In the next section, however, some representative definitions will be addressed.

Leadership could be a role assigned to a specific person in an organisation, or an abstract concept or a procedure initiated and implemented throughout an organisation to address organisational challenges: "*a set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances*" (Kotter, 1996: 25).

An early approach to understanding leadership, as Northouse (2007) explained, focused on leaders' personal qualities, assuming that leadership is conferred on individuals as the result of the possession of certain attributes and traits that allow some people to influence others in order to achieve particular purposes. The elements of individual influence and goal-seeking feature strongly in the varied definitions of leadership. For example, leadership has been described as "*the ability to motivate, influence, and enable individuals to contribute to the objectives of the organization of which they are members*" (House et al., 2004: 15). Leadership is also perceived as "*a shared process among educators – principal and teachers. The principal is seen as a 'leader among leaders' who facilitates the growth of others*" (Lambert et al., 1995: 9).

From another perspective, however, some scholars perceive leadership as a discourse. Sorenson (2002), for example, notes the varied contributions of a number of disciplines to the way leadership is perceived and understood. The fields of education, history, political science, social science, business and management, biology, sociology, and philosophy have all contributed insights into leadership. Such insights, especially from business and management, have influenced the way leadership in education is perceived.

Nevertheless, according to Blakesley (2011), confusion is suffered by educational leadership as a result of constantly changing contexts, due to the "*incompatibility of managerial approaches to leadership with educational desires and aspirations*". He blames the way leadership within the educational context has been viewed through the lens of two major perspectives, based on Business and Management, and Social Science.

> *Reinforcing this inability of educational leadership to emerge as its own "stand alone" discipline or field of practice has been the grafting of ideas and philosophies taken from other areas. The resultant legacy of doing so has served to seriously hinder the development of educational leadership and hampered its emergence as a profession in its own right.*
> (Blakesley, 2011: 10).

Educationalists, however, saw the essential need for academic dialogue between leadership and education (Lefstein, 2005; Lipman, 2003; Smythe and Norton, 2007). As a result, a growing body of literature emerged that privileged the 'authority' of a participant's experience of education (Giles and Morrison, 2010), and reflected upon educational leaders' beliefs and experiences.

A broader perspective is in the view of Giles and Morrison (2010: 65) which defines leadership as "*not firstly a concept, role, position or power, but a phenomenon*". They argue that, as a phenomenon, it is "*not definitive*" and "*uncertain"* in nature because it is experienced differently based on the context and situation, and is constantly changing. In this regard, they stated that "*the experience of leadership is atypical, contextual, situational, and always/already in flux relationally"* (Giles and Morrison, 2010: 65). They concluded that leadership in education "*should be context dependent rather than 'model' dependent*" so that there is no prior defined model to follow, as a result of rapid and continuing changes in the 21st century. Moreover, as educational processes are seen to be 'sites of emergence' (Osberg and Biesta, 2007), Male and Palaiologou (2013) argue that leadership should be described as praxis, which means "*reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it*" (Freire, 1986: 36). Viewing leadership in terms of praxis permits leaders to choose their own course of action in light of each context within which a decision is needed. Praxis, however, is argued to be *"always risky"* as certain qualities should be acquired by leaders, not least of those are making good practical decisions and taking wise actions. According to Carr and Kemmis (1986: 190), "*it requires that the practitioner makes a wise and prudent practical judgement about how to act in this situation"*.

Having to take leadership actions based on the particular circumstances of every situation, therefore, requires certain qualities to make actions and decisions based on the situation. It is argued that leaders' personalities and personal characteristics play a vital role in influencing the followers, motivating and engaging them (Rodd, 2013). Supporting this claim is what Luthans (2002) suggested that a leader's personality has an influence on creating positive attitude and effectiveness of the organisation. An aspect of leadership discussed in the literature is leadership traits and characteristics. For example, personal qualities such as being wise and prudent (Carr and Kemmis, 1986), advocacy, enthusiasm, passion and inspiration (Solly, 2003), and a good decision maker and communication skills, engaging and supportive (Rodd, 2013) were stated to have a positive influence on leadership practice and the institution success.

Leadership definitions presented here are characterised by a number of common themes. One of these is influence, whether a general influence *per se*, influencing others, individuals or groups in order to achieve a common and shared goal, or influencing the targets and objectives to be pursued. It is apparent, therefore, that direction and influence are two elements incorporated into the definition. Furthermore, it was seen as a complex phenomenon, a discourse, a praxis, and a shared process where the leader is a leader and a facilitator among leaders, who requires curtain qualities to influence others to achieve the shared goal.

The researcher, however, supports the idea that *"leadership will continue to have different meanings for different people. The bottom line is that leadership is a complex concept for which a determined definition may long be in flux"* (Northouse, 2013: 4). Perceiving leadership as an uncertain, contextual and situational experience (Giles and Morrison, 2010), which can reflect people's individual experiences when leading their educational institution, and having certain leadership traits and characteristics to influence the success of their educational organisation (Northouse, 2013), along with perceiving the leader as a facilitator and a leader among leaders (Lambert et al., 1995), may justify the complexity of leadership. These notions are supported by this research.

2.2.1 Leadership and Management

The terms 'leadership' and 'management' are often used interchangeably, but they have a different emphasis (Davis and Ryder, 2016: 12).

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss this issue in depth, it is important to shed light on this difference. There is often a degree of confusion about either leading or managing an organisation. From the above definitions, it can be concluded that leadership is

seen as directing an organisation. Management, however, is the day-to-day administration (Muijs et al., 2004). Basically, "*management is operational - it deals with the organization of people and resources*", whereas "*leadership is to inspire and influence the vision to meet future challenges*" (Daly et al., 2009: 4). The focus in this research will be more on leadership than management.

Efficiency is key to leadership and management in ECE. Smith and Langston (1999: 7) stated that:

> *Being a leader and a manager, the same person needs to be an effective administrator who checks the tasks, procedures and resources within the organisation. The sort of person who can successfully lead others needs to combine all three elements – leader, manager, administrator – no mean feat and a little like spinning plates! The leader initiates the ideas and puts them into practice. The manager keeps them going and organises their progress. The administrator makes sure they are achievable*
> *(Smith and Langston, 1999: 7).*

This reflects the importance of creating a team culture in a preschool setting. There should be collaboration among these roles and the responsibilities. Not only have Smith and Langston (1999) included the administration element, but they also identified certain components that need to be considered by the person who leads the ECE setting. Regardless of the position title, the combination of three elements—a leader, a manager and an administrator—in one person reflects the extensive responsibilities and the vital role that this person plays in the success of a preschool setting.

To avoid confusion, the terms 'leader' and 'headteacher' are used interchangeably throughout this paper to represent the person who leads the ECE setting. This is not only because it has been widely used in ECE leadership literature but also because the Saudi MoE has recently changed the way school headteachers are referred to from managers to leaders to cultivate autonomy.

2.2.2 Leadership Constructs

To put it briefly, principals have shifted from being managers of administrative responsibilities to humanitarian, instructional, transformational and pedagogical leaders. In this regard, it was noticed that "*prior to 1985, research on the principalship included efforts to clarify principals' roles, beginning from two quite different premises*" (Leithwood et al., 1994: 16). The first was a unidimensional role, as appears from researchers' efforts to describe the role. For instance, this can be seen in Lortie (1975) perspective on the instructional leader, who is "*an enhanced senior colleague. Thus, he can symbolize professional purpose and*

competence: he potentially can reassure teachers about the quality of their teaching" (p. 197). The second, contrasting view was a multidimensional role of the principal. Examples of principals' roles under such a view are management activities, encouragement of staff and interpersonal support, modelling behaviours and important goals, instructional intervention, and developing an appropriate school culture (Sergiovanni, 1984).

Nevertheless, not only can these roles ensure leadership quality and effectiveness, but also, as Mortimore (1991) stated,

> *The research shows that having a headteacher who is purposeful but neither too authoritarian nor too democratic and who is able to share ownership of the school with colleagues is important. The quality of leadership, however, includes the ability to delegate to a deputy without feeling threatened, and to involve members of the staff in the planning and management of the school (p.14).*

Various leadership constructs represent diverse perspectives of leadership, which focus on aspects such as active leadership, motivation of staff and students, continuous improvement and reaching the community. Although the conceptions of leadership cited most frequently in research were transactional, transformational and instructional, this research also addresses learner-centered and pedagogical leadership. Each will be discussed subsequently.

2.2.2.1 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership focuses on trading or exchanging one thing for another (Burns, 1978). Theoretically, it is based on a system of reward and punishment, which are considered as the key motivators to followers within the organisation to follow their leader. According to Wright, (2007: 24) a transactional leader "*approaches followers with a view to exchange or barter*". Thus, leadership includes exchange and bargaining for the success of the organisation.

The underpinning psychological approach for this form of leadership is behaviourism, in which Pavlov's Classical Conditioning and Skinner's Operant Conditioning play key roles. Such theories are based on controlled experiments, ignoring complex emotional and social aspects. Transformational leadership, discussed next, addresses these issues more explicitly.

2.2.2.2 Transformational Leadership

In transformational leadership, "*Leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation*" (Burns, 1978: 20), whereby leaders work as role models, maintain optimism, mobilize commitment and show concern for followers' needs, for organisational development (Bass, 1999).

> *As organizational leaders struggle to lead their organizations to become higher preforming, quality organizations, there is an increasing recognition that a new leadership paradigm is required to successfully develop and sustain a motivated and committed work force* (Horrine and Bass, 1993: 1).

Transformational leadership is the new leadership paradigm mentioned here. The importance of this form of leadership in an educational context is reflected in the views of Sergiovanni (1990) and Leithwood (1992), who agreed that it allows educational institutions to cope with educational change and complexities.

Based on Weber's (1947) notion of a "*charismatic hero*" who displays powerful and unique characteristics, Burns (1978) developed the notion of a "transformer" leader, because of the powerful attributes by which she/he effectively influences and changes followers.

According to Northouse (2010: 175), "*transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people*". In explaining such transformation of people, Bass and Riggio (2006) claim that transformational leadership assists followers' development and intrinsic motivation. Hence, it is concerned with transforming individuals within the educational organisation. Therefore, it "*looks for potential motives in followers and seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower*" (Burns, 1978: 4). Accordingly, it is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs in which the individual's needs of safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation are taken into account.

Transformational leadership is shared among people within the educational organisation and comes from both the principal and teacher. Therefore, it represents a more bottom-up approach to organisational improvement (Day and Leithwood, 2007).

Certain components embody transformational leadership. According to Day and Leithwood (2007), it offers individualised support, rewards, shared goals, vision, modelling and high expectations, culture building and intellectual stimulation. Earlier, Bass (1985) argued that transformative leaders:

> *…convert followers to disciples; they develop followers into leaders. They elevate the concerns of followers on Maslow's need hierarchy from needs for safety and security to needs for achievement and self-actualization, increase their awareness and consciousness of what is really important, and move them to go beyond their own self-interest for the good of the larger entities to which they belong. The transforming leader provides followers with a cause around which they can rally (p.467).*

A transformative leader provides individual support, builds school vision, works with the staff to achieve the school's goals, models appropriate behaviours and values, intellectually stimulates others, holds high expectations, and establishes and sustains a collaborative culture

in the school (Leithwood and Steinbach, 1991, Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999). Therefore, one of the key components of transformational leadership is idealised influence, which means that the leader acts as a role model who attracts others' cooperation through the respect he/she inspires.

The underlying psychological theory of transformational leadership is humanistic psychology, as it is based on the notions of needs' hierarchy and emotional intelligence.

2.2.2.3 Instructional Leadership

Taleb (2010) described an instructional leader of a school as 'an enhanced colleague' who symbolises 'professional purpose and competence: he potentially can reassure teachers about the quality of their teaching'. In instructional leadership, the role of the leader is not only limited to managerial duties, but also includes influencing the quality of teachers in the classroom (Alameen et al., 2015). Thus, instructional leaders, as best described by Hallinger (2005), are "*strong, directive, goal oriented and culture builders*", who motivate teachers and students towards achieving the desired academic outcomes and sustain an *"academic press… that fostered high expectations and standards for students, as well as for teachers"* (p. 223-224).

In addition, Alameen et al. (2015) explain further, "as *governments and school systems pressed for higher levels of student achievement, the construct of instructional leadership was developed further through the 1990s though school effectiveness and improvement programmes" (p. 3).* It was seen then as collective rather than individual and usually renamed as learning-centred or learner-centred, which focuses on the 'academic press' by building "*data-driven professional communities that hold all individuals accountable for student learning and instructional improvement"* (Mazzeo, 2003: 2). However, *"the direct engagement of formal leaders in student learning was less instrumental in improving and enhancing student attainment than the impact that could be achieved through indirect activity"* (Alameen et al., 2015: 3). Pedagogical leadership, as the key leadership construct in this research,

> *extends the notion of learner-centred leadership (which itself was a much more personalised approach than typically employed in instructional/learning-centred approaches) to encompass the ecology of the community as well as the individual learner. (Alameen et al., 2015: 4).*

Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, leadership in education "*should be context dependent rather than 'model' dependent*", as there is no prior defined model to follow, as a result of rapid and continuing changes in the 21st century (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 2), and because educational processes are 'sites of emergence' (Osberg and Biesta, 2007). Leadership, then, can be seen as "*practical engagement of actions… a process that involves interpretation*".

Therefore, it is described as praxis (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 3), which means "*reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it*" (Freire, 1986: 36). In this sense, leaders require qualities, such as making prudent practical decisions and actions, as "*leadership goes beyond the simplicity of actions/practice and their causality*" (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 7).

As discussed earlier, despite the various attempts to attach the terms 'pedagogy' and 'leadership', "*the use of these two terms in conjunction is still limited, relatively unexamined, ambiguous and focuses only on the relationship between learning and teaching*" (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 2). This research, therefore, examines the construct of pedagogical leadership in the 21st century in an Arab Muslim monarchy, "*where directive leadership and control by the state has been the traditional norm*" (Alameen et al., 2015: 1).

According to Elmore (2000) leaders in the instructional leadership approach have little influence on the school's learning and teaching quality, as this is the superintendent's duty. Although school outcomes and programme performance are fostered through the perception of the 'academic press', instructional leadership seems to be limited, as not all parties can be involved in the process of decision-making.

2.2.3 The Shift of Leadership in 21st Century

Leadership constructs discussed in the literature advocate a set of common skills and competencies across countries, which could be as a result of the worldwide researchers' use of the same leadership constructs, such as transformational, distributed, instructional, etc., based on universal evidence regardless of individual contextual differences (Hermosilla et al., 2014). Therefore, the current study attempts to fill in this gap in knowledge by being sensitive to and considering the contextual differences, as well as offering a more holistic approach to leadership in a 21st century learning environment that take the context into consideration, which is pedagogical leadership.

In 21st century environment, that is categorised by knowledge evolution, technological advancement, ICT and social communication, dramatical political and economic changes, where the educational context is best described as dynamic and site of emergent (Uhi-Bien et al., 2007; Osberg and Biesta, 2007), leadership actions could fail when adopting predetermined models of leadership. This is argued and best described by Uhi-Bien et al. (2007), stating,

> *Leadership models of the last century have been products of top-down, bureaucratic paradigms. These models are eminently effective for an economy premised on physical*

> *production but are not well-suited for a more knowledge oriented economy. Complexity science suggests a different paradigm for leadership—one that frames leadership as a complex interactive dynamic from which adaptive outcomes (e.g., learning, innovation, and adaptability) emerge*
> *(Uhi-Bien et al., 2007: 298).*

Such shift that moves leadership from taking the top-down, bureaucratic approaches to a more complex level of becoming dynamic and interactive, responding to the 21st century changes, and allowing the development of learning and innovation outcomes, confirms the importance of leading with a tolerant open mind, considering the context where leadership operates and the situations that the leader experience every day, rather than following a specific leadership model. Supporting this argument is what Aubrey et al. stated as,

> *This suggests the need to take account of the complex, contradictory and diverse demands being made of EC leaders both inside and outside their work environment. It also suggests the need to reassess leadership theories that address contemporary challenges in a changing and globalized world*
> (Aubrey et al., 2013: 8).

Not only the importance of being an open early childhood pedagogical leader as to deal with the 21st century dramatical changes, but also because,

> *The challenge to early years leaders is to understand what makes childcare good quality and how to guarantee this for all children. But especially to boost the life chances of children from disadvantaged background and help close the achievement gap*
> (O'Sullivan, 2015b: 73).

2.2.4 Leadership in Early Childhood Education:

Leadership in ECE has not been given attention in the literature compared with other fields. Recently, it was argued that "*leadership research in early childhood education and care is a relatively new undertaking. It combines leadership concepts from school research as well as from business*" (Hujala et al., 2016: 406). For example, in the historical review of the 40th Anniversary Issue of Educational Management Administration and Leadership (EMAL) journal, it was indicated that, in the past decade, only fifteen papers focused on primary education, compared to 41 focusing on secondary education and most of the primary stage studies did not address the ECE sector (Bush and Crawford, 2012). Therefore, leadership research in early childhood education and care has emerged as a relatively new field. It draws on leadership concepts from school research as well as from business (Hujala et al., 2016). Thus, a theoretical expansion of ECE leadership is called for.

Existing research in ECE leadership has studied topics, such as models of leadership, dominantly distributed leadership (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007; Jappinen and Sarja, 2011; Bøe and Hognestad, 2015), roles and responsibilities, and team-building (Muijs et al., 2004; Moyles, 2006; Rodd, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2015; Davis and Ryder, 2016), excellence and efficiency of leadership, characteristics and emotional intelligence (O'Sullivan, 2015), and school leadership and neuroscience (Lyman, 2016). Moreover, contemporary literature on ECE leadership "*focuses on pedagogical leadership, distributed leadership and leadership practice*" (Rodd, 2013: 7). This could be because due to the nature of ECE, a collaboration and teamwork culture is vital to ensure that the practice is appropriate for children's learning and development.

Because this research focuses on pedagogical leadership in ECE, it is worth mentioning that contemporary theorising and research in ECE leadership (Cecchin and Johansen, 2009; Jappinen and Sarja, 2011; Rodd, 2013) have associated pedagogical leadership with distributed leadership and have shown that pedagogical leadership tasks and responsibilities are effectively enacted by distributed leadership (Bøe and Hognestad, 2015); however, they have not discussed the holistic approach of ECE pedagogical leadership. Indeed, research on ECE pedagogical leadership has focused mainly on aspects such as teaching and learning. Moreover, these studies have mainly examined ECE leadership in a Western context, thus failing to consider cultural and lifestyle differences that emerge in non-Western contexts.

Distributed leadership, which is a dominant approach of leadership in ECE, is concerned with knowledge growth and an openly dispersed responsibility practice. It is also concerned with knowledge generating (Jappinen and Sarja, 2011) because knowledge provides ECE educators with the foundation for leadership capacity. Rodd (2013: 42) referred to knowledge in this context as '*both pedagogical and practical understanding, which can be dispersed within early childhood services and can fit with other specializations such as visionary, community, cultural, conceptual and career development leadership*'. This broad scope demonstrates the complexity of leadership; however, when leading in an ECE context, it is the leader's responsibility to establish a positive culture of knowledge creation and reflective practices that support this context and promote children's learning and development.

Another example that demonstrates the complexity of leadership particularly pedagogy, was seen in a study carried out by the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership in Melbourne, Victoria from 2010 to 2013, carried out on participants in a leadership course in early childhood. It showed that key elements related to pedagogical leadership, such as developing

individual and collective capacity, developing and sustain relationships, shaping and leading pedagogy, promoting inquiry and reflection and creating and sharing knowledge where rated 7th, 2nd, 9th, 5th and 3rd respectively by the participants who performed services from a wide variety of organisational contexts. This suggests that key elements of pedagogical leadership were not yet strongly embedded in participants' perception of leadership capacity (Sims, et al., 2014).

Drawing on the argument that leadership should be context dependent and that educational environment is seen as a site of emergence (Osberg and Biesta, 2007), when discussing ECE leadership, it is important to analyse the distinctive features of the ECE context.

> *One interesting distinction between the field of ECE leadership and other fields that have been studied is the extent to which women occupy leadership roles, which contrasts strongly with the situation and gender distribution in the business world. Such research as exists is not well informed by theory and research in the broader field of leadership studies, in education, public sector or business leadership. Much of the existing literature has focused on the roles and characteristics of EC leaders gathered largely through self-report*
> (Aubrey et al., 2012: 6).

In many countries, ECE is dominated by women who (compared with men) place different emphases on family and career at different stages in their lives (Rodd, 2013). One of these countries is Saudi Arabia. This is similar to the cultural perception in the Saudi society, where ECE workforce is entirely dominated by women, of the nature and conventional role of women. However, in discussing Islamic teaching with regards to women, it is important to differentiate between the normative teachings of Islam and the diverse cultural practices among Muslims rooted in social norms (Hamdan, 2005).

Another distinctive feature of ECE is that its "*services and care are discussed as a condition for urban and rural development and as part of the social and economic infrastructure of healthy and wealthy local communities*" (Dahlberg et al., 1999: 1). For these reasons, it could be argued that ECE needs or has its own distinctive forms of leadership, and faces its' own challenges (Sims, et al., 2014), thus, the scope of this research. In relation to Saudi ECE, as discussed in the introduction chapter, it is given great attention as the government is investing heavily in the sector to raise standards and the society has been increasingly recognising its importance and influence on the child's future life.

In their paper, 'The twoness of twos: Leadership for Two Year Olds', June O'Sullivan, the CEO of the London Early Years Foundation (LEYF), and Sue Chambers discussed how to

enable care givers to meet the challenges of learning among two-year olds. One of the focuses of their research was on Leading Pedagogy. They discovered that there is an "*anxiety about the introduction of a more formal assessment of two year olds… and practitioners will need to be confident of discussing children's progress with parents, particularly if children are failing to meet expected milestones*" (O'Sullivan and Chambers, 2014: 42). It is the preschool leader's role, therefore, to facilitates and support practitioners in such circumstances.

Recently, Hujala et al. (2016) carried out a cross-cultural, context-based study of ECE leadership, in which leadership discourse and culture are viewed as shaped by the context. This leadership approach allows for examination of the interaction between the different levels (Hujala, 2004; Nivala, 1999) and perceives the ECEC mission and core tasks as a socially constructed, situational, and interpretive phenomenon (Hujala, 2004).

The work of Siraj-Blatchford and others has been influential in shaping our understanding of leadership in the early years (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002; Sylva et al, 2004). In a collaboration with Manni (Institute of Education, University of London, 2007) on effective leadership in the early years (ELYS) sector, they argued that contextual literacy, a commitment to collaboration, and to the improvement of children's learning outcomes should be considered (by definition) to provide fundamental requirements for Leadership for Learning. They also attempted to identify the characteristics or patterns of leadership that can be valuable in settings judged to be offering the highest quality of early learning experiences for children and families. The following '*categories of effective leadership practice'* were identified:

- Identifying and articulating a collective vision; especially with regards to pedagogy and curriculum.
- Ensuring shared understandings, meanings and goals: building common purposes.
- Effective communication: providing a level of transparency with regards to expectations, practices and processes.
- Encouraging reflection: which acts as an impetus for change and the motivation for on-going learning and development.
- Commitment to on-going, professional development: supporting staff to become more critically reflective in their practice.
- Monitoring and assessing practice: through collaborative dialogue and action research.
- Building a learning community and team culture: establishing a community of learners.

- Encouraging and facilitating parent and community partnerships: promoting achievement for all young children (Whalley and Allen, 2011).

Although the ELEYS study adopts a much broader understanding of leadership than the one emerging as appropriate for the leader of practice, there are insights here that help shape our emerging definition of ECE leadership, especially the notion of 'building a learning community and team culture' (Whalley and Allen, 2011).

O'Sullivan (2015) asserts that leaders need to be pragmatic so they can overcome unnecessary barriers in order to change and make improvement. An effective leader has the ability to influence and negotiate at all levels, communicating in different ways to reach their varied and disparate audiences. They also need to balance pragmatism with compromise because no leadership theory fits all people, situations or structures. This particularly applies to ECE. Therefore, leadership in the ECE was perceived as "*using your knowledge, skills, personality, and experience to positively influence practice*" (Davis and Ryder, 2016: 9).

Communication and relationships in ECE are vital in order to build a learning community that values knowledge creation and supports children's learning and enhances their development. Central to communication and relationship building is the leader's ability to be emotionally intelligent. O'Sullivan (2015) considered emotional intelligence as fundamental to success, both in terms of personal survival and winning the respect of staff. The ability to read a situation and use a personal antennae to understand all the nuances and dynamics that ripple through human interactions and relationships, being able to read the politics of a situation is an important attribute. These leaders, in turn, nurture and value the emotional intelligence of educators, thereby enhancing the capacity of the service to work in emotionally intelligent ways.

> *By positive ongoing relationships within the local community, we can help children to recognise their role in wider society by promoting a sense of belonging and an understanding of our responsibility towards others*
> (O'Sullivan, 2015: 97).

Mutual trust and a sense of belonging and loyalty of the ECE leaders and staff are important. Communication is a key to foster those elements. According to Kezar et al., (2006: 127), *"Open communication, including listening by leaders, encourages loyalty and establishes a reciprocal sense of trust".*

ECE leaders are described as "*building a learning community and team culture*" (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007: 21). Therefore, the ECE context requires a leader '*who is guided by moral, rational and socio-emotional concerns more than structure and systems*' (Rodd, 2013: 39) because each ECE setting is unique in terms of its context, needs and requirements.

This suggests a need to identify leadership practices and outcomes that are compatible with the field of ECE, its needs and requirements, for which few leadership research studies have been conducted despite the high potential for activity in the field. Therefore, the aim of this research study was to explore a holistic approach to pedagogical leadership in ECE.

2.3 Understanding pedagogy

It is important to discuss the term 'pedagogy' as a key term in this thesis prior to discussing the concept of pedagogical leadership. A number of perspectives have shaped the understanding of the term 'pedagogy'. Because its definition varies among researchers, it is important to discuss diverse perspectives in the literature and to identify the most suitable definition in the context of this research study. To demonstrate the importance of pedagogy in education, Leach and Moon (2008: 1) began with '*the premise that good teachers are intellectually curious about pedagogy*'. Curiosity means being eager and having a strong desire to learn about something (Oxford-University, 2017), which, as a result, could influence a teacher's attitude towards his/her practices and therefore significantly affect the quality of education as well as children's learning experiences.

Despite the variety of insights regarding pedagogy, it is argued to be a complex concept, and therefore it is difficult to apply one definition. For example, Watkins and Mortimore (1999: 1) described its complexity:

> *As with other complex ideas, pedagogy will be difficult to define – even in the formal literature on the subject. The boundaries of the concept may seem unclear, but the ways in which different writers have drawn them may itself be instructive.*

It seems that the complexity is caused by the lack of clear boundaries, which could result from the different perspectives that emerge in different contexts. The term itself is a concept that is considered related to education (Watkins and Mortimore, 1999). One perspective is that pedagogy encompasses teaching acts and styles, which is illustrated by definitions such as '*the act and discourse of teaching*' (Alexander, 2004: 8) or '*any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning of another*' (Watkins and Mortimore, 1999: 62). When pedagogy is perceived as such, it encompasses a learning process, classroom activities, what is taught and

how and the role of the teacher in the classroom, such as offering instruction to teachers and guiding them to lead and manage their classrooms; however, these definitions restrict pedagogy to teaching and learning and lack a broad meaning, which is discussed in more detail later in this section.

Several scholars have influenced the shaping of pedagogy and have discussed aspects such as learning processes, teaching approaches, creating a learning environment and adults' roles in facilitating and supporting children's learning. For example, Maria Montessori's learning approaches, which are frequently implemented in preschools in Saudi Arabia, and John Dewey's pedagogical beliefs, including hands-on learning and exploration, are cross-disciplinary approaches to curriculum design (traditional subjects connected with one another) that aim to close the gap between thoughts and actions. It begins with questions rather than fixed answers (Watkins and Mortimore, 1999; Leach and Moon, 2008; O'Sullivan, 2015). These early educators also discussed the relationship between the teacher and the learner. Pestalozzi's moral guidance and the emphasis on the child's emotional well-being through love, trust and gratitude have been influential. Fredrick Frobel's approach to education has also been influential, which involves play-based learning by creating a learning environment equipped with practical materials (Morrison, 1988).

All the abovementioned learning and teaching techniques, as the researcher would describe them, are discussed in the literature as part of the meaning of pedagogy. While such theoretical perspectives continue to dominate the concept of pedagogy and influence ECE practices, it is important to understand the other, wider perspective of pedagogy, which surpasses the aspects of teaching and learning. Whether or not pedagogy is mostly concerned with the aspects of teaching and learning, this paper critically analyses pedagogy as a broader concept. From this wider perspective, Alexander (2001: 214) argued that pedagogy

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

This definition contradicts the previously mentioned definitions of pedagogy in which the terms teaching and pedagogy are used interchangeably. Alexander (2001: 540) differentiated between both terms in which teaching is perceived as an '*act*', whereas pedagogy is an '*act and discourse*'. It is suggested that pedagogy includes potential dialogues related to other elements, such as culture, beliefs, theories, policies, the purpose of education, the nature of childhood, knowledge and understanding of the way children learn, controversies, socio-economic factors

and philosophical, educational and psychological dialogue. Thus, teaching is shaped by pedagogy (Alexander, 2001; Male and Palaiologou, 2011). Hence, Alexander criticised Watkins and Mortimore for describing pedagogy as an act of teaching in their definition: '*any conscious activity …*', etc. Male and Palaiologou (2013: 217) suggested that the '*epistemological nature of pedagogy that stays faithful to the culture of families' involvement*' is neglected. Nevertheless, Alexander (2001: 540) perceived Watkins and Mortimore's (1999) definition of pedagogy as closer to his definition of teaching in which

> *('teaching, in any setting, is the act of using method x to enable pupils to learn y') it entered the domain of pedagogy as soon as we started describing, comparing and evaluating the different forms these elements may take and various ways they may be combined… Pedagogy connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure and mechanisms of social control*
> *(Alexander, 2001: 540).*

In terms of cultural differences, '*the case of pedagogy outside England looks somewhat different*' (Alexander, 2001: 542). For example, a Swedish understanding of pedagogy developed by Marton and Booth (1997: 178) is described as

> *a discipline that extends to the consideration of development of health and bodily fitness, social and moral welfare, ethics and aesthetics, as well as to the institutional forms that serve to facilitate society's and individual's pedagogic aim.*
> .

Thus, it is recognised that pedagogy is not limited to the teaching process but also includes potential dialogues related to other elements, such as culture, the purpose of education, the nature of childhood, knowledge and understanding of the way children learn, socio-economic factors and philosophical, educational and psychological dialogue (Alexander, 2001). In the researcher's experience, as a Saudi citizen, this notion of pedagogy is closest to the way pedagogy is understood in the Saudi culture. Pedagogy in Saudi education is mostly viewed as a discipline and is related to the issues mentioned by Marton and Booth (1997). In schools, syllabi, such as religious pedagogy, moral pedagogy and pedagogy of health and fitness, are part of the curriculum. Pedagogy in Saudi Arabia is also viewed as part of the responsibilities of parenting.

Therefore, literature studies that have examined pedagogy have shifted from simplistic views on teaching and learning to considering teaching styles, the context in which teaching takes place, the roles of all stakeholders and the role of policies (Male and Palaiologou, 2013). In support of Alexander's (2001) perception of pedagogy, Male and Palaiologou (2013: 1) described pedagogy as a broader concept than simply teaching and learning:

> *The term 'pedagogy' is understood as a set of practices which shape educational organisations and is organised around teaching and learning in order to match externally applied standards and expectations of student outcomes.*

The ambiguity regarding the term pedagogy is exacerbated when attached to the concept of leadership, which requires more explanation beyond the current perception that pedagogical leadership is only concerned with teaching and learning (Male and Palaiologou, 2013). The notion that underlies this research is Male and Palaiologou's (2013: 219) argument in which pedagogy is perceived as

> *the creation of learning environments in which the centrality of interactions and relationships among learners, teachers, family and community (i.e. their values, beliefs, culture, religion, customs and economic circumstances) interact with external elements (such as the global economy, climate and social phenomena that additionally influence the life of the community) in order to jointly construct knowledge.*

Therefore, Male and Palaiologou (2013: 6, 219) recognised pedagogy as '*a triangulated concept based on the relationship of social praxis that is concerned with theory, practice and a set of social axes*', and they also argued that

> *pedagogy in the 21st century should move beyond the simplicity of a literal functional description of the dichotomised theme of teaching and learning and should be concerned to subvert authority, bridge disciplines and cross fragmentations of axiologies, ontologies and epistemologies in an attempt to transcend disciplinary boundaries and move beyond a visionary learner environment where the contemporary is set against traditional acceptance versus denial or standard versus visionary classrooms*
> *(Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 6).*

In the Saudi Arabian hierarchical and centralised system, people tend to accept authority, and few people subvert it due to cultural and traditional beliefs and values that promote respecting leaders. This is an example in which the confusion between religion and culture emerges, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter; however, this is now shifting due to the 2030 vision of Saudi Arabia, which advocates a decentralised system and valuing the community's voices. Moreover, especially due to the evolution of social media, more public voices are emerging and being heard, and there are fewer authoritative provisions from the Saudi government.

Another common perspective of pedagogy is discussed by MacNeill (2005) and includes various inter-related perspectives. According to MacNeill et al. (2005: 4), pedagogy is perceived through at least five lenses:

1. *Epistemological*
    - *Pedagogy as the transmission of knowledge (Lingard et al., 2003)*
2. *Social-Ideological*

- *Pedagogy as a political tool for the enculturation students (Freire, 1977; Morton & Zavarzadeh, 1997; Smyth, 1985; vanManen, 1999);*
- *Pedagogy-ideological practices of constructing subjectivities necessary for reproducing existing social organizations (Morton & Zavazadeh, 1991).*

3. *Social*
   - *Pedagogy as a relationship that produces knowledge (Britzman, 2003; vanManen, 1999);*
   - *Pedagogy as social practice (Daniels, 2001).*
4. *The pedagogic act*
   - *The mechanical aspect of how knowledge is transmitted*
   - *Pedagogy as inclusive view of all aspects teaching but not simply instruction (Mortimore, 1999; Newmann & Associates, 1996);*
   - *Any conscious activity designed by one person to bring about learning in another (Ireson, Mortimore & Hallam).*
5. *Pedagogy separated from didactics*
   - *Pedagogy, in the European usage, related to culture and children's learning, while didactics relates to the subjects to be taught (Alexander, 2004, p.10; Hamilton & McWilliam, 2001).*

(MacNeill et al., 2005: 4).

In this sense, pedagogical leadership is viewed as a mixture of epistemological and social aspects, the pedagogic act and children's learning and cultures. The context in which leadership takes place, which is argued to be vital in determining the practices of the pedagogical leadership construct, could also be included in this description. Livingston et al. (2017: 8) supported this perception of pedagogy and described it as '*the dynamic relationship between learning, teaching and culture*', and they advocated the importance of the context and teachers' pedagogical beliefs and experiences in learning and in shaping pedagogy. They also emphasised the importance of critical engagement with pedagogical approaches based on the needs of its context rather than following ready-made prescriptions of classroom practices.

Diagram 1 illustrates that pedagogy is central to the educational institution and is shaped by '*the ecology of the community*' as explained by Male and Palaiologou (2013: 7), who defined the '*ecology of the community*' as follows:

> *the active participation of learners, teachers, family and the local community and shaped in turn by all the internal axes (values, beliefs, local economy) and external axes (societal values, global economy, mass media, information communication technologies and social networking) … the national curriculum and the 'academic press' of student test scores …*
>
> *Pedagogy, therefore, is cultivated by the quest for understanding the being of the learners (the ecology of their community), the experiences of the learners and their community and the meaning making and problem solving required in that context for creating effective educational interactions and relationships. In that sense, pedagogical axes serve as foundation elements of the praxis that is the key activity of educational organisations. In that context, leadership in the 21st century is an aspect of pedagogical axes, thus we call it pedagogical leadership*

(Male & Palaiologou, 2013: 7).

By considering the ecology of the community, this notion of pedagogical leadership includes the local and personal learning, organisational and systematic needs.

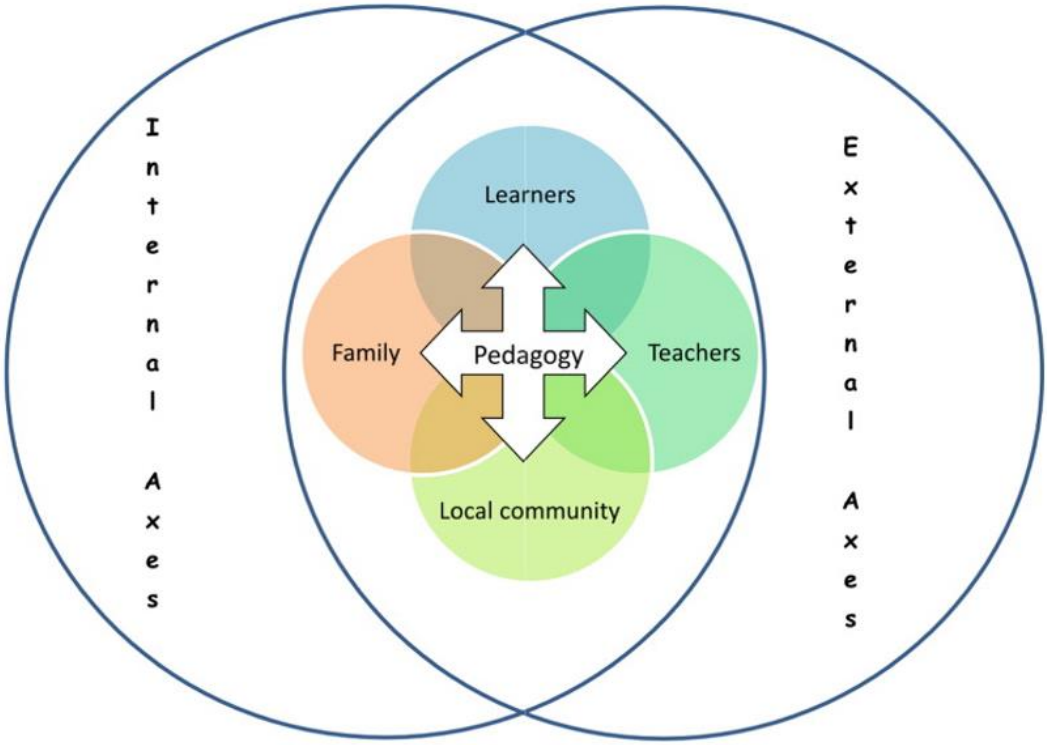


Diagram 1: The relationship between pedagogy and social axes (Male & Palaiologou, 2013).

To conclude this section, while discussing various perspectives of pedagogy, it is important to identify the most suitable definitions for this research. The notions that are sensitive to the context and that consider the needs of the community rather than adopting predefined pedagogical beliefs that may not fit the context are the most suitable for this research, such as those presented by Male and Palaiologou (2013) and Livingston et al. (2017).

The next section discusses the theoretical perspectives of leadership and pedagogy insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of pedagogical leadership.

2.4 Understanding pedagogical leadership

The fact that pedagogical leadership has not been sufficiently addressed in literature as compared to other leadership constructs, demands exploration. According to Heikka and Waniganayake (2011: 501), "*There has been limited theoretical advancement in writing about*

pedagogical leadership in early childhood education". Moreover, "*the term 'pedagogy' is an ambiguous one when it is attached to the concept of leadership and requires further explanation beyond the seeming current determinism that pedagogical leadership is only about supporting teaching and learning"* (Male & Palaiologou 2013: 1).

This shows the importance of the current study, as it aims to explore certain aspects within pedagogical leadership in ECE that may help in clarifying the concept and contribute to the existing body of literature.

As noted in section 2.3, pedagogy is a contested concept that can be viewed narrowly, in terms of teaching and learning (Watkins and Mortimore, 1999; Alexander, 2001), or more broadly to include therefore, beliefs, places and a variety of structural and cultural factors (Marton and Booth, 1997; Alexander, 2004; Male and Palaiologou, 2013), the latter being the view adapted in this thesis.

2.4.1 What is Pedagogical Leadership?

As it appears to be a recent concept, pedagogical leadership in ECE has no definition that is agreed upon even though a number of perspectives on pedagogical leadership arise. On one hand, it is seen concerned with leading learning and on the other, seen as a wider perspective concerned with the ecology of the community.

One perspective by Ord and others referred "*pedagogical leadership as to the way in which the central task of improving teaching and learning takes place in educational settings"* (Ord et al., 2013: 1). Whereas Sergiovanni views pedagogical leadership as about building teachers' and students' capacities through investing in and guiding students socially, academically and spiritually and developing teachers professionally and intellectually. He believes that "*teachers practise a form of pedagogical leadership directly since in schools they stand first and closest in a caring relationship to children*" (Sergiovanni, 1998: 93).

Thus, it is not only the school principals who can practise such an approach to leadership, but also teachers. However, it is the principal's responsibility to facilitate this process in order to ensure that children's needs and interests are served (Sergiovanni, 1998). From that perspective, Heikka and Waniganayake (2011: 507) perceive pedagogical leadership as "*taking responsibility to ensure that practices are appropriate for children*". Moreover, it offers a holistic approach to learning, because "*the pedagogic sets out to address the whole child*" (Moss, 2006: 32).

Since "*the construction of knowledge lies at the heart of the learning process, it should be the main aim in education*" (Male and Palaiologou, 2011: 9). Hence, pedagogical leadership is concerned with knowledge creation rather than only knowledge transmission. Pedagogical leadership is also concerned with the way that knowledge is generated and shared among the staff as well as decision-making among each other (Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011).

Moreover, pedagogical leadership is concerned with the professional development of staff, recognition of opportunities for learning for students and teachers and creating a learning community (Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011). Accordingly, it is argued elsewhere that through pedagogical leadership, innovation and creativity in teaching is fostered (Webb, 2005).

With regards to ECE, Gotvassli (2006) cited in Cecchin and Johansen (2009) discussed the term 'professional pedagogical leadership'. Gotvassli's work is translated from Danish to English, which reflects the fact that the research in this area is limited.

> *Gotvassli (2006) writes: "Even if the term pedagogical leadership is not a precise term, it would seem that it is generally understood as leadership of learning processes". For the preschool sector this means "among other things to initiate and guide reflection and learning processes in kindergartens"*
> (Cecchin and Johansen, 2009: 27).

According to Cecchin and Johansen (2009: 2), "*Pedagogically educated leaders combine their pedagogical knowledge with their managing competences when performing leadership*". Therefore, they investigated 'Professional Pedagogical Leadership' as a new theoretical approach and characterized it as "*connecting pedagogical developmental theory and leadership practice with classic leadership and management theory in one model*".

Elsewhere, pedagogical leadership is seen as a set of distributive and productive collective activities, where the whole school community participate in the processes of leadership and management to support students' learning, not only those who hold official leadership positions. In this regard, Jappinen and Sarja (2011) identify the term "distributed pedagogical leadership" (DPL) as

> *What characterizes a professional learning community when the educational actors intentionally share a common mission ... Primarily, DPL refers to the distribution of interest, vision, aims and values for the purpose of achieving something more than the actors can perform separately. The issue is one of synergy creation where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*
> (Jappinen and Sarja, 2011: 64).

In this sense, DPL, at its best, is concerned with collaboratively led educational practices in jointly-agreed ways and direction "on the basis of accumulative collective, cognition and understanding" (Jappinen and Sarja, 2011: 65).

"Synergy creation" among the learning community is a key factor that pedagogical leaders can create to build a professional learning community. A pedagogical leader is seen as,

> *Any person who has a deep understanding of early learning and development may take on the role of the pedagogical leader. These individuals see themselves as partners, facilitators, observers and co-learners alongside educators, children and families. Most importantly, pedagogical leaders challenge others to see themselves as researchers in the teaching and learning process. In turn, this practice builds a culture of reflective teaching that helps us to sort through the complexities of our work*
> (Coughlin and Baird, 2013: 1).

Table 1 below summarises the current insights on pedagogical leadership.

Researcher	Perception of pedagogical leadership
Sergiovanni (1998)	Interaction, learning community building (social, academic & professional capitals), building teachers' and students' capacities,
Gotvassli (2006)	Initiate and guide reflection and learning processes
Cecchin and Johansen (2009)	A combination of pedagogical knowledge and management competences when performing leadership
Heikka and Waniganayake (2011)	Taking responsibly to ensure appropriate practice for kids, shared decision-making, concerned with staff professional development, recognition of learning opportunities for pupils and practitioners, building learning communities
Jappinen & Sarja (2011)	Distributed pedagogical leadership, sharing a common mission, distribution of: interests, vision, aims and values to achieve the shared goal, synergy creation
Coughlin & Baird (2013)	Deep understanding of early learning and development, leader as partner, facilitator, observer, co-learner, and researcher in the teaching and learning process, builds a culture of reflective teaching
O'Sullivan (2015)	Understanding of how children learn and develop, taking account of the context (home and school), significance of relationships; school, home, and the community
Male & Palaiologou (2016)	Knowledge creation, seeks links between educational outcomes and a set of social realities, a triangular social praxis shaped by theory, practice and social axes, building productive synergistic relationships, context dependent

Table 1 : Summary of the current perspectives on Pedagogical Leadership

Such views are consistent with Lambert et al.'s (1995) perception of leadership as a shared process among educators, leaders and teachers, where the leader is seen as 'leader among leaders', a facilitator. A recent study by Foley (2016) examined shared pedagogical leadership

impact on physical activity in ECE, which is argued to be different than distributed leadership where shared leadership is perceived as giving the space for team members to practice their personal leadership abilities. Elsewhere, it is also argued that, "*distributed leadership is not the same as shared leadership; its distribution, diffusion and dispersal are not 'managed' by a leader who 'decides' to share leadership: that is delegation*" (Rodd, 2013: 48). This is consistent with perceptions of pedagogical leadership where capacity building is considered.

The Foley (2016) study concluded that shared goals and family participation in decision making facilitated by pedagogical leaders has maximized results. The findings of this research has also concurred that "*shared leadership forms are the most beneficial for the ECE sector*", as well as asserted that "*having one leader to make the final decision was sometimes necessary*" (Foley, 2016: iv).

It is worth mentioning that shared leadership differs from distributive leadership and both are different from pedagogical leadership. Modelling leadership is not a concept in the current research. This research, however, challenges the notion of leadership models by presenting a new perspective of pedagogical leadership that is situational and context based.

Sergiovanni (1998) discussed the roles and responsibility of the pedagogical leaders these include purposing, maintaining harmony, institutionalizing values, motivating, modelling, problem solving, managing, explaining and supervision.

A pedagogical leader facilitates the process of teachers' pedagogical leadership, since they are the closest to children and guide them academically, spiritually and socially. A pedagogical leader also ensures that children's needs are met and has the ability to mobilize people and community to face their problems and make progress in solving them (Sergiovanni, 1998).

Rather than focusing on the whole school community, Sergiovanni (1998), focused on the concept of capital in which pedagogical leadership, from his perspective, develops where "*schools become caring, focused and inquiring communities within which teachers work together as members of communities of practic*e" (p.38). In addition to practitioners' collaborative work to build a learning community,

> *Pedagogic leadership takes into account the "Why?", "How?", and "When?" of learning, not just the "How?" Pedagogic leadership bridges the artificial divide, identified by Ellett and Teddlie (2003), between school and teacher effectiveness studies. Pedagogic leadership is based on dialogue, not monologue and the learners are essential participants in the discussion. Evans (1999, p. 11) made the point that principals who are not guided by pedagogic choice "... resort to a thoroughly bureaucratized way of relating to teachers" and as a result teaching becomes an occupation defined by expectations*

(MacNeill et al., 2005: 5).

June O'Sullivan, the CEO of the London Early Years Foundation (LEYF), perceived a pedagogical leader from her practical point of view as,

> *Someone who understands how children learn and develop and makes this happen. Taking account of every element of the service from home to school including significant relationships at home, at school and within the wider community*
> (O'Sullivan, 2015: 75).

June O'Sullivan was also inspired by Paulo Freire's (1921-1997) perception of adults as role models, shaping children's learning and development, which *"raises the level of responsibility for the leader to lead a positive, effective service that increases advantage"* (O'Sullivan, 2015: 77). Freire also sees teachers as learners as much as children, since children come to school with a set of knowledge and skills. For a leader, the learning process is continuous, and this humility is said to be what distinguishes an ECE leader from any other leader.

Coughlin and Baird (2013) define pedagogical leadership only from the perspective of teaching and learning processes. For example, pedagogical leadership is seen as "*leading or guiding the study of the teaching and learning process*". Another thought addresses elements of the 21st century educational environment, where the ECE leader's role is to support children and their families to prepare for a rapidly changing world, given that

> *the new generation builds upon the knowledge of the past. I believe that this must be one of our pedagogical principals which sets the pathway for us to develop an approach where we use all that we currently know combined with children's responses and ideas to create an attitude of thinking, questioning, evaluating, experimenting and testing, so that we are constantly ready to listening for the subtle and significant changes that continually take place in this unpredictable world*
> *(O'Sullivan, 2015: 77).*

For these reasons, Male and Palaiologou (2013) offer another approach to viewing both pedagogy and pedagogical leadership in quote:

> *On the one hand, pedagogy needs to be understood beyond the simplistic position of the process of teaching and learning, and on the other hand, pedagogical leadership should strive not to follow models of effectiveness, but to seek links between educational outcomes and the set of social realities that these outcomes need to be measured*
> (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 15).

Thus, in conclusion, they present "*a construct of pedagogical leadership as a triangular social praxis shaped by theory, practice and the social axes relevant to the educational setting*" (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 2).

They defined pedagogical praxis as "*a set of actions imbued with theoretical substance and supported by a system that we claim as the ecology of the community of education settings"*. They also disputed "*assertions that relate pedagogical leadership with the dual relationship of teaching*" considering it "*too simplistic in the context of the 21st century*" (p.2). Hence, the phrase '*leading praxis*' as opposed to '*leadership praxis*' is appropriate, to stress the dynamic interplay of practices as social phenomena which both shape and are shaped by the broader discursive, material and social arrangements which prefigure them.

More recently, to explore pedagogical leadership in action, Male and Palaiologou (2016) investigated two case-studies of head teachers in schools in England, recognised as excellent practitioners, who had led their schools from a failing position to being judged as 'outstanding' and had successfully sustained and extended this status. They arrived at a number of leadership categories and activities which contributed to their success. These are: establishing a success culture, managing external expectations, selection and induction of staff, managing a robust supportive environment, sustaining effective internal relationships and head teacher leadership behavior.

Despite this research on pedagogical leadership in relation to teaching and learning, it did not address the social context, community involvement and other leadership related aspects. More comprehensive perspective of pedagogical leadership, however, has currently emerged. Such a wider complex pedagogical leadership perspective is precisely what this research intends to investigate.

A leader's ability to communicate and interact with children, parents, staff and the local community is significant. It was argued that in order to guide pedagogical, teaching and learning related, practice, leaders need the responsibility. In the discussion of improving the communication within ECE setting, research was carried by Farley et al. (2016) suggested that, the entire team contributes to communication and "no one expert" voice or any sense of protected knowledge. There is truly distributed leadership and not merely delegation.

To summarise the theoretical discussion of pedagogical leadership, it is important to clarify the way pedagogical leadership is defined in general when applied to any educational setting and to the ECE-specific context as well as how it is viewed differently based on other leadership constructs. Given the importance of the context in shaping pedagogy and leadership, pedagogical leadership in education considers the dynamically and rapidly changing 21st century context by enhancing the capacity of learners and practitioners to be constantly ready

to respond to these changes in an unpredictable world. Indicative examples include interactions among the community to generate knowledge, to develop synergistic professional learning communities and to facilitate innovative and reflective praxis.

In an ECE context, due to the importance of the participation of and interactions with families to enhance children's learning and development, pedagogical leadership in ECE involves developing effective communication and synergy among the community to ensure appropriate developmental experiences for children. Pedagogical leaders in ECE consider on-going professional development for themselves and the staff to ensure a clear and deep understanding of children's learning and development and to critically reflect on practices. Figure 3 summarises the characteristics, roles and responsibilities of the ECE pedagogical leader.

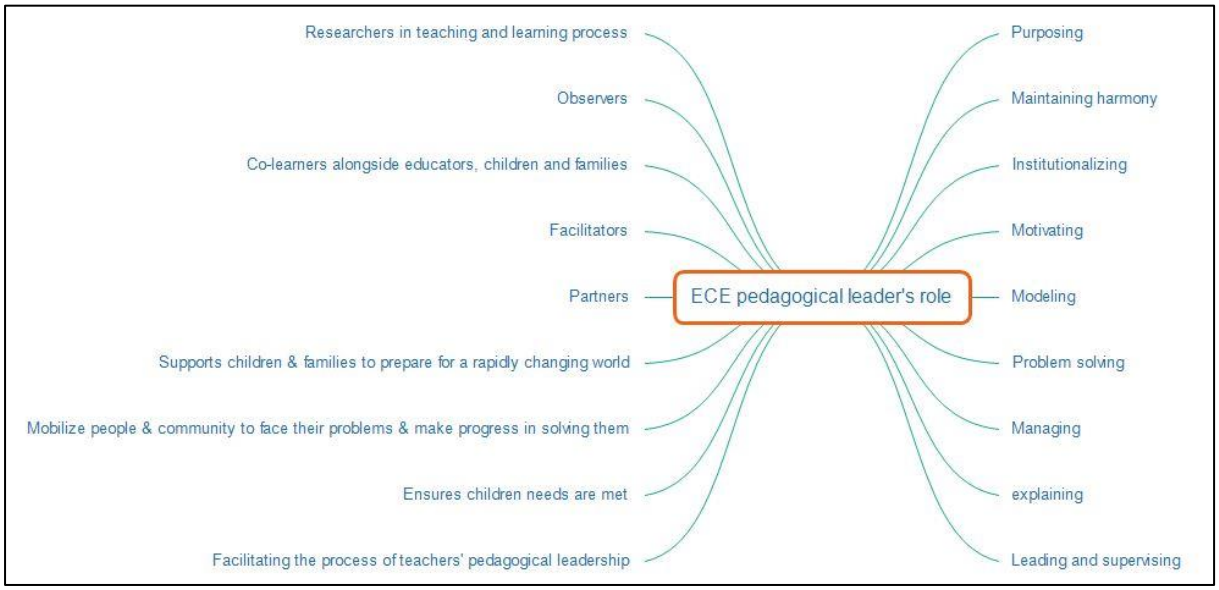


Figure 3: ECE pedagogical leaders' roles.
Sammurised from (Sergiovanni, 1998; Coughlin and Baird, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2015).

These roles and responsibilities that meet the requirements of the ECE-specific context demonstrate the important role of pedagogical leadership in this context. Moreover, because no one theory fits all people or situations, it is vital to shape pedagogical leadership based on the context in which it operates rather than to follow a specific leadership model.

The way the concept of pedagogical leadership in this research differs from other leadership models is that it is perceived as a leadership construct rather than a leadership model. Leadership is shaped by the context in which it operates. For instance, if the ECE provision in a specific context promotes a shared vision, values and community participation, pedagogical leaders in this context would be more likely to create a shared vision and professional learning

communities that encourage knowledge creation and mutual efforts to achieve their common goals. Thus, decisions are made based on the situations that the leader experiences.

To understand the contexts that may shape pedagogical leadership, the following section discusses the factors that influence leadership followed by the challenges faced by leaders.

2.4.2 Factors which influence leadership:

Here, the term 'factor' refers to the aspects or elements that could influence how pedagogical leadership is shaped. Several factors identified appear to influence and shape leadership and thus the learning environment. Among these factors are values, beliefs, culture, religion, media, leader characteristics and economy.

2.4.2.1 Beliefs and values

Values are perceived as 'the ideas, beliefs, and modes of actions that people find worthwhile or desirable' (Northouse, 2018: 285). They are also described as follows:

The core principles that guide an institutional mission are frequently the direct results of one key individual and his or her beliefs and values. In many instances these values are passed on for centuries without being questioned (Kezar et al., 2006: 53).

This key individual is most likely to be the leader of the organisation. Not only do his or her beliefs and values influence followers, but the values of the organisation they lead are also influential. For example, Schien (1992) discussed the central role that leaders play in determining their organisation's philosophies, constitution and actions. In other words, the leaders' values influence the organisational culture as well as the individuals in educational organisations. According to Kezar et al. (2006: 52), 'leaders' values play a significant and precise role in the construction of organisational culture'. According to Curry (1992), leaders' beliefs play a key role in either hindering or facilitating the transformation of their organisations. Therefore, it is important that leaders are clear regarding their own values to frame and to shape the value systems in their organisations. As stated,

awareness that each individual holds a particular leadership belief should lead to an acknowledgement and exploration of multiple perspectives of leadership, fostering communication and moving beyond groupthink (Kezar et al., 2006: 129).

For the current research, beliefs are viewed as an important aspect that guides leadership as well as leaders' thoughts and actions.

2.4.2.2 Culture:

Culture was defined by Walker and Dimmock (2002: 16) as '*the endorsing sets of beliefs, values, and ideologies, underpinning structures, process, and practices that distinguishes one group from another*'. Furthermore, they categorised the culture influencing school leadership into organisational culture (at the school level) and societal culture (at the national level) (Walker and Dimmock, 2002). They distinguished between the two cultures by stating that organisational cultures might be '*deliberately managed and changed, whereas societal or national cultures are more enduring and change only gradually over long time periods, if at all*' (Dimmock, 2000: 45).

Many researchers have argued that societal culture is one of the major factors that influence school leaders and shape their practices. Furthermore, it is claimed that '*leadership is subjected to the cultural traditions and values of the society, which it is exercised*' (Yakavets, 2016: 687). Other researchers believe that '*educational policies and practices are deeply embedded in the culture and traditions of the countries in which they are implemented*' (Bridges et al., 2014: 272).

A good example of the societal cultural impact on schools and school heads was presented by Yakavets (2016) in his study of Kazakhstani schools:

> *Overall, schools and school principals are influenced by an evolving mixture of the following: traditional Kazakh cultural values (e.g. harmony, collectivism, loyalty to one's superior); a paternalistic culture (e.g. a traditional form of 'family' relations used as a model for the whole of society; respect for the elderly); and the Soviet legacy (e.g. a top-down information flow, order and obedience, uncertainty avoidance and the 'wish for order') (Yakavets, 2016: 696).*

School leaders have an influence on the organisational culture, and it is evident in the literature that school leaders can shape school culture, help maintain its shared purpose and positive values and inculcate this culture among school members (Petrson and Deal, 1998; Turan and Bektas, 2013; Lucas and Valentine, 2002; Gurr and Drysdale, 2005).

Furthermore, Petrson and Deal (1998) believed that school leaders play vital roles in building a 'positive culture' and eliminating a 'toxic culture' in schools. Positive cultures are '*places with a shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern, and a shared commitment to helping students learn. Some examples might illuminate the*

possibilities'; toxic cultures occur '*where staff are extremely fragmented, where the purpose of serving students has been lost to the goal of serving the adults, where negative values and hopelessness reign*' (Petrson and Deal, 1998: 28).

2.4.2.3 Religion:

Religion is an important factor that might influence leadership. It is an important factor to study not only because the constitution in Saudi Arabia is based on Islamic law (Bowen, 2015) but also because religion was found to have a significant influence on leadership provisions and actions in the Western culture as well. For example, the impact of religion on leadership has been discussed in literature, and many researchers concluded that faith has a powerful impact on the practices of leaders (Strachan et al., 2009; Striepe et al., 2014).

Striepe et al. (2014) discussed the factors that shape leadership in faith-based schools and showed that school leaders are affected by their prophets as role models and guides. Muslim leaders' practices were affected by the prophet Muhammad PBUH, and Christians were affected by Jesus. Both types of school leaders believed that they should serve others before themselves, which is encouraged by religion (the concept of helping others). For instance, the prophet Muhammad PBUH stated that '*whosoever relieves from a believer some grief pertaining to this world, Allah will relieve from him some grief pertaining to the Hereafter. Whosoever alleviates the difficulties of a needy person who cannot pay his debt, Allah will alleviate his difficulties in both this world and the Hereafter*' (Badi, 2002).

Muslims view the prophet Muhammad PBUH as the perfected human (Kriger and Seng, 2005), and the morals of the prophet are praised in the Holy Book of Quran: '*And most surely you conform (yourself) to sublime morality*' (The Quran, 68:4). Therefore, his leadership provisions are influential among Muslims. Nevertheless, the faith of the Saudi leaders impacts them negatively in the sense of following the commands of top management without question, as though it is an obligation. Because the prophet Muhammad PBUH is the role model for most Muslims, he encouraged the democratic approach to leadership, which is evident in Islam as well as in this verse: '*And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them*' (The Quran, 42:38). Such evidence illustrates the confusion that some leaders may have in terms of differentiating between religious values (allowing for consultation and negotiation) and the cultural perspectives related to following the hierarchal leadership role and power.

Moreover, Kriger and Seng (2005) argued that many of the values that were reviewed in the literature regarding the characteristics of spirituality in the workplace, such as developing a community, a concern for social justice within an organisation and its vision and the equality of voices (Conger, 1994; Fry, 2005; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Gozdz and Frager, 2003; Hicks, 2003; Mitroff, 2002; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Moxley, 2000; Pfeffer, 2003), are actually some of the concepts of Islam. Other workplace values are also discussed in Islamic literature, such as "*the values of service, surrendering self, truth, charity, humility, forgiveness, compassion, thankfulness, love, courage, faith, kindness, patience, and hope"* (Kriger and Seng, 2005: 776).

In fact, most Islamic characteristics of a 'good' human being (whether it is taken from the prophet Muhammad or from the Quran) are reviewed in the pedagogical literature as part of the effective early childhood leader characteristics, such as compassion, honesty, fairness, courage, responsibility and competency (Rodd, 2013; Kouzes and Posner, 2007). The following list illustrates some influential Islamic insights into each characteristic:

following list illustrates some influential Islamic insights into each characteristic:

1. Compassion:

Allah says in the Quran that '*grievous to him is what you suffer, anxious for you, compassionate is he, merciful to the believers*' (10:128).

2. Honesty:

The Prophet PBUH said:

> *Truthfulness leads to righteousness and righteousness leads to Paradise. A man will keep speaking the truth and striving to speak the truth until he will be recorded with Allah as a siddeeq (speaker of the truth). Lying leads to wickedness and wickedness leads to Hell fire. A man will keep telling lies and striving to tell lies until he is recorded with Allah as a liar (Sahih Bukhari 6094, Imam Muslim 2607).*

3. Fairness:

Allah says in the Quran (4: 135):

> *O you who believe, be persistently standing firm in justice as witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. Follow not your desires, lest you not be just. If you distort your testimony or refuse to give it, then Allah is aware of what you do*

4. Responsibility:

As the prophet PBUH stated:

> *Every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. The leader of the people is a guardian and is responsible for his subjects: a man is the guardian of his family and is responsible for his subjects, a woman is the guardian of her husband's home and of his children and is responsible for them, and the slave of a man is a guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it. Surely, every one of you is a shepherd and responsible for his flock*
> *(Sahih Bukhari, 232:42).*

5. Competency:

The prophet PBUH said that *"whoever delegates a position to someone whereas he sees someone else as more competent (for the position), verily he has cheated Allah and His Apostle and all the Muslims*".

Based on these excerpts, it could be argued that the effect of Islam on early education leaders is positive; however, it is important to note that the religion factor might have a negative influence in cases of extremism. As was evident in Yaghi's study (2008), an 'over-religiosity' of an organisation's leaders can hamper the process of decision making and can restrict the ability to change values or managerial strategies as well as the capacity for self-development and '*gaining new skills'* (Yeghi, 2008: 37).

However, in Islam, it is recommended to avoid extremism, as is evident by the Prophet Muhammad's statement:

> *Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, the afternoons, and during the last hours of the night*
> *(Fath-ul-Bari, 102, Vol 1).*

2.4.2.4 Characteristics:

A characteristic is defined as a 'typical or noticeable quality of someone or something' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017). The literature lists some leadership characteristics: valuing human resources, vision, communicating and listening, emphasising student-centred schools, being proactive and taking risks (Sylvia, 1992).

Rodd (2013) argued that the characteristics of leaders help build trust, create relationships, enhance follower commitment and achieve goals. Some effective early childhood leaders' characteristics are mentioned in the literature, including passion, enthusiasm, compassion,

flexibility in work, strong work ethic, dedication, honesty, enthusiasm, good learner, respectfulness, fairness, inspirational, knowledgeable, forward-thinking, decision maker and problem solver, understanding, responsible, reliable and competent (Rodd, 2013; Kouzes and Posner, 2007). Moreover, Semann and Waniganayake (2010) claimed that many difficult challenges faced by early childhood leaders can only be achieved through courage, which is associated with risk taking, goal attainment and advocacy.

The Saudi Organisational Guide for Educational Supervision Handbook (2016) identified the following characteristics of early childhood education leaders:

1. Work ethic
2. Being healthy
3. Leadership
4. Being a good role model
5. Ability to adapt to workloads and demands
6. Team work spirit
7. Taking initiative
8. Respectfulness and appreciation
9. Emotional balance
10. Self-confidence, humbleness and flexibility
11. Objectivity

2.4.2.5 Media:

Media is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a means of communication, such as television, radio and newspaper media. These are considered traditional media platforms, whereas new media utilises technology for communication. The primary focus is social media because it is currently the most widely used media. The term 'social media' refers to '*websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone*' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017).

Social media use is rapidly increasing. In fact, the vast majority of the Saudi population uses social media. According to the Saudi Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (2016), the number of social media users in Saudi Arabia has reached 18.3 million users, which accounts for 58% of the Saudi Arabian population. In terms of application use, Facebook and Twitter are ranked first in the list of the extensive number of social media users in Saudi Arabia, with 11 million users and nine million users, respectively. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has the

second highest worldwide use of Snapchat, and YouTube has seven million Saudi viewers at a rate of 105,900 hours per day.

For educators, it has been shown by Ferriter (2011) that 61% of teachers, school leaders and librarians actively use at least one social media platform, though their purposes differ. For instance, many use the platforms for professional development, such as attending webinars, watching YouTube videos, listening to podcasts or contributing to blogs (Ferriter, 2011).

Social media can help school leaders in several ways, such as through communication and public relations with stakeholders (Hoyle et al., 1998), earning the trust of their school communities, receiving feedback from stakeholders and benefitting from a lively exchange of ideas with the off-site and extended community (Kellough and Hill, 2014; Larkin, 2015). Furthermore, social media can support school leaders in creating a positive school culture and in advancing their agendas (Dembo, 2015). It can help in attaining administrator professional development and in participating in professional learning networks both internationally and nationally (Cox and McLeod, 2014; Sheninger, 2014). Lastly, through social networks, school leaders can '*communicate; collaborate; acquire resources; elicit feedback; get support; and share ideas, data, strategies, and information*' with other principals (Sheninger, 2014: 48).

2.4.2.6 Personality:

Personality is another factor proven to impact leadership. The five-factor personality model, or 'the big five' traits, were studied frequently in the literature to understand the link between personality traits and leadership (Judge and Bono, 2000; Barrick and Mount, 1991; Derue et al., 2011; Phaneuf et al., 2016). The five big traits are '*broad personality constructs that are manifested in more specific traits*', according to Judge and Bono (2000: 751-752), they are:

1- Extraversion: '*Represents the tendency to be outgoing, assertive, active, and excitement seeking*'

2- Conscientiousness: '*is indicated by two major facets: achievement and dependability*'

According to Barrick and Mount (1991), this is the trait most correlated with job performance. Derue et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis supports this claim, as they concluded that the most important traits for leader effectiveness are extraversion and then conscientiousness, and both are positively related to effectiveness.

3- Agreeableness: '*consists of tendencies to be kind, gentle, trusting and trustworthy, and warm*'

4- Openness to experiences (sometimes referred to as intellectance): '*represents the tendency to be creative, imaginative, perceptive, and thoughtful*'

The meta-analysis of Derue et al. (2011) showed that extraversion, agreeableness and openness to experience were positively related to leadership effectiveness.

5- Neuroticism: '*tendency to be anxious, fearful, depressed, and moody*'

This is the only factor that was considered by Judge and Bono (2000) to have a negative correlation with transformational leadership.

2.4.2.7 Stress:

Early childhood leaders are exposed to a variety of stressors daily, such as dealing with teachers and families and their demands and objections, making important decisions, managing important responsibilities and working with young children, which is '*physically, emotionally, and intellectually demanding*' (Rodd, 2013: 92). Mulford (2013) discussed the negative impact of job-related stress (from the pressure of long hours, budget cuts, overcrowding and shortage of qualified teachers) on school leadership and identified it as a reason for the declining interest in school leadership. According to a study by Grady et al. (1994), job-related stress and pressure are major causes of school principals' early retirement. Furthermore, it has been argued that some people tend to be more stressed than others and that some people have a better coping ability for stress that others (Vollrath, 2001).

In contrast, Rodd (2013) contended that stress is not considered good or bad; it depends on how someone perceives it and experiences it and on the person's ability to cope and level of resilience: '*Human beings need a certain amount of stress to get going each day. When perceived as a challenge, stress is a good motivator and activator. Stress is part of modern life and work, and as such it is unrealistic to expect that stress can be eliminated*' (Rodd, 2013: 93). Emotional intelligence is one approach to dealing with stress:

> *Emotionally intelligent early childhood educators understand the links between thoughts, feelings and reactions. They appreciate that usually there are choices regarding how one perceives a situation, and that different consequences arise from different choices. They use such insights in deciding how best to respond. Consequently, they see that stress can be managed by either changing the situation or changing themselves*
> *(Rodd, 2013: 93).*

2.4.2.8 School Type (Public vs Private):

According to Ghamrawi (2015), public education systems in the Arab region are usually hierarchical with a bureaucratic, top-down approach to school management and administration.

Hence, leadership participation is restricted '*with the school leaders focused on efficiency and control*', and they feel pressured and restrained by regulations and circulars and lack both the training needed and the authority to carry out their responsibilities fully.

The Ministry of Education generally maintains tight control over the daily operations of schools, which makes it difficult for school leaders to create autonomous schools in which leadership and authority are distributed across the school community. Private schools, on the other hand, tend to have more democratic leadership forms, such as participative, delegative and non-directive approaches. This is more visible in the international schools in Jordan, the GCC countries and Lebanon.

Because pedagogy is related to the creation of the learning environment, Male and Palaiologou (2013) argued that it is central to the interaction of the learning community (learners, teachers, families and the local community) for educational organisations. These interactions are shaped by internal and external pedagogical axes. Male and Palaiologou (2013: 7) identified these as follows:

- *Internal axes (values, beliefs, culture, religion, customs and local economy); and*
- *External axes (societal values, global economy, mass media, social networking, information communication technologies, national curriculum, the 'academic press' of student test scores).*
  (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 7).

Figure 4 below summarises these pedagogical axes.

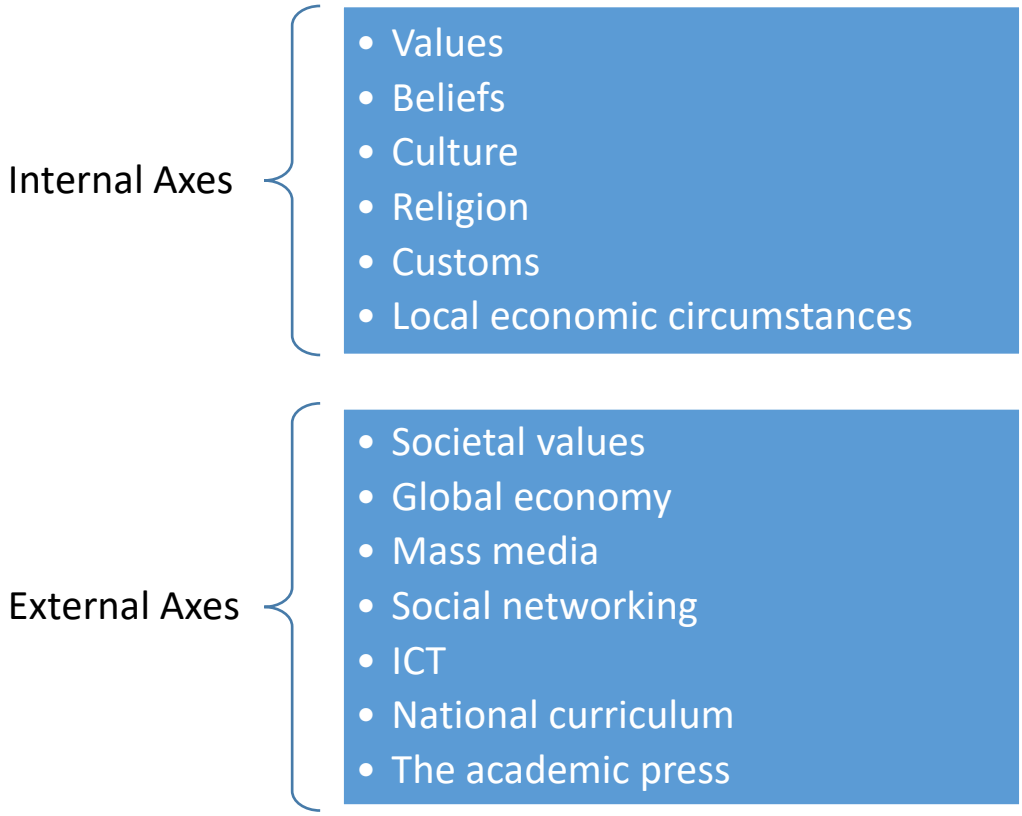


Figure 4: Pedagogical Axes (summarised from Male & Palaiologou, 2013)

2.4.3 Challenges facing pedagogical leaders

This section discusses the challenges and obstacles pedagogical leaders of early childhood education encounter. National and international challenges, which face women leaders generally, and ECE-specific challenges are identified. It is important to note that discussing the challenges of early child education leaders in their environment is not meant to discredit their abilities to lead or to underestimate their role but rather to identify these challenges to find ways to overcome them in future research. Examples in the case of Saudi Arabia might include adapting to change, such as due to the development of the MoE's current educational reform strategies, decentralisation, allowing leaders' autonomy for decision making and the increased number of female leaders in a male-dominated society. It is important to mention that because the focus of this study is ECE leadership in which all leaders are female, part of the discussion focuses on the challenges faced by female leaders in various contexts.

AL-Lamki (1999) addressed some of the obstacles facing female managers in an Omani, Middle East, context. She identified a wide array of challenges,

> *Limited opportunities to higher education, discriminatory appointment and promotion practices, traditional attitudes of male bosses towards working women,*

> *male dominated sectors, male resistance to women in management, absence of policies and legislation to ensure participation of women in management positions, a lack of professional networking, a lack of female role models, a lack of professional management development programs, a lack of a sufficient number of quality day care centers, dual responsibilities of traditional and professional roles, balancing traditional and professional roles and family obligations as a wife and a mother for childbearing and child rearing*
> *(AL-Lamki, 1999 cited in Al-Ahmadi, 2011: 151).*

The obstacles faced by female leaders identified in Western cross-cultural studies demonstrate similar trends to challenges faced by female leaders worldwide. For instance, Stead and Elliott (2009) mentioned lack of training, lack of role models and stereotyping. In a study of women's management in top positions in different Arab Gulf nations (Bahrain, Oman and UAE), Wilkinson (1996) found that challenges faced by female managers were discrimination at the workplace, cultural taboos, lack of trust in them, and as a result, lack of confidence.

In line with Wilkinson's (1996) perception that cultural taboos are one of the challenges facing female leadership, Stead and Elliott (2009) argued that some traditional beliefs within Arab communities prevent women from participating in leadership. Examples include beliefs associated with prohibiting women's career advancement or associating leadership abilities with men only rather than with both genders. Moreover, negative perceptions of female leadership were mentioned as another challenge. According to Al-Ahmadi (2011: 152):

> *Culture reflected in the set of beliefs and practices associated with the local community, as well as in the work place, can adversely reflect on the effectiveness of women leaders and their ability to exercise a positive leadership role*
> *(Al-Ahmadi, 2011: 152).*

Research focusing on the Saudi context has also identified some of the challenges that female leaders in government sectors face. According to Al-Ahmadi (2011), the challenge ranked as the most influential was the structural challenge. These challenges are associated with the lack of authority and participation in forming strategies and the centralisation of male decision making. Such challenges could be due to the recent access of Saudi females to top leadership positions. Thus, there is still a concern regarding the effectiveness of their leadership capacities (Al-Halawani, 2002).

Due to centralisation and the lack of female participation in decision making, Saudi female leaders lack empowerment, which is another challenging factor (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). The inability to influence the process of decision making and to achieve the goals of their organisations is a significant obstacle for effective female leadership. This was confirmed by

Almenkash et al. (2007), who asserted that inadequate preparation and a lack of opportunities for learning and enhancing female leaders' professional experiences are challenging factors for female leaders. It has been argued that empowerment enhances a sense of physical and moral affiliation and belonging to the organisation and thus positively influences individuals' psyches and induces a sense of importance to the organisation as well as appreciation (Effendi, 2003). Nevertheless, Metcalfe (2008) stated that the lack of empowerment methods and tools can explain why women leaders lack empowerment. The absence of leadership development strategies and the lack of role models, mentoring and guidance are examples of these obstacles (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Cultural challenges, including the traditional conservative mentality, also constrain female leaders from participating effectively in the process of decision making. Nevertheless, contrary to the common argument, cultural challenges are considered one of the least influential challenges faced by women leaders in Saudi, according to Al-Ahmadi (2011),

> *Contrary to the prevailing perspective, cultural challenges are less important compared to the other challenges faced by women leaders. This is an indication of changing perception of the role of women in society and a reflection of the policy of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah who calls for the integration of women in decision-making positions…*
>
> *… The current study confirms that there are signs of change in the general view of women in Saudi society, and thus, cultural aspects despite their importance are not the most serious impediment to women leaders*
> *(Al-Ahmadi, 2011: 162).*

There are also personal challenges, which include social pressure, family responsibilities and personal capacity. The difficulty of balancing family and professional responsibilities, psychological pressure, physical and health factors, fear of leadership responsibility and lack of self-confidence can be barriers for female leaders to fully and effectively practise their leadership roles (Al-Halawani, 2002; Al-Ahmadi, 2011). In a previous study on Saudi women in leadership positions, respondents ranked personal traits such as self-confidence, energy and independence as the highest, while taking risks, initiative or relationships were ranked lowest (Alajmi, 2001).

Nevertheless, remarkable efforts have been made by the Saudi government during the past few years to support female leaders to take leadership positions. In terms of school head teachers, the government has not only supported school head teacher's professional development by introducing more training but has also clarified their roles and responsibilities

and provided them with more autonomy, such as by beginning with changing the name of this position to 'leader' rather than 'head teacher' of the school (MoE, 2017b).

Previous studies have explored challenges that preschool leaders face. Among these challenges is an indicative example of an investigation of women and leadership in Western early childhood settings (Wise, 2011b). The research showed that female leaders in early childhood settings feel that their work is undervalued as a result of undervaluing the field of early childhood in general. In addition, it was found that despite their concerns and efforts to establish and maintain relationships and build the community, they '*experience loneliness, isolation, and emotional strain*' (Wise, 2011: vi).

Such feelings could be the result of society's poor perception of the early childhood profession, and consequently, these leaders lack confidence; however, there is also a lack of communication with decision makers, practitioners and researchers in the field. In support of this argument, Waniganayake and Hujala (2001) presented a combination of findings from two different contexts, Australian and Finland, and identified the issues confronting early childhood professionals. The leadership challenges identified are summarised in Table 2.

Australia	Finland
• Low professional status and poor public image • Sectional interests-lack of unity within the profession • Pedagogical concerns over program quality • Training reform – debates over core knowledge • Philosophical concerns – place of children and women in society • Government reforms and impact of funding cuts • Linking research and policy reform	• Low professional status • Decision-making about limited resources • Concerns about day-care centre staff wellbeing • Establishing connections between policy, politics and practice • Reconciliation of comprehensive and integrated leadership with disconnected power and responsibilities

Table 2: main challenges face early childhod perofessionals in austrailia and Fineland
Adapted from (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2005: 37).

Based on this cross-cultural perspective, along with accommodating the rapid social and

economic changes and developing adaptive and flexible programmes and services in response to the needs of the children and the community, the ECE field includes various challenges. Leaders and ECE practitioners must therefore adapt to the existing changes of the 21st century by seeking effective strategies and understanding the policy making process as well as how to influence its decisions (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2005). It was also found that '*quality assurance, conflict management and mediation, partnership with families and communities, advocacy for children and families, globalisation and futures*' (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2005: xvi).

In such circumstances, creating an innovative learning environment for children in ECE could be challenging. For example, regarding the development of creative innovative practices, Fourie and Fourie (2016) asserted that the major challenge faced by practitioners in early childhood development centres was the manager's lack of management skills. The headteacher's skills and knowledge when performing leadership or managerial responsibilities and the role of the leader in the success of any organisation are vital, as discussed in this chapter's introduction.

Leaders in early childhood institutions play an important role in parental involvement in their children's learning progress by empowering and supporting their involvement (Davis and Ryder, 2016). It has been assumed that it is the early childhood leaders' and/or the practitioners' responsibility to recognise the challenges that parents face, such as their children's health or behavioural issues, and to discuss the possibilities and make decisions based on medically researching specific cases (Davis and Ryder, 2016); however, communication becomes a challenge in some situations, such as when there is a lack of communication skills (Fourie and Fourie, 2016).

Communication is not only essential to motivating and influencing people to contribute to the mission of an organisation of which parents are also members (Alameen et al., 2015a), but it can also be a solution to parents' issues and can influence learners' learning attitudes. According to Fourie and Fourie (2016: 806), who investigated the obstacles to implementing an innovative practice in a South African early childhood setting, effective and '*continuous communication with parents could be a solution to negative attitudes of parents towards teachers and managers*' and can also influence the '*learners' positive attitude towards school and help parents to develop self-efficacy and self-confidence*'. Some leaders lack communication with parents and ignore their needs (Fourie and Fourie, 2016). When managers

lack communication skills, manager-staff communication becomes another challenge. Other indicative examples highlighted by Fourie and Fourie (2016) are irregular or no communication with practitioners regarding their views and devalued contributions.

Despite the importance of communication at all levels in the preschool context being well-recognised, leaders can face obstacles such as lack of communication with parents as well as between managers and practitioners, limited parental involvement, a lack of internal rules, trained staff and staff development, a lack of funds and resources and lack of leadership qualities. Because communication is an important component of pedagogical leadership when synergistic and productive relationships are developed within the school community to support children's learning (AlAmeen et al., 2015), it could be challenging under these circumstances; however, the leader's role is to maintain communication.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) discussed several major challenges that school principals must overcome, especially during the process of change. The first is the capacity of the leader under pre-reform to achieve new expectations in a context of high accountability. Second, financing the efforts of the reform, such as when reconfiguring the existing budget and the organisational structures, is a challenge. In addition, policies of the previous system's organisational structure and professional norms create obstacles for innovative approaches to professional development.

Leithwood et al. (2004) also highlighted challenges leaders face related to student learning. They argued that one of the major challenges of leaders' professional development is '*the extent to which the principal is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction and assessment practices*'. It could be even more challenging for Saudi preschool leaders to introduce new policies and regulations. Regarding policies and regulations, Leithwood (2001) found that in the United States, a considerable number of educational leaders face an extensive set of governmental policies, which were designed for more accountability in schools.

Financial issues can become challenging to preschool leaders and practitioners. For example, there is sometimes a lack of resources and materials for teaching and learning and for creating a safe environment for children, such as building maintenance (Fourie and Fourie, 2016). Among the challenges that leaders face is identifying the leadership behaviours that would significantly influence school performance and culture as well as student achievements (Oluremi, 2008).

One of the main challenges facing leaders in Saudi Arabia is bureaucracy and the top-down leadership approach. Family expectations and the ministry's requirements are also challenges because some families prefer literacy and numeracy skills for their children, and in contrast, the government's aims and objectives for ECE are play-based learning approaches (AlAmeen et al., 2015).

No previous research has investigated the challenges leaders face in Saudi preschools. Nevertheless, a study carried out by the MoE as a part of the educational reform identified a number of challenges in the educational sector. In the context of Saudi Arabia, a number of challenges were identified as part of the educational reform currently taking place. In the National Transformation Programme 2020, which is a sub-plan of the Saudi Vision 2030, six challenges facing the education sector were identified by the MoE. A set of strategies was also established to gradually overcome these challenges (CEDA, 2016). Details are shown in Appendix 5 in Figure 8 (an Arabic version only).

The first challenges identified were the low-quality curriculum, the dependence on traditional teaching methods and the inaccurate evaluation and testing methods used by the teachers to evaluate students. The government therefore developed the curriculum and the pedagogy approach as well as the evaluation system. Among the government's initiatives to address these challenges was creating an evaluation system to evaluate the gap between the students' actual levels of education and their expected educational levels. The government has also suggested a new teaching strategy in which the student becomes the cornerstone of the educational process. It allows the teachers to identify children's individual needs and to respond to them as well as to support students to reach their highest learning potentials and to improve their skills to solve problems.

The second challenge was the lack of students' personal and critical thinking skills. Two strategic goals were established to overcome this challenge. The first goal was to strengthen students' essential skills by identifying a list of skills that students must develop to succeed in the future and to include them in co-curricular activities. To support students in developing critical skills, the government has also encouraged the involvement of the family in the learning process as well as the family's role in developing children's personal values and national identity. The second strategic goal was to improve the educational system to fulfil the needs of the labour market.

The lack of a creative and innovative environment in education was another challenge for Saudi education. The MoE thus motivated students to participate in international tournaments and competitions, and it began to develop the schools' safety and security systems, to implement electronic learning methods, to reduce the managerial load on faculty members to lower costs and to improve logistics quality, and to establish programmes that train and motivate high school and college students to invest in and to begin start-up companies.

The fourth challenge was the negative bureaucratic image of education as a profession, as part of the Saudi Arabian society undervalues the profession of education. Therefore, the government's strategic goal was to attract and to recruit teachers and to improve training for teachers to be well-qualified. To achieve this goal, three sub-goals were established. The MoE designed a holistic framework for the continuous professional development of teachers and leaders in education, improved the national strategy to boost the level of education as a profession by focusing on the educational environment and the services provided for teachers and promoted a positive perception of the education profession in Saudi Arabia.

The fifth challenge was the lack of education services and educational programmes provided for individual students' needs. Therefore, the government provided suitable education for all students, such as by improving the quality and the number of preschools across Saudi Arabia and establishing the Project of Developing Special Education, which is a cooperation between the MoE and the private sector. The MoE also expanded school transportation services to transport students to schools, established lifelong and sustainable educational opportunities and provided e-learning training in trading and business skills.

The final challenge identified by the MoE was the lack of investments in private institutions and the need for more prosperous educational facilities. The government therefore stimulated private investments in the education sector by attracting private investments to diversify financial resources, encouraging the private sector to invest in primary education (including ECE), developing a new model to transform 2000 public schools into 'independent schools' run by middle-size economic establishments and developing new models for university hospitals managed by the private sector. The government also diversified the funding resources to improve the financial efficiency of the education system by improving the efficiency of the budget and of planning, established the National Transformation Plan Office in the MoE to monitor and to supervise the transformation plan, implemented the suggested operation model and reassigning responsibilities of the MoE offices, improved the databases and statistical

research systems, established the Office of Strategic Administration in the MoE, established the System of Electronic Services, developed medical operating electronic systems in university hospitals and developed evaluation methods for the education sector.

Whether Saudi preschool leaders also face such challenges is yet insufficiently researched in this specific context. Therefore, the aim of this research study was to identify the challenges faced by preschool leaders specifically to contribute to the international dialogue and to identify ways to overcome them. The next section presents the conceptual framework of the research.

2.5 The conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this research has been developed based on several literature studies related to leadership in general, early childhood leadership and pedagogical leadership in particular. These studies provided interrelated thoughts that informed the researcher and shaped concepts while undertaking the research, which focuses on three aspects: pedagogical leadership, factors that influence pedagogical leaders and the challenges that face pedagogical leaders.

Because school leaders subscribe to pedagogy in their educational context, they are considered pedagogical leaders (Sergiovanni, 1998). In this study, the educational context is viewed as dynamic (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) and as a site of emergence (Osberg and Biesta, 2007). The educational context must therefore adapt to the 21st century environment in which knowledge evolution and dramatic technological, economic and political changes take place (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Thus, leadership is drawn from the perspective that it is *not definitive* and is *uncertain* in nature (Giles and Morrison, 2010). Hence, individual leaders' experiences and interpretations and the context in which leadership operates were focuses of this study.

Leadership in early childhood is unlike other educational contexts, and it has unique features. For example, the field is dominated by women worldwide, which could have impact the practices of early childhood leadership and its theory development (Muijs et al., 2004; Rodd, 2013). Pedagogical leadership is the dominant leadership approach in ECE and is compatible with the nature of ECE's environment and needs. In the early childhood environment, a deep understanding of children's learning and development needs are vital along with parental and community involvement to enhance children's developmental progress (Rodd, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2015).

Table 1 summarises the current perspectives of pedagogical leadership, and pedagogical leadership requires a deep understanding of children's learning and development processes (Coughlin and Baird, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2015), ensuring that the practices are appropriate for children (Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011), exercising a combination of pedagogical knowledge and leadership competencies (Cecchin and Johnsen, 2009), recognising the learning opportunities for learners and practitioners, staff professional development, building learners' and practitioners' capacities, developing learning communities (Sergiovanni, 1998; Heikka and Waniganayake, 2011), creating a productive and synergistic relationship among the school and local community to create knowledge and support children's learning (Jappinen and Sarja, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2015; Male and Palaiologou, 2016), perceiving the pedagogical leader as a facilitator, partner, observer, co-learner and researcher in the process of teaching and learning (Coughlin and Baird, 2013) and seeking context-dependent links between the educational outcomes and a set of social realities (Male and Palaiologou, 2016).

Pedagogical leadership in early childhood is influenced by a number of factors that shape and construct the way leadership operates; however, a number of challenges that early childhood leaders face can be barriers to fully exercising leadership opportunities. Among the factors that influence pedagogical leadership are values, beliefs, culture, religion, leader's characteristics, media, leader's personality and stress. The leader's beliefs and values, for example, can not only determine the philosophies of his/her institution but can also either hinder or facilitate the transformation of their institution (Schien, 1992). School culture as well as societal culture were found to be factors that influence and shape leadership; however, the role of the school leader determines and creates the school culture, which can either be positive, where shared ethos and commitments to support learners take place, or toxic, where the goals serve adults rather than learners and there are negative values and fragmented staff (Peterson and Deal, 1998). In terms of societal culture, Yakavets (2017) identified indicative examples of a mixture of cultural values within the same society that shape school leadership. Examples such as harmony, loyalty and collectivism were found in the traditional Kazakhstani culture, while having a specified model for family relations, such as respecting the elderly based on a paternalistic culture, and the top-bottom system of order and obedience were found in the Soviet tradition.

Religion is another important factor that influences leadership (Strachan et al., 2010; Bowen, 2014; Striepe et al., 2014), and religion influences leadership actions and impacts its practices either positively or negatively in several ways. It can have a positive influence not only by

making decisions based on a role model example of successful leadership, such as prophets as role models (Mohammad PBUH for Muslims and Jesus PBUH for Christian) (Striepe et al., 2014), but also by adhering to certain values or leadership qualities. Indicative examples from a moral religious perspective include community building, social justice and equality, the values of service, humility, compassion, honesty, love, courage, kindness, thankfulness, hope and patience (Kriger and Seng, 2005). Religion can also have a negative impact on leadership practices in cases of extremism. Over-religiosity, or extremism, was highlighted by Yaghi (2008) as an indicative example that religion can restrict the process of decision making and managerial strategies as well as the ability to change values and to engage in self-development; however, Islam encourages and calls for tolerance and peace in all aspects of life and also instructs followers to avoid extremism.

Another major factor found to influence leadership is a leader's characteristics. A number of influential characteristics were discussed by Mendez-Morse (1992), Kouzes and Posner (2017) and Rodd (2013), which include building trust and relationships among the school community and enhancing practitioners' commitments to their job and to achieving their goals. Early childhood leader characteristics also include a clear vision, listening and communication skills, being proactive, being a risk taker, compassion, passion, enthusiasm, problem-solving skills, being knowledgeable, being understanding, flexibility, reliability, responsibility, being a competent decision maker, being a forward-thinker, inspiring others, having a strong work ethic, being a good learner, honesty, respectfulness and fairness. In addition, being a role model, team spirit builder, initiative taker and emotionally balanced and self-confident leader and displaying leadership skills and a strong work ethic are characteristics specifically identified by the Saudi MoE for ECE leaders. The personality of the leader also influences leadership and its effective practices, based on traits such as extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experiences (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Derue et al., 2011; Dono and Judge, 2004).

Because social media has been extensively used both locally and internationally, its influence on leadership has been investigated. Not only does it help leaders communicate with families, the community and stakeholders and provide a lively exchange of ideas and feedback, but it also enhances their professional development through participating professionally in blogs and online discussions nationally and internationally (Hoyle et al., 1998; Kellough and Hill, 2014; Cox and McLeod, 2014; Sheninger, 2014; Larkin, 2015). Social media also helps

leaders enhance the positive culture of the school (Dembo, 2015), collaborate, receive support and share strategies, thoughts and experiences with other school leaders (Sheninger, 2014).

Because being a leader in an early childhood setting has a variety of stressors, such as working with children, which demands emotional, physical and intellectual efforts, decision making and dealing with staff and families' demands and requirements (Rodd, 2013), stress was found to be a factor that influences leadership. Interest in leading a school has declined, and early retirement takes place as a result of stress, such as job-related pressures (Grady et al., 1994), budget cuts and a shortage or overloading of staff (Mulford, 2013).

Nevertheless, a leader's competence and capabilities allow the leader to manage such stress. For example, according to Semann and Waniganayake (2010), having courage as a leadership characteristic helps ECE leaders face and address stressful issues. Vollrath (2001) linked the personality of the leader with managing and coping with stress. In support of this argument, Rodd (2013) stated that stress is a factor that is related to the early years individual leaders' perceptions of each situation, experience, ability and resilience. Therefore, emotional intelligence is argued to be effective in dealing with stress. According to Rodd (2013) and O'Sullivan (2015), emotionally intelligent educators understand their thoughts, feelings and reactions as well as the consequences of each choice they make. Rodd (2013: 93) stated that "*consequently, they see that stress can be managed by either changing the situation or changing themselves*'.

There also appears to be an influence of the school type on leadership, whether it is public school, which utilises hierarchical and bureaucratic leadership approaches, or a private school, where more democratic approaches are adopted (Ghamrwi, 2015). Another perspective of the factors that influence leadership is provided by Male and Palaiologou (2016), who discussed a '*set of social pedagogical axes*', identified as internal and external axes, which were found to influence and to shape pedagogical leadership.

As the aim of this study was to investigate the concept of pedagogical leadership within the Saudi context, the theoretical framework was based on viewing leadership as a praxis, '*in particular [a] pedagogical praxis*', shaped by the context in which leadership operates and is viewed as '*a set of actions imbued with theoretical substance and supported by a system that we claim as the ecology of the community of education settings*' (Male and Palaiologou, 2013: 7).

One aspect investigated was whether the factors identified in the literature or any other factors influence the pedagogical leadership of ECE in Saudi Arabia. Another aim was to identify the challenges the leaders in the Saudi context face and to compare them with those provided in the literature. The purpose of using these theoretical perspectives as a framework for this study is to offer a holistic approach to pedagogical leadership as well as to consider the ecology of the community. This means that leadership is context-dependant, as it is based on the community's beliefs and values. Therefore, despite using a Western perspective in a different context, this approach to pedagogical leadership does not impose Western beliefs and values but rather is open to contextual influences. Moreover, compared to other educational environments, ECE requires more community involvement, particularly parents' interactions, to foster children's learning and development (Gordon and Browne, 2014). Pedagogical leadership thus requires educators to understand and to interact with the ecology of the community, where the community's participation, including that of parents, is encouraged. Thus, pedagogical leadership is viewed as a praxis according to Male and Palaiologou (2013), which is considered the theoretical framework for this research.

2.6 Rationale of the research:

The rationale for choosing pedagogical leadership in particular above all other leadership approaches is that pedagogical leadership research in the ECE context in general is still limited, relatively unexamined and ambiguous, particularly in the Saudi context. Moreover, pedagogical leadership is most closely related to ECE because it focuses on the centrality of pedagogy and the ecology of the community to foster children's learning and development. The need for an investigation to be carried out on early childhood leadership in Saudi Arabia has been demonstrated. Limited research has been carried out to investigate leadership in Saudi preschools, particularly pedagogical leadership in early childhood settings. This encouraged the researcher to examine and explore the current situation.

The Saudi context was selected due to its peculiarity. The education system, for example, has traditionally been influenced by Islam, Arab views on gender roles, authority and government centralisation (Alameen et al., 2015). Also, this context is unique because there is a female-only early childhood sector and a gender-segregated community in an educational context, and early childhood is the only level of education that is not gender-segregated.

Despite the centralisation of the education system in Saudi Arabia, the '*central government has now established greater opportunities for local decision-making*' (MoE, 2014), which

allows for the actualisation of this notion. Therefore, in such a context, it is important to explore the ways in which leaders in ECE are able to exercise decision making, particularly in terms of policies, which have '*remained centralised and culturally constrained*' (Alameen et al., 2015: 5). Nevertheless, the theoretical perspectives on pedagogical leadership employed in this research are context-dependent in which the leadership style is dependent on the individual school and its community, values and ethos. Such research is of interest due to the political and strategic changes taking place in Saudi Arabian education, and leaders of private and state preschools were interviewed to understand their perspectives and leadership experiences. In addition, as discussed in the previous chapter, new trends/changes in the Saudi education system are taking place as a result of the recent education reform programme. Therefore, ECE is expected to be affected by such factors, which demonstrates the importance of this research.

Although the current theoretical perspectives of pedagogical leadership are viewed as suitable approaches to investigate Saudi ECE, as pedagogical leadership in this research takes into consideration the cultural context and education system, '*a conflict can be detected between the "ideal" world of theory and the "real" world of practice*' (Alameen et al., 2015: 3). This demonstrates the need to consider the environment/context. Pedagogical leadership is viewed as appropriate for this research as the theoretical framework because it builds on previous related notions and encompasses the personal, local, organisational and systemic 'national' needs of the community, as discussed. Therefore, it is suitable for the research context.

2.7 The research questions

To achieve the research objectives, the following research questions were developed:

1. What are the influential pedagogical factors of ECE leadership in the Saudi context? How and why are they influential?
2. What challenges do ECE leaders face in order to be effective pedagogical leaders?
3. Is pedagogical leadership enacted in ECSs in the Saudi context? If yes, how and to what extent?

2.8 Summary

This chapter discusses the theoretical perspectives of several areas related to this research study. Various perspectives of conceptualising leadership and leadership constructs have been reviewed. The chapter has also described leadership in ECE followed by pedagogical

leadership. The factors that influence leadership in general have also been discussed along with the challenges leaders face. The theoretical framework has also been presented.

The investigation of the literature review regarding leadership in the ECE in general and pedagogical leadership in particular highlights the importance of leadership in ECE and the role it plays in the success of ECE. It appears that pedagogical leadership in the ECE sector is a recently evolving area of research that has rarely been examined in the Saudi context.

Pedagogical leadership includes multiple concepts and theoretical perspectives, which underpin the theoretical framework of this study. It encompasses increasing the capacity of teachers and learners along with developing a learning community (Sergiovanni, 1998). Pedagogical leadership involves not only displaying a deep understanding of children's learning and development (Coughlin and Baird, 2013; O'Sullivan, 2015) to appropriately support their learning experiences but also perceiving the leader as a facilitator, a learner, an observer and a researcher in this context (Coughlin and Baird, 2013). Pedagogical leadership has also been described based on the context (O'Sullivan, 2015), the educational outcomes and the social realities (Male and Palaiologou, 2016) that can influence and shape leadership.

Several factors that are influential to leadership have been discussed, such as values, beliefs, culture and economical changes. Some have categorised these factors as internal and external pedagogical axes. The challenges ECE leaders face include emotional strain, loneliness, isolation (Wise, 2011), developing flexible and adaptive programmes in response to rapid social and economic changes, innovation and risk taking, a lack of head teacher leadership and management skills, a lack of communication with parents and financial challenges (Fourie and Fourie, 2016).

Because the research participants were mainly women, the challenges that female leaders face in the government and business sectors were also identified. For example, these challenges include a lack of training, a lack of a role model, stereotyping (Stead and Elliott, 2009), a lack of trust, a lack of confidence, adverse traditional beliefs of female leadership (Wilkinson, 1996) and a lack of learning opportunities and professional experiences (Almenkash et al., 2007). The next chapter presents and discusses the research methodology adopted for the current stud.

3 Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design of this study. It begins with the nature of the research and its philosophical stance, followed by the research methodology and data collection method. Then, the research access, sample, implementation, limitations, ethical considerations and trustworthiness will be discussed, followed by the role of the researcher and data analysis.

3.2 Nature of the research

Research varies according to its nature: natural sciences and social sciences. In order to understand the nature of research in general, the roots are summarised in the table below.

	Natural Science	Social Science
Label	Labelled as "hard sciences"	"soft sciences"
Knowledge	Reasoned (a posteriori) knowledge	Attain derived logical (a priori) knowledge
Formation	Based on empirical evidence	Independent of empirical findings
Approach	Uses inductive logic	Deductive approach
Focus	Concerned with natural phenomena or events	Concerned with the what, how and why aspects
	Configured to abstraction or generalised to laws	
Researcher role	Uses laboratory or technical equipment	Social actor: instrument for studying the social aspects of other human beings
	Objective	Subjective
Data analysis	Based on scientific methods	Contextual understanding of human existence
Objects	Consciousness-free dimensions of the physical world	Social, behavioural dimensions of the human world

Table 3: Summary of the two main types of research (adopted from Male, 2015).

In summary, the researcher's beliefs and values, and the way in which they deal with their subject matter, determine the choice between these domains. Basically, according to Bryman (2012), natural scientists' approach is based on scientific methods in analysing data, while social scientists lean towards seeking to understand human beings. While research can be classified according to its nature, it can be also classified according to its purpose. According to McDougall (2010), research can be categorised according to research purpose, inquiry or application. For instance, the purpose of the research can be classified as exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory (Gray, 2013). Exploratory research seeks to explore 'what is happening and to ask questions about it… particularly useful when not enough is known about a phenomenon' (Gray, 2013: 36).

The purpose of this study is to explore to what extent pedagogical leadership is exercised in the Saudi context, as well as leaders' experiences and the challenges they face, in line with the notion of pedagogical leadership. Because there is limited theoretical advancement in the literature about pedagogical leadership in Saudi ECE, an exploratory purpose is considered appropriate for this research. As this is social science research, a qualitative interpretive approach was employed, which will be explained further later. As pedagogical leadership is a relatively new, unexplored area in the Saudi context, the advantage of such an approach is that by exploring uncharted waters, the research will contribute to the existing body of literature, bridging the gap in knowledge and testing the theoretical framework in a different culture. Moreover, this study will inform policy implementation in Saudi Arabia.

3.3 Research philosophy

The way each researcher approaches their study differs depending on their beliefs, values, assumptions and interaction with their surroundings (Bryman, 2012; Grogan and Simmons, 2012). Their behaviour is guided by principles. According to Grogan and Simmons (2012: 29), 'researchers carry certain philosophical assumptions about the world into their research even if such assumptions are not acknowledged or made explicit'. These ways of thinking are described as paradigms (Grogan and Simmons, 2012).

The term *paradigm* emerged in the 20th century. It was driven by Thomas Kuhn's analysis of revolutions in science (Bryman, 2008). Kuhn (1970) described the natural sciences as going through periods of revolution. In this context, he described a paradigm as 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques shared by members of a given scientific community' (Kuhn, 1970: 75). It is not surprising, however, that most authors are unable to offer a clear, agreed-upon definition of the term 'paradigm', because 'Thomas Kuhn, the person most responsible for bringing that concept into our collective awareness, has himself used the term in no fewer than 21 different ways' (Guba, 1990: 17). The term *paradigm* is also used to describe philosophical perspectives. Guba and Lincoln (1994: 105) 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'. Furthering these assertions, a paradigm has been described as,

> *A cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted*
> *(Bryman, 2008: 605).*

Therefore, paradigms (a) strongly influence choice of method and the need to ascertain validity (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) and (b) influence the way the researcher works and, as a result, affect the output of the research (Newby, 2010). In other words, a paradigm provides an ideological framework for understanding, explaining and interpreting the social world in which humans act.

Generally, a research paradigm includes three key assumptions acknowledged by most authors: ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Cohen et al., 2000; Creswell, 2009; Bryman, 2012; Grogan and Simmons, 2012).

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality or being. For example, what is the nature of social phenomena? Do phenomena exist independently, or is 'reality' constructed by human interaction (Creswell, 2013)? There are two ontological positions: objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism is defined as an ontological position that 'asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors' (Bryman, 2008: 19). Constructionism, in contrast, is 'an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors' (Bryman, 2008: 19).

Objectivism advocates that 'the world is out there, operating in a systematic and lawful manner, with myriads of discrete and observational events in which reality is separate from human sense-making'. According to constructionism, in contrast, 'the world is semantically constructed and reconstructed, with different ways of meaning fused together through signs and symbols, amongst which language plays a central role' (Ma, 2016).

Views on ontology have implications for epistemology. This term is derived from the Greek *episteme*, which means knowledge. It is a branch of philosophy concerned with the scope of knowledge, particularly related to validation, the methods of acquiring knowledge and the relation to the researcher. It is concerned with questions such as, what is knowledge? How is it acquired? Can it be acquired by a detached researcher or is it constructed by involvement with others? (Creswell, 2013). There are two major epistemological positions: positivism and interpretivism.

Positivist epistemology advocates 'the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond' (Bryman, 2008: 13). The argument here is that knowledge 'can only be obtained by gathering facts in a systematic and objective manner, predominantly by experimental methods or by testing of hypotheses' (Male, 2015

forthcoming). Positivists consider themselves independent from their research, following the attitude of natural scientists, as indicated in table 1, towards observations, variables, experiments, facts, measurements and statistics. Thus, subjective feelings and the researcher's interaction with the research are neglected (Creswell, 2009; Bryman, 2012).

In contrast, interpretivism as an epistemological position adopts the view

> *that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action*
> (Bryman, 2008: 16).

Knowledge here is considered as '*a representation of the reality carried out by the researcher who construes knowledge as subject to time-space configuration and as a manifestation of social relations of power*' (Male, 2015). Interpretivism considers interaction between the research and the subject matter as inevitable. Humans' role and their influence in the social world is emphasised, and knowledge is gained through the interpretation of social actions.

These stances, in turn, imply different approaches to axiology, a branch of philosophy concerned with the judgements and values that influence a study (Bryman, 2008). It accentuates the researcher's values, which influence all stages of the research, in particular the credibility of the research output. For positivists, the subject matter is free of the researcher's bias, whereas in interpretivism, values should be considered in interpreting findings.

The ontological and epistemological stances of this study are subjectivism and interpretivism respectively. It rejects the idea of a fixed, external 'reality' of pedagogical leadership, assuming instead that there are multiple 'realities' according to the lived experience of leaders themselves or, at best, a common construction of 'realities' based on shared experience of influencing social factors. Based on this ontological position, it follows, epistemologically, that knowledge about pedagogical leadership in Saudi Arabia can best be obtained by engaging with leaders in order to explore this phenomenon through their eyes and interpret their experiences. Hence, pedagogical leadership is explored in terms of how leaders understand, experience and practise it. In other words, this research is trying to understand the phenomenon of pedagogical leadership by interpreting the experience of leaders as social actors.

In terms of axiology, the researcher recognises that in the process of engagement between herself and the research participants, she and they will inevitably bring their own subjectivities

into the research. The research framework assumes that leaders' pedagogy is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, including values, beliefs and social norms. In adopting such a framework, the researcher consciously takes up a similar subjectivist position. Her own understandings of pedagogy and leadership are influenced by her experiences as a woman and a teacher in the Saudi context, and by more recent experiences of studying in the UK and engaging with the academic community. Values, therefore, cannot be excluded from the research; what is important is to be mindful of those values and critically reflective on their impact on the research process and outcomes.

Table 4, below, summarises the researcher's stance on the above discussed philosophical stances with the current research.

Philosophical Position	Inquiry	Stance adopted in the research
Epistemology	The researcher's relationship to the study	Interpretivisim.
Ontology	The nature of the social world	Subjective
Axiology	Researcher's values and credibility	The researcher considers her values carefully and reflects on their impact on the research

Table 4: Summary of this research stance

3.4 Research methodology

The focus of this research is on leaders' experiences and behaviour in preschools in Saudi Arabia, and as indicated above, it therefore adopts an interpretive approach, as one of the key features of the interpretive paradigm is its ability to reveal the complex details of diverse inner phenomena, such as people's perceptions and experiences (Delamont, 2012). Close interaction with experienced leaders can inform and clarify perceptions, understanding or misunderstanding, and in this way gaps in the current knowledge of preschool leadership behaviour in Saudi could be reduced. Therefore, this research is concerned with interpreting and describing social world experiences, rather than testing a theory or causal relationships between variables. Scholars such as Creswell (2009), Bryman (2012) and Grogan and Simmons (2012) have associated the positivist paradigm with a quantitative approach and the interpretivist paradigm with a qualitative approach, which tends to investigate the what, how and why. They differentiate these approaches according to the underpinning ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions. Table 5 below describes the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Quantitate	Qualitative
Numbers	Words
Point of view of researcher	Point of view of participant
Researcher distant	Researcher close
Theory testing	Theory emergent
Static	Process
Structured	Unstructured
Generalization	Contextual understanding
Hard, reliable data	Rich deep data
Macro	Micro
Behaviour	Meaning
Artificial settings	Natural settings

Table 5: Common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research (Source: Bryman, 2008: 393).

This study adopts a qualitative methodology, consisted with its interpretive inductive approach and emphasis on exploring and understanding phenomena (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is described by Creswell (1998) as

> *An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998: 15).*

Such a methodology is appropriate in order to have in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and actions, and to discover those common described issues that are related to their practical experiences of pedagogical leadership, since as mentioned earlier, leadership is understood and experienced in a variety of ways. Qualitative methodology generates "*a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increase the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability*" (Patton, 2002: 14).

It also enables a consideration of the context and identifies unexpected phenomena that may create new-grounded theories related to those phenomena. In other words, the researcher can begin with general questions and narrow them down so that, during or after data collection, concepts and theory can be evolved (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2008). Moreover, as it is concerned with in-depth understanding, qualitative methodology considers the participants' responses to questions such as 'how?' and 'why?' and encourages critical reflection of the practice by which events and actions take place (Bryman, 2008; Newby, 2010).

Nevertheless, a number of criticisms are directed towards the qualitative approach. For example, some argue that it is impressionistic and too subjective (Bryman, 2008; Newby,

2010), as the findings are built on the researcher's interpretations of the participants' responses; close interaction with the participants can influence the researcher's interpretations; and, moreover, qualitative research is not structured but depends upon the researcher's clarity of design, and results in restricted generalisability (Bryman, 2008; Newby, 2010). Against these arguments, it can be suggested that all research is, to some degree, subjective: positivist, quantitative researchers decide what to investigate, how to define constructs, how to measure them and what information to obtain from respondents, and in doing so may exclude much that is relevant. Qualitative, interpretive research has the strength of being open and critically reflective about values and bias. Moreover, by accessing participants' opinions, beliefs and experiences, it can offer a more nuanced and contextualised view of phenomena in the social world. As for generalisation, this is not an aim of this research, which is context-specific. Nevertheless, the alternative qualitative criterion of transferability may be applicable. This is the reader's informed judgment as to whether or how far the research conclusions may be applicable in his or her setting, based on assessment of the degree of similarity to or difference from the research context. The researcher's role is to facilitate such a judgement by providing detailed information about the research context and the way the research conclusions were reached. This is the researcher's aim in this study. Overall, the insights afforded by qualitative methods are expected to outweigh the disadvantages.

3.5 Research methods

Given the nature of this study, along with the limited theoretical advancement in pedagogical leadership, particularly in ECE and in the Saudi context, there is a need to understand and interpret leaders' experiences. Therefore, the interview technique seemed appropriate for gathering data.

An interview is a dialogue between two parties, the interviewer and the interviewee, for the main purpose of extracting particular information from the interviewee (Delamont, 2012). The researcher may consider these interviews as interaction, as the interviewer evaluates the answers given in relation to their relevance to the proposed research. According to Bryman (2008), interviews are frequently employed in qualitative research and seen as flexible, as the verbal interaction with the participants can be adapted to suit the research area.

Interviews are the preferred method to extract in-depth insights into the participants' experiences. According to Seidman (2006: 9), '*at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest*

in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience'.

Although interviews, interview transcription and analysis of transcripts might be time consuming, they can be easily accommodated into researchers' and respondents' lives. Besides, the time period spent in an interview could vary as it depends on interviewees' cooperation and the time available. The quality of data and findings depends on the interaction between the researcher and respondents (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, interviews can be a costly approach, such as for this research, where the researcher needed to travel overseas. Nevertheless, careful preparation and planning can minimise these issues.

3.5.1 Interviews

As discussed earlier, to address the research problem and research questions, a qualitative approach was implemented and the method selected was the interview. The use of interviews helped in achieving in-depth knowledge as opposed to general information. Moreover, interacting with the respondents served in understanding the leaders' actions and thuoghts. Furthermore, in order to access accurate and detailed information on a topic like pedagogical leadership, interviews were preferable. Also, they helped to avoid any misunderstanding between the researcher and the respondents whereby questions could be interpreted differently: through the interviews, the researcher could explain, repeat and address any inquiry. Another advantage of adopting interviews is that it helps with reflecting and identifying new practices and behaviours that could be different to those introduced in the research.

However, interviews have some disadvantages, such as being time consuming and costly, particularly when travelling to another country is involved and considerable effort is needed to schedule interviews. For example, this researcher had to travel to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to carry out one-to-one interviews in different early years settings, which provided more insights. Furthermore, the quality of the information gathered depends heavily on the interaction between the researcher and the interviewees and it depends on the skills of the researcher at doing interviews. In addition, the introduction of bias in the questions or in the interpretation process is a risk associated with the interview method.

The identified disadvantages were carefully addressed through cautious planning. In addition, the risk of misunderstanding because of the cultural context was mitigated by the researcher being from Saudi Arabia and having worked closely with the Saudi early years setting for several years.

The three main types of interviews are unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews. The unstructured interview is an interview in which the researcher has only a list of issues to be discussed with the interviewee, without any sequence or limitation, and most probably the discussion will be informal. The semi-structured interview involves a list of questions in general form. The researcher is not committed to the sequence of questions and has the flexibility to ask any further question depending on interviewees' responses. Finally, the structured interview is more formal, in that all respondents are asked the same questions in the same sequence (Creswell, 2009; Bryman, 2008).

While unstructured interviews can extract similar relevant data (Bryman, 2008), it is important to prevent any misunderstandings of the study's focus. Furthermore, in order to add to existing knowledge, there is a need for consistency to assure coverage of identified areas, which unstructured interviews may not provide. Nonetheless, whilst consistency is important, understanding participants' experience may require flexibility. A balance between these considerations is met by the semi-structured interview.

In order to extract answers from the interviewees to a specific list of questions, a face-to-face semi-structured interview technique was employed. Consistent with the stance explained above, semi-structured interviews were conducted to flexibly extract as much information as possible from the participants and to capture their points of view and experiences.

Respondents are not constrained to answering within pre-designed formats, as in a questionnaire or structured interview. They can answer on their own terms, so the researcher has access to participants' own understandings. This is consistent with the interpretive philosophy adopted in this research.

This technique serves the exploratory nature of this research. First, it was intended to seek in-depth information about pedagogical leadership in ECE settings in Saudi Arabia, instead of broad information. Second, it allowed the flexibility to explain or repeat questions on the spot, vital to prevent any misunderstanding of the research questions. In this research, understanding people's experience is essential and this needed flexibility, which was provided by a semi-structured face-to-face interview.

Prior to the field work, pilot interviews were conducted to test the clarity of the interview questions and to familiarise the researcher with the semi-structured interview technique. In addition, they helped with understanding how to get access to the interviewees. Six interviews were conducted in the pilot study, and were included in the analysis of this research. They were

in both Arabic and English, as respondents were a mixture of English and Arabic speakers. As a result of the pilot interviews, some of the questions were paraphrased in order to clarify them for future participants.

The interview questions addressed three main themes: pedagogical factors, challenges faced by EC leaders and pedagogical leadership activities. The questions were developed based on the research objectives and questions, literature review and research framework. Twenty-three interviews were conducted with leaders from 23 early childhood settings in Riyadh. They lasted for 30–90 minutes, depending on participants' detailed or prompt responses. All interviews were audio-recorded (with permission) and notes were taken, to ensure nothing was missed. All records were transcribed, resulting in total textual data of around 238 pages (119,128 words).

3.5.2 Access

A detailed contact list for ECE leaders in Riyadh was obtained from the Saudi Ministry of Education. An introductory letter from the university and the researcher's sponsor (the Saudi Government) were provided to support access to the chosen early childhood settings in Saudi. This letter eased access to participants. Also, the researcher used her personal connections to ease access and gain introductions to the interviewees.

3.5.3 Research sample

According to Patton (2002: 244), '*There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry*'. The aim was to conduct 25–30 interviews in order to gain rich data; however, 23 interviews were conducted according to the participants' willingness to participate in the research. In this regard, Patton (2002: 245) stated,

> *The validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size (Patton, 2002: 245).*

A sample is a part or sub-group of a larger population. There are two main types of sampling: probability, which seeks representativeness by random, unbiased selection, and non-probability, where participants are purposively chosen to meet the specific requirements of the research (Bryman, 2008).

Since interpretive research does not necessarily aim at neutrality and representativeness, a non-probability sampling technique was considered to be appropriate. The suggested research sample comprised the leaders of two types of early childhood settings – private and public – in

the capital city of Saudi Arabia (Riyadh). The tables 6 and 7 below provide a profile of the research sample alongside the codes used to designate participants in reporting the findings, in order to preserve their anonymity.

Initials	Leader	School Type	Location	Background	Years of Experience
PUL1A	L1	Public (PU)	Alsafarat (A)	BA - Business & Management	20
PUL2B	L2	~	Alsafarat (B)	BA - Geography	25
PUL3C	L3	~	(C)		
PUL4D	L4	~	Ergah (D)	BA - ECE	17
PUL5E	L5	~	Alsafarat (E)	BA - ECE	7
PUL6F	L6	~	Almalaz (attached to university) (F)	BA - Geography	29
PUL7G	L7	~	Alsafarat (G)	Sociology	22
PUL8H	L8	~	(H)	IT	15
PUL9I	L9	~	(I)	BA - ECE	13

Table 6: Research sample (Public settings)

Initials	Leader	School Type	Location	Background	Years of Experience
PRL10J	L10	Private (PR)	Altakhsosy (J)	BA - English Language	4
PRL11K	L11	Private - Part of a bigger group	Alnakheel (K)	BA - ECE	15
PRL12L	L12	~	Altakhsosy (L)	BA - Arabic Language	13
PRL13M	L13	~	Alwrood (M)	BA - ECE	25
PRL14N	L14	~	~ (N)	BA - Arabic Language	20
PRL15O	L15	~	(O)		6
PRL16P	L16	~	Alrayed (P)	BA - ECE	5
PRL17Q	L17	~	Alsafarat (Q)	BA - ECE	
PRL18R	L18	Private - Part of a bigger group	Alwrood (R)		11
PRL19S	L19	~	Alrayed (S)	BA - Business Administration	18
PRL20T	L20	~	(T)	BA - ECE	8
PRL21U	L21	~	(U)	~	7
PRL22V	L22	~	(V)		4.5
PRL23W	L23	~	Alnakheel (W)	BA History & French language BA Education	

Table 7: Research sample (Private settings)

PU	Public preschool
PR	Private preschool
L1	Leaders and her labeled number
A	Alphabetical order for preschools locations
BA	Bachelor degree

Table 8: Key to tables

3.5.4 Secondary data

Documents were used as an additional data source. They helped with understanding the preschool setups, leaders' role, policies and content related to early years' educations. Information gathered from secondary data supported the findings from interviews and visits. Also, it helped the researcher with validating, clarifying and comparing data provided by participants. Documents collected included the Ministry of Education's annual reports, education strategy and other reports, and the preschools' websites and newsletters.

3.6 Research implementation

Six pilot interviews were conducted with preschool leaders prior to data collection in order to gain insights about the practice and check the interview questions. To ease access to participants, a list of public and private preschools in Riyadh was provided by the Ministry of Education, as generally there are two types of the preschools, public and private. All interviews were conducted in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. Nine interviews were conducted with leaders from public schools while the remaining fourteen leaders were from private schools. All leaders were employed as the head teachers and led their preschool settings. All were female. It took the researcher three months to carry out the interviews.

Participants were contacted before the interview to obtain permission and arrange a convenient time. Some of the contacted leaders directly welcomed participation in the study, while others declined on the grounds of having other commitments, such as being away for training or having limited time available. A couple of the interviewees initially refused audio-recording of their interview; however, they agreed when the researcher reassured them by clarifying again the ethical principles observed in this research: anonymity, confidentiality and that the data would be used for research purposes but not for public use. This misunderstanding could be explained by the fact that those leaders were not familiar with the notion of academic research, compared to other interviewees who welcomed and encouraged the project. Indeed,

they were keen to see the research implications and contribution to the development of their practice.

3.7 Limitations

There are some limitations in this study, as with any other empirical research. As data collection was through interviews, in which participants were asked about several matters concerned with pedagogical leadership, which depended on their memories, this could be a limitation for the research, as information depends on the accuracy of participants' recollections.

Also, the research was confined to female participants only since, as mentioned earlier, culturally the ECE sector is all female in the Saudi context. The issue of gender and leadership in the literature, however, is controversial.

Moreover, the research was grounded in Western literature, whereas the context studied was in the Middle East. Thus, cultural differences may be considered a limitation. However, as stated earlier, there is a lack of literature on pedagogical leadership in the Saudi context, whereas Western research on this area is well developed.

3.8 Ethical considerations

In order to ensure that the research conformed to appropriate standards it was reviewed by the University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Thus, the researcher was supported by ethical approval to facilitate the process of data collection. Ethical approval was also obtained from the Ministry of Education in Saudi.

Ethics are principles that govern human behaviours and relationships with each other. They should be adhered to in any research to protect the participants' rights; for instance, to ensure that their careers are not damaged by their sharing information (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this research was clearly explained to participants to ensure they understood the purpose of the research and their rights with respect to such participation. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw whenever they wished. In addition, the researcher assured participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected and avoided risks to the participants.

Furthermore, prior to the interviews, it was clarified to all participants that the data recorded would remain anonymous and confidential. Also, the researcher clarified the steps that would follow the interview. For example, it was explained that transcripts would be shared with

participants, who would have an opportunity to confirm that the content accurately represented their views. Such clarifications encouraged respondents' confidence, so they were more likely to feel able to make full and frank disclosures, which were needed for the research to be trustworthy.

3.9 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are seen as problematic issues (Hartley and Chesworth, 2000; Bryman, 2008). However, the quality of qualitative research can be judged on trustworthiness (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Trustworthiness includes four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

Credibility is similar to internal validity. According to Bryman (2008: 377) 'the significance of this stress on multiple accounts of social reality is especially evident in the trustworthiness criterion of credibility'. There are two ways to do this: one is known as respondent validation and the other one is triangulation. Respondent validation is where interviewees are provided with findings to assure the researcher that he/she understood their social world correctly. Also, it ensures that the research is conducted according to the principles of good practice. Triangulation means using several methods and sources of data while studying a phenomenon.

Transferability is similar to external validity. It refers to providing a thick description of the context and culture, to provide others with a pool or database on which to make a judgment of the possibility of transferring the results to other contexts.

Moreover, dependability is similar to reliability in quantitative research. For this purpose, an auditing approach can be adopted. This means keeping accessible complete records of all phases of research, such as respondent selection, fieldwork notes, transcripts and details of the analysis. In this regard, 'peers would then act as auditors, possibly during the course of the research and certainly at the end to establish how far proper procedures are being and have been followed' (Bryman, 2008: 378).

Finally, conformability refers to ensuring that the researcher has 'not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it' (Bryman, 2008: 379).

In this research, as stated earlier, interviews were shared with participants to ensure their credibility as representations of the participants' experiences. They were all audio-recorded to ensure no important information was missed while interviewing. In addition, back translation

of the interview questions along with a pilot study were employed in order to ensure that questions were clearly understood and so obtain full and accurate answers. Moreover, the results of these data will be compared to the literature to ensure the plausibility of the research conclusions.

3.10 The role of the researcher

As mentioned earlier, the researcher in a qualitative study is recognised as a social actor. He/she is considered an instrument for studying the social aspects of other human beings (Male, 2015 forthcoming). Although the researcher in this study is a Saudi citizen and Arabic is her mother tongue, she considers herself as more *etic*, an outsider and an objective viewer of the context under scrutiny. This is because the researcher does not fully participate in the activity researched, preschool pedagogical leadership in Saudi. Nevertheless, the researcher's role in this study consisted of extracting, understanding and analysing the experiences of preschool leaders in Saudi context, in the light of Western literature, as there is limited theoretical advancement of ECE pedagogical leadership in general and in the Saudi context in particular.

3.11 Data analysis

Analysis of the research data has been an ongoing process. During data collection, the researcher began the analysis process in order to have clear, focused data and avoid unfocused repetitive data. As stated,

> *Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that has been analysed while being collected is both parsimonious and illuminating*
> *(Merriam, 1998: 162).*

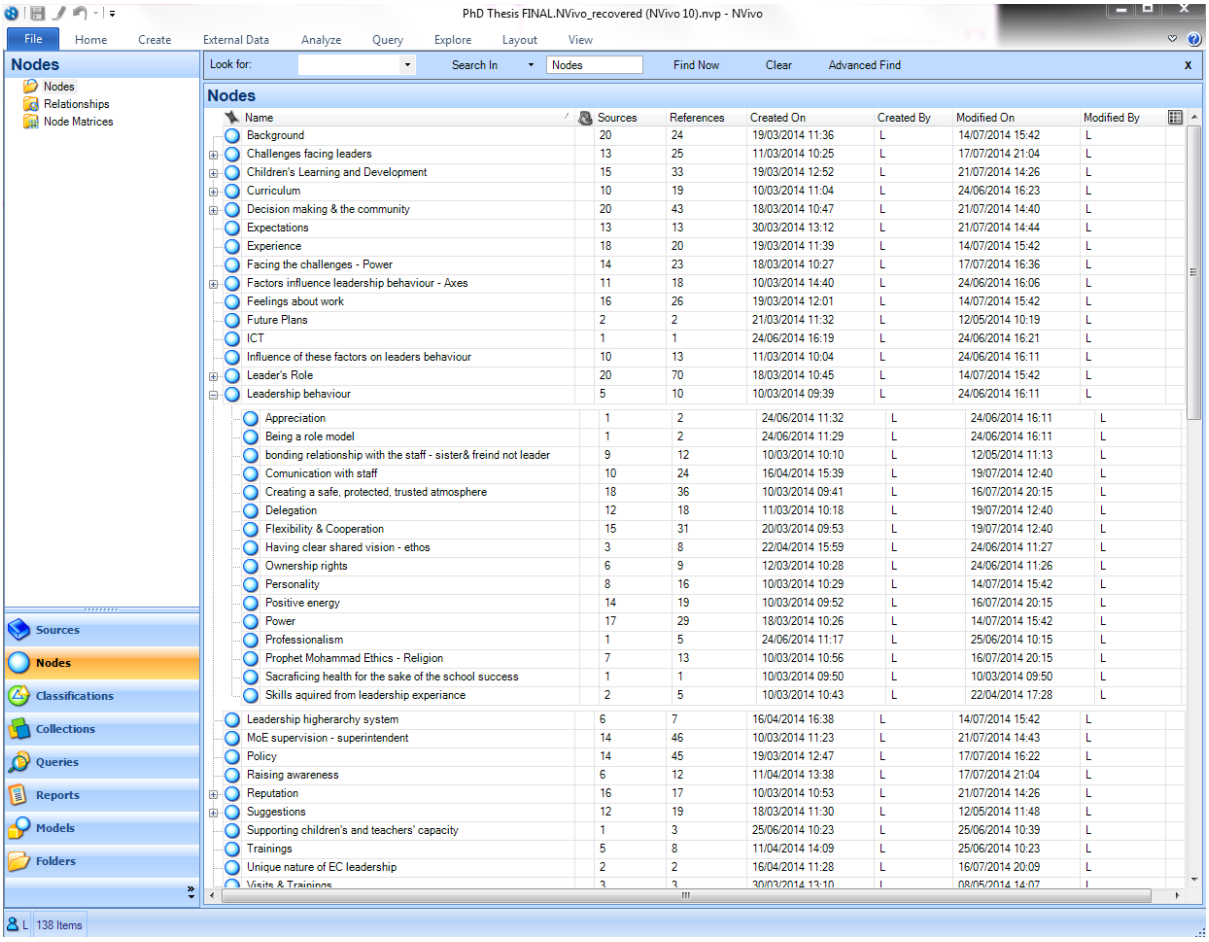
There are several qualitative analysis techniques, such as content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, interpretive analysis and grounded theory. According to Richards and Morse (2007), Bryman (2008), Delamont (2012) and Creswell (2013):

- Content analysis is more related to texts and documents and, in its traditional form, looks for quantification of specific content in a systematic manner.
- Narrative analysis is a sensitive approach to analysis in the sense that it focuses on the temporal sequence of people as storytellers of their lives and surrounding episodes.
- Discourse analysis analyses any forms of discourse, like talk and language, that concern the ways in which types of reality are accomplished.
- Grounded theory is a technique that is intended to generate new theory out of data.

- Interpretative analysis looks for insights and meaning from the data provided by respondents, such as experience of a specific phenomenon.

As mentioned earlier in section 3.6, because leaders' experiences and pedagogical leadership in preschool were under scrutiny in this research, an interpretive approach to analysis was employed. Such an approach provides understanding of the 'realities' experienced by participants, which when compared with literature, may help to confirm, modify or challenge existing assumptions and interpretations.

As previously stated, all interviews were transcribed. While two of them were in English, the remainder were in Arabic. Using QSR Nvivo10 software as a tool to manage and organise the data (as shown in the picture below), these transcripts were subjected to a combination of a priori and emergent coding. A priori codes, from the literature, were identified and the data were clustered into themes and patterns. These were supplemented by emergent codes which were identified through in-depth inductive analysis, in which a new theoretical base to knowledge may be generated, as according to Bryman (2008), the inductive approach to analysis is concerned with generating theory from research data analysed. Attention was directed towards what was highlighted by participants, their description and experiences of leadership and the meanings they expressed, whether related to specific questions asked or any other part of the interview. Notes taken also helped in shaping the codes. Moreover, for verification purposes, transcripts were viewed as a process rather than an event, being shared with and revised by participants.



Picture 1: The coding process through NVivo software

3.12 Summary

This chapter discussed the research design of this study and identified the philosophy and methodology employed to explore pedagogical leadership phenomena in the ECE context in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this research was to explore how far leaders in ECE settings exercise the construct of pedagogical leadership. It involved close interaction with leaders of these settings to deeply understand and interpret their experiences and behaviour. Interpretive and constructivist philosophical stances best matched the nature of this study, for their ability to reveal the complex details of diverse inner phenomena, such as people's experiences and perceptions.

In terms of methodology, a qualitative, inductive approach was employed in order to seek meaning and achieve a deep understanding of leaders' perceptions and the context in which leadership operates. Pilot interviews were conducted to assess the clarity and appropriateness of the interview questions. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 leaders.

To ensure all data were recorded and nothing was missed, the interviews were all audio-recorded and notes were taken. The following chapter presents the results of this research.

4 Chapter Four: Results

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in chapter two, an increasing volume of the literature is concerned with pedagogical leadership; however, far too little attention has been paid to pedagogical leadership in ECE. To date, there is no reliable evidence of research about Saudi ECE pedagogical leadership. This study, therefore, aims to contribute to the growing area of research by investigating a non-Western context and exploring whether there is evidence that the behaviour of preschool leaders in Saudi corresponds to the construct of pedagogical leadership discussed in the literature review above. It aims to:

- investigate pedagogical leadership in Saudi ECSs,
- identify the pedagogical factors identified in the theoretical framework in the Saudi context and whether there are other additional factors, and
- explore the challenges faced by ECE leaders.

This chapter presents the results of this study. It is has three main themes, pedagogical factors, key challenges that face leaders and leadership behaviour, responding to the following research questions:

1. What are the influential pedagogical factors of ECE leadership in the Saudi context? How and why are they influential?
2. What challenges do ECE leaders face in order to be effective pedagogical leaders?
3. Is pedagogical leadership enacted in ECSs in the Saudi context? If yes, how and to what extent?

The results are presented in three main sections: pedagogical factors, the challenges that face leaders, and leadership behaviour.

This study is interpretive in nature and used a qualitative methodology, as mentioned in Chapter 3. Data were collected by interviewing 23 preschool leaders from private (PR) and public (PU) preschools. All interviews were audio recorded, with permission, then transcribed. The transcripts exceeded 53,885 words. They were then coded and clustered in a thematic way using Nvivo software to manage and organise the data.

4.2 Pedagogical Factors:

In order to identify whether or how pedagogical factors influence leadership in ECE in the Saudi context, respondents were asked to identify aspects they found influential, how and why. A number of these aspects appear to be personal aspects and leadership aspects, while others

are contextual aspects related to where leadership operates. Diagram 2 below presents the main findings.

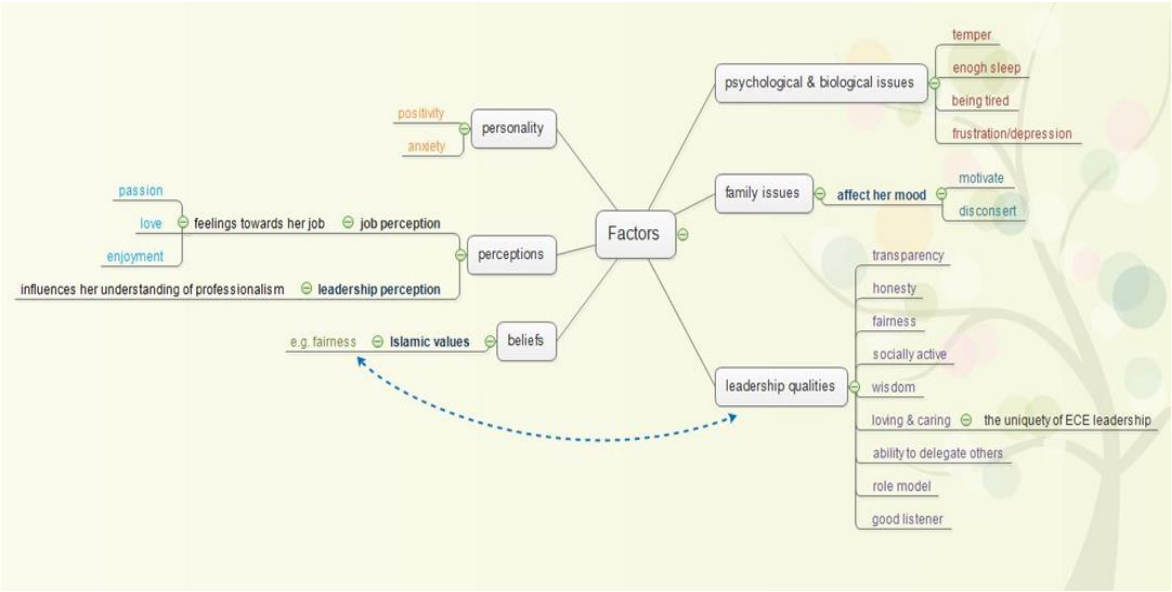


Diagram 2: Factors which influence leadership in a Saudi ECE context

4.2.1 Personal factors

Fifteen participants highlighted that aspects such as the headteacher's family life were influential in some cases positively and negatively in others. An indicative example was stated by PRL11K, who explained how her home situation affected her mood, in the same way as work pressure did:

> *the pressure from home or school affects me psychologically which for sure is reflected in my mood, as well as if I am comfortable/at ease it will be reflected in my mood. The work pressure concerns me too as the time goes fast and I visit all the classes every day and need to meet the weekly planned schedule* (PRL11K).

Three participants PRL11K, PRL16P and PRL22V highlighted psychological and biological issues they found influential. These included the leader's temper, enough sleep, being tired and frustration/depression after being enthusiastic and keen to add to their practice and make changes. The link between these leaders is that they were in private schools, two of which are part of a bigger school; therefore, there was top management above them.

Another personal factor was mentioned by PUL4D when she described her feeling towards her job. She asserted her passion, love and enjoyment of managing and leading her setting. It appeared that the way she perceived her job encouraged her to be creative and lead change in her setting. Among many other successful leaders, PUL4D was able to transform her preschool, which was located in a disadvantaged poor district, to become the main source of education, health and safety and knowledge for children and their families.

Results also show that headteachers' beliefs influenced their behaviour and thus the pedagogy of their settings. PUL6F believed that her role as a leader was reflected in everything in her setting. She stated: "*I am focusing on my leadership role because it is reflected on everyone in my setting"* (PUL6F). Therefore, the way she perceived and focused on her role allowed her to build and improve her leadership skills in order to create a successful learning environment for children and teachers. She successfully managed to lead a large number of staff and children and seek to improve her setting.

PRL23W also expressed her perception of her leadership. She stated, *"As an internal factor, it's my vision of what is professionalism and what is a professional leader that drives me internally as well"* (PRL23W).

PUL4D showed her religious beliefs by stating, "*I am afraid of becoming unfair when dealing with my staff, so I pray to God every morning for me to be fair with others and for others to be fair with me*". Her beliefs influenced the way she dealt with her staff.

Headteachers' personality was another influential factor. Some seemed anxious about their school problems and carried them home, for example, PRL10J stated that, "*I continuously think about issues in my school, even at home"* (PRL10J). Other headteachers stated that positivity is a personality trait that influences the setting. For instance, PUL6F stated that

> *The positive person affects her surroundings in such as the development of the preschool, spreading happiness, clarity of responsibilities and systemisation. So you face various circumstances but instead of considering them as barriers and being their prisoner, use them for development and organisation* (PUL6F).

4.2.2 Leadership related factors

4.2.2.1 Managerial Factors

Eight headteachers discussed a number of managerial factors that they found influencing their leadership behaviour.

An indicative example that illustrates this is that of PRL14N, who reported her experience with another preschool, where she found that the constantly changing leadership was problematic. From a managerial perspective, PRL14N said,

> *I worked as an administrator in another preschool for seven years. The problem was the instability of the preschool's leadership; five head teachers were changed during that period and each had her own decisions and so on* (PRL14N).

She found that this led to frequent changes of staff responsibilities and created a lack of cooperation and sensitivity, which resulted in an uncomfortable climate.

PUL7G, as a leader in a public preschool, highlighted three factors she found stressful, depending on the situation, which were; management pressure, MoE supervisory pressure, and pressure from children's families. She also emphasised the type of relationships between herself and the teachers as influential.

PUL7G also highlighted pressures in relation to MoE supervision and children's families' pressures, whereas PRL15O raised the issue of pressure stemming from the conflict between families' perception of ECE and the MoE's. For example, she stated:

> *The way families perceive ECE affects you directly, as well as the conflict of perception of this stage between families' and the MoE. The MoE focuses on the importance of implementing the ECE curriculum, which is play based learning, whereas some children's families focus on the traditional didactic learning, literacy and numeracy skills. The MoE also requires provision of resources and materials more than activating the role of didactic learning or free play learning, and focuses on fulifilling the learning environment more than the learner. Which means a lot of formality more than anything else* (PRL15O).

Another example, in which the head teacher dealt with a surrounding influential factor, superintendent pressure, at her own expense in order to sustain the best environment for her staff, was PUL2B, who resisted responding to some superintendents' inquiries she stated:

> *I do not blame these superintendents but I blame those who gave them that power… I have a persistent personality, I work towards the goal I believe is important for my institution, by eliminating negative energy and motivating creative minds… Management is to supervise and follow up the work, I am not only managing. I do not want to sit at my desk saying "do this or that, or you have a new regulation to follow" and focus on trivial things that not only add nothing to our practice but also demanding, and encourage fear of mistakes. No, mistakes lead to success* (PUL2B).

Although some situations were sources of pressure, others alleviated the stress on headteachers. An indicative example of a managerial factor that influenced leadership and pedagogy in a positive way is the headteahcer's assistant. PUL4D explained how having an assistant enhanced her leadership role by enabling her to focus on leadership more than managerial duties. She stated,

> *Workwise, I have divided the work well among staff. I am more relaxed after having an assistant, I used to be tough with teachers because of the workload I had. But now I am calmer and more giving. Even my decisions are placidly taken. Such small changes make a big difference* (PUL4D).

It appears that pressure and the way they respond to it affects headteachers' attitudes. For instance, PUL2B's response to pressure from the superintendent was different from the response of PUL4D to workload pressure. This could reflect the influence of the personality of each headteacher, as discussed previously. Personality, therefore, influences leadership behaviour. In this regard, PRL17Q stated nine illustrative examples of certain qualities that she thought leaders need to have in order to successfully influence their institution: transparency, honesty, fairness, being socially active, wisdom, being loving and caring, has the ability to delegate to others, being a role model and being a good listener. She believed that such qualities would help in gaining others' trust and thus their respect and support, which in turn would lead to a successful organisation. More details will be discussed under the theme of leadership behaviour later in this chapter.

4.2.2.2 Decision making process

Twenty one out of twenty-four interviewees highlighted another axis that influences leadership and pedagogy, that is, the decision-making process. 13 of those were private while 8 were public preschool leaders. The majority focused on internal (operational) decision making, involving teachers and the community to inform their decisions. However, a minority of the interviewees highlighted their responsibility in informing strategic decisions related to the MoE, which reflects the government's intention of involving leaders.

Examples of operational decision making mentioned by interviewees were planning and organisation, and community involvement in the preschool's internal day to day practice. All participants paid attention to the school community to inform some of their decisions, for instance, respecting their complaints and suggestions, sharing knowledge and information, and extensive use of technology (mainly Twitter) to enhance communication with the community. Nevertheless, PRL21U demonstrated limits in involving the school community in school decision making by stating, "*There are things that require parents' involvement but not others, such as the school's regulations/rules like 'no diapers', they are not involved in this*" (PRL21U).

Besides respecting the surrounding community's perspectives in decision making, PUL1A added, "*When making decisions, you have to be aware of your school's community's, families and teachers, social class. Also, your leadership, decisions and implementation need to be under the umbrella of Islamic values"* (PUL1A). This example shows how a leader's beliefs and values influence her decisions and that some leaders take into consideration societal values. Another example that shows freedom of choice was PRL15O, who demonstrated her role in

decision making regarding what values children should learn. She valued patriotism and aimed to raise the patriotic awareness of her school community.

However, an aspect of decision making highlighted by a private preschool headteacher was conflict arising from differences of affiliation. For example, PRL14N, a head teacher, was appointed by the MoE and obliged to carry out its policies, whereas the deputy head of her school was appointed by the owner. The resultant constant conflict between the headteacher's vision and the owner's vision created a tense relationship in terms of the overall decision making process.

PRL12L, whose setting was part of a bigger private school, wished to have independent decision making, because she believed that the top management of the school made unsuitable decisions as a result of lack of knowledge about ECE's needs, for example, they did not consider the importance to children's safety having soft safe carpets, but made decisions based solely on cost. Therefore, she emphasised the importance of her independence in taking decisions, as she perceived herself the most knowledgeable about what was best for children and their needs. Similarly, PRL22V showed frustration at having limited power of decision making as a preschool leader. She stated, "*I am responsible for this place, allow me the freedom of decisions and not let me decide on some things but not others… I should have the full power"* (PRL22V). Another head teacher defined her role clearly as "*responsible for managerial decisions in the preschool such as planning, school improvement, or a teacher or a child's transfer*" (PRL16P).

In the above examples of decision making made by headteachers, which show their focus on internal operational decisions, the majority of these participants were from private settings. Nevertheless, for other participants, decision making was not only limited to day to day operations, but they were also being involved in policy development and curriculum. An illustrative example was PUL1A's preschool, which was chosen by the MoE, as an excellent setting, to trial a new curriculum development and the principal was asked to report her perspectives. Therefore, not only did she respect her school community's desires/suggestions, but she also brought their views as well as her own suggestions to inform the MoE. Thus, the government trend in involving leaders in decision making and informing current policies is illustrated.

In relation to the decision-making process on curriculum development, cultural differences and respecting religious values were clear to PUL1A when she communicated with both a Western consultant and a national MoE staff member, as part of the process. *"Some families did not accept musical instruments, so we suggested replacing them with natural sound making*

tools" (PUL1A). She found that "*it is easier to persuade the Western more than the MoE consultant.*

4.2.3 Communication with staff

PRL12L found that her relationship with the teachers was an aspect that influenced her leadership behaviour. She described that, "*it is very comfortable when there is mutual understanding and flexibility in delivering and exchanging thoughts among us as a team*" (PRL12L).

The results revealed that 'regular' communication with the staff and clarifying their roles and responsibilities leads to having responsible staff, which promotes successful communication.

PRL12L mentioned that some of her staff feel irresponsible, PRL23W described the way she supported her staff to be responsible. Her regular communication with the teachers resulted in a number of benefits. According to PRL23W the key to her communication with the staff was by her trying "*to be positive most of the time to try to make any external factors seem less challenging to the staff"* (PRL23W). Regular communication was highlighted, for example, by stating:

> *Taking a look daily and trying to gauge in the morning how the teachers are feeling in order to try to get their day starting off right. If I sense that the teachers feel a bit stressed about upcoming report cards or an event that we're planning, then you try to address that to make them feel better or more relaxed. Or maybe you just try to lighten the mood generally by sharing positive comments from mums, or something that was a positive comment on Twitter about one of the activities, or myself just commenting on the quality of the newsletter write-ups this week* (PRL23W).

Another point PRL23W highlighted in relation to communication is clarity. The leader 'clearly' assigns each staff member her responsibilities, as mentioned:

> *You try for the most part to be clear with your staff on the expectations of their responsibilities that they need to meet... when everybody knows the deadline for the newsletter is Wednesday, this is your Tweet day… making sure that you communicate regularly with everyone so that everybody is aware of their role and their responsibilities… You're always gauging that your staff members know what they need to be doing, they're aware of their responsibilities and how to meet them or achieve them…* (PRL23W).

The clarity of responsibility through regular communication was also highlighted by PUL6F and PUL9I. The latter linked it with the positive leader who influences her workplace in matters such as the organisation of the work, clarity of responsibilities, development, and creating a happy climate.

As a result of such regular clear communication PRL23W claimed that, "*then they (teachers) feel less stressed, they feel responsible for their job they don't want to not complete it and not be part of the team"* (PRL23W). PRL22V, however, stated the difficulties she faced in relation to clarity of roles and responsibilities, as it requires cooperation and willingness from the teacher's side as well as headteacher's. She cited as an example the issue of afternoon shifts, where each teacher as well as herself were filling gaps; nevertheless, she did not believe working afternoon shifts was really her responsibility, but she did so to fill the gap as necessary for that job, because there was not enough cooperation from teachers themselves.

Showing appreciation for teachers' achievements was also considered vital as part of communication. Like PRL23W, PUL5E also focused on acknowledging her teachers' positive attitudes and ignoring the negative ones in order to reinforce their positive attitudes. PUL5E was not the only leader who described the relationship among her staff as being like a family. However, she extended that to social communication among them, in such matters as attending and celebrating someone's engagement, weddings or a birth.

Understanding staff's psychological needs was also pointed out by PUL4D as part of communication. She declared her concern about 'careful' communication with her staff in which fairness was her main concern: "C*ommunication with others really concerns me because you have to make sure that you do not oppress others"* (PUL4D). Similarly, PRL17Q also highlighted the importance of understanding others' positions by stating, "*You need to put yourself in other people's shoes*". PUL6F also highlighted the importance of understanding staff and children's needs as well as respecting their individual differences. She had built an understanding, generous, family atmosphere, leading 60 staff members and a group of children.

Along with PUL4D, PRL17Q agreed on the importance of careful communication including equality. She stated,

> *Leaders need to manage people carefully. Their relationship needs to be loving, needs to be transparent, and needs to take equality/fairness into consideration. If you have these qualities and the staff see you practising them, you will gain their trust and then their respect will be built spontaneously and consequently the success of the place you are in* (PRL17Q).

She perceived that communication skills are gained by a long experience of communication with a variety of people. She linked years of experience as a leader with the growing skills of communication with others. She said, "W*hen you've been a leader for 11 years, your communication skills with people are built/acquired*" (PRL17Q).

4.2.4 The sense of responsibility

Being caring, loving and positive in communication with teachers can help them develop a sense of responsibility. Results show that teachers' sense of responsibility towards their job can be enhanced by pedagogical leaders. The best case to illustrate this claim is PRL23W's. She saw her role as guiding and supporting her staff towards sensing their responsibility by showing care, love and positivity.

> *You want people to feel good and supported and know what they are required to do, then they feel less stressed, they feel responsible for their job, they don't want to not complete it and not be part of the team* (PRL23W).

PRL16P highlighted another aspect of responsibility, which was connected with being responsible not only towards the children and their families but also most importantly towards God. This will be discussed further later, in the leadership behaviour section, particularly with regards to values and religious influence.

4.2.5 Internal – motto

Developing a team spirit which contributes to enhancing children's learning and achieving excellence in pedagogy was highlighted by participants. For instance, PRL23W focused on strengthening teamwork by team training while creating a school motto in order to develop a positive teamwork culture. She stated,

> *We have a motto that we develop during our team training at the beginning of every academic year. Again internally this is something that I feel is a good team builder and leadership thing, which is to create a positive teamwork and team environment you should have some kind of team spirit, and in order to create a team spirit one of the things we have is a team motto or saying. Last year it was 'go and be the light in the darkness', and it was a daily reminder to these preschool/early childhood education teachers that they are using a more unique approach with these kids, and that unlike a lot of traditional schools here we're not going to shout at young children, we're not going to be aggressive, we are going to use critical thinking and problem solving, what they call the 21st Century skills of learning…*
>
> *So we have a team motto, this year it is that teachers are the life of the school. So every morning at the end of our morning meeting it's called, where I'm trying to send the teachers off with a positive morning feeling/making sure they're meeting any responsibilities they need to by the end of the day. At the end of it I say, "I hope you all have a great day and go and be the life of the school". That's something that they developed as a team during team training, and as I mentioned last year it was a different one, it was "You are the light in the darkness" (PRL23W).*

She justified the reason for having a school motto, what she called a "*team motto*"

> *The idea is that it's a daily morning reminder to them that what they are doing is important, that what they are about to do in the classroom, they need to just be aware that it is important and influential and that every day they are making a difference. And every day they are exerting an influence (PRL23W).*

4.2.6 Context where leadership operates

4.2.6.1 Staff

4.2.6.1.1 Absence

PRL10J highlighted teachers' absence as one of the internal factors that influence her leadership behaviour. Her concerns were about the children, as they became familiar with their teachers and as a result of teachers' frequent absence, some children were emotionally affected.

Although PRL23W had experienced the issue of staff absence, when the workload and the children were affected, she seemed less troubled. Her attitude towards this issue helped staff to feel more responsible, as discussed earlier in the communication section. According to her,

> *You want to try to make your staff feel at ease, more positive, and have a good day with the kids. You want them to feel as much at their best as possible, and you want them to feel like successful professionals who know what they're doing and send them off into their classroom to have a good day* (PRL23W).

4.2.6.1.2 Recruiting (6 participants)

> *I think that obviously the external factors influence your behaviour because you want to try to make your staff feel at ease, more positive, and have a good day with the kids. You want them to feel as much at their best as possible, and you want them to feel like successful professionals who know what they're doing and send them off into their classroom to have a good day (PRL23W).*

Another issue regarding staff was highlighted by PRL10J. She found the way that staff reacted to strategies she set as a leader influenced her leadership behaviour. She said,

> One *of the factors that affects you positively is the teachers' responding to the things you asked them to do and the strategies you set. It affects the way you deal with them, e.g. they have bonuses and incentives. The negative side, however, is when they do not cooperate with you in improving the preschool (PRL10J).*

PRL12L added another issue regarding teachers as she said, "*The negative things are losing a teacher for any reason, if you have teachers who lack the ability of taking responsibility or have any comments/issues with them so you might want to discuss them but you need to wait until you have an alternative"* (PRL12L).

4.2.6.2 The nature of ECE

4.2.6.2.1 Nature of work = Hard work

PRL11K highlighted the view that an enormous effort and time is required in the ECE field. PRL12L agreed on that and stated, "*Our atmosphere is tiring as maybe because this is the nature of the work but generally there is psychological comfort*" (PRL12L).

4.2.6.3 The way ECE is seen by teachers, family and the society

4.2.6.3.1 Parents

PRL10J considered parents as an external influential factor that influenced her behaviour by, for example,

> *positive atmosphere increases when a mother comes to you expressing her thanks and appreciation for your efforts, but it would make you feel disheartened really when you feel parents are not cooperating and are criticising and expressing their dissatisfaction" (PRL10J).*

She considered parents' dissatisfaction as the main factor that influenced her leadership behaviour. She focused on the way some parents express their dissatisfaction:

> *When something is wrong within the preschool itself I will be the first to be concerned about it. However, the way some parents absorb an idea or a trivial issue that does not affect the child or the parents, and the way some express and criticise is the thing that most upsets you… I continuously think about issues in my school, even at home (PRL10J).*

4.3 Key challenges leaders face in ECE in KSA

A number of challenges were highlighted by the participants of this research. They are presented on a thematic was in Table 9 below, in which examples of the challenge highlighted is presented, followed by illustrative participants' quotations:

Main theme	Examples	Quotation
Social Challenges	Children's families' concerns	*There was a minor issue but she* (the mother) *exaggerated it because she did not like it (PRL11K).* *Teachers leaving us, is out of my hands as a leader and I cannot control it (PRL11K).*
	Social commitments	*The most important aspect for being comfortable in your work is your family life. Another challenge is coming to work in the morning tired because of attending social events. You will do your work but still it is considered as a challenge* (PUL4D)
	Underestimating ECE teachers	*My staff are not seen by the society as practitioners but as child carers. Yet, they have*

		*dignity and each has her level of education and qualification (*PRL18R).
	Society's desire and expectation	*I am not able to meet all society's desires because this will create great pressure on me and demands money. As well, as I stick to my values, which I cannot relinquish (PRL15O).*
Top management of the school	• Understanding needs of ECE. • Multiple Leadership. • The Owner's interests. • Leader/manager relationship. • Financial support.	*One of the biggest challenges we face is that the owner does not understand and appreciate the needs of ECE and thus, he does not support us financially as needed* (PRL14N).
Ministry of Education	MoE supervision	*Each superintendent brings a new policy with her* (PRL18R).
	Policies	*They asked us for an immediate implementation in the middle of the year, and (2) without providing resources (computers) to support that project in practice (PUL9I).*
Financial Challenges	• Lack of creativity • Safety	*For those who like to keep creativity and continuous improvement, more funds are needed. But the Ministry may consider that as unnecessary* (PUL4D)

Table 9: Key challenges face leaders in KSA

4.3.1 **Social** *challenges*

A number of social challenges were faced by leaders, which they perceived as factors that influence of their role as pedagogical leaders.

4.3.1.1 Concerns regarding children's families

Four participants out of twenty three leaders were concerned about problems related to their relationship with pupils' parents and saw this as a challenge to their leadership.

For example, PRL11K stated that she and teachers made enormous efforts to establish an excellent learning and secure environment for children, such as the leader's daily presence at the front door to greet and admit children and their mothers in the mornings and afternoons, but these were sometimes disregarded by parents. She drew an example of a mother who made a great fuss because she did not like something; *"There was a minor issue but she exaggerated it because she did not like it" (PRL11K).* Such attitudes on the part of parents influence the

leader's and teachers' behaviour, as they felt *"greatly frustrated and that our efforts were wasted!"(PRL11K).*

PRL11K also drew another example of pressure caused by parents. Since her's was a private preschool, parents had high expectations towards its education. However, she was sometimes unable to meet their expectations due to matters beyond her control. For example,

> *Teachers leaving us, is out of my hands as a leader and I cannot control it, especially if she is an English teacher. It is really hard to find a well-qualified alternative. And sometimes it could take over a month (PRL11K).*

Also, PRL15O (also in a private preschool) reported the challenge she faced from society's perception of schools in general, which limited her setting's openness.

> *The society judge a school from the way it looks! So, if the school is large, has luxurious buildings and has an intensive English language course, it will attract more people in the society. My school among others, however, is a small school in a rented building, even though the staff I have are well educated and qualified. I am not able to meet all society's desires, because this will create high pressure personally and financially. I stick to my values, which I cannot relinquish (PRL15O).*

PRL18R, as a private preschool leader, highlighted the relationship between the school and children's families, which sometimes became a challenge as a result of the school's top management disapproval or lack of support. She drew an example of the need for changing the flooring for children's safety, which parents had complained about. However, the top management refused, leading to loss of parents' trust in her.

PUL6F highlighted the importance of family satisfaction in such matters as the children returning from the preschool as clean as possible, although children's exploration is part of their development.

4.3.1.2 Home care

Extending the home-school relationship issue, since children's families have a vital role in the success of their child's learning and development, seven participants considered home care and family social class a challenge.

PRL15O mentioned a lack of parental support to follow up and support children's learning and development at home. Similarly, PRL20T referred to families' lack of response as a result of relying solely on the preschool and neglecting their role in supporting children's learning. Equally, PRL21U agreed that she lacked family cooperation, which not only influenced children's learning and development but also the preschool's ambition and vision.

PUL4D, however, suggested that being in a deprived area of the city, she faced a lack of family awareness about ECE and special educational needs (SEN), which was a concern as some children had special learning difficulties. Such poor awareness resulted in poor child

homecare. The importance of home-school cooperation to support children's learning and development was also highlighted by PRL19S. She drew an example of a three-year old boy who had speaking difficulties, which were solved through home-school cooperation. PUL6F and PUL9I, however, highlighted children's behavioural problems, which were in some cases caused by the home environment. PUL6F said she supported the child in such a case through working with the family to overcome such a problem, by allowing the child's key worker to raise the family's awareness of their role at home and providing solutions, respecting their anonymity.

As hers was a university attached preschool, PUL6F also consulted specialists from the ECE and SEN departments if needed. PUL9I reported the danger caused by housemaids, who take care of children and sometimes are the closest to children. She thought this became a danger if the role of parents in raising their child was neglected, when the child could be influenced by the housemaid's faith, beliefs and values, which may contradict Islamic values.

4.3.1.3 Social commitments

PUL4D mentioned social commitments as a challenge, for example, family, social events and visits, especially if they last until late at night. She stated, "*The most important aspect for being comfortable in your work is your family life. Another challenge is coming to work in the morning tired because of attending social events. You will do your work but still it is considered as a challenge" (PS).*

4.3.1.4 Society underestimating ECE teachers

Four leaders PRL18R, PRL20T, PUL6F and PUL9I mentioned that the society's perception about early years practitioners (EYPs) is a challenge, as they undervalue their role. According to PRL18R, "*My staff are not seen by the society as practitioners but as child carers. Yet, they have dignity and each has her level of education and qualification*". PUL6F gave an example of a mother, years ago; "*A mother said to an EYP in our setting, it would be better for you if you completed your studies rather than this toil babysitting".*

4.3.2 Top management of the school

25% of the sample (6 out of 23) highlighted issues related to the top management of the school. Indicative examples were such as the owner's lack of understanding ECE needs and requirements, conflict of the owner's interests and ECE provision, having multiple leadership (leader allocated by the MoE and a deputy head allocated by the owner), and the leader/manager relationship issues.

PRL14N, as a leader of a private preschool, said that the interest of the owner of the setting

was financial more than educational. She highlighted the importance of the owner understanding and appreciating the means of ECE. The last owner of this setting was a trader, and did not have an understanding of education, but invested in the school in the expectation of profit. She stated that, "O*ne of the biggest challenges we face is that the owner does not understand and appreciate the needs of ECE and thus, he does not support us financially as needed"* (PRL14N).

Not only the issue of conflict of interest between the preschool leader and the owner, but also having multiple leadership within such context. Allocated a leader by the MoE to follow its regulations while a deputy head following the owners resulted in confusion, conflict and sensitive relationship between the leader and the deputy head, which in turn influenced the quality of everyday life of the school.

4.3.3 Staff

Ten participants stated various challenges regarding staff, among them PUL5E, who declared that the limited number of staff in her setting created challenges for a successful preschool setting, as roles and responsivities were shared among staff. Also, PRL18R reported a lack of staff, which created pressure on her as it imposed several duties on her. PUL2B summarized and explained such challenges when she complained about "*the MoE lack of coordination"* and agreed that *"there is lack of teachers in some preschools and a surplus in other as a result of lack of open communication with the MoE*". Therefore, the results revealed that lack of open communication and coordination between preschool leaders and the Ministry of Education affect the early years setting.

Cooperation among the staff themselves was highlighted by PRL22V. She emphasised the importance of practitioners' cooperation among each other and with the leader. The challenge PRL22V faced was resistance from some staff, which resulted in her frustration, as it influenced the preschool progression. PRL21U added, "*The challenge is when we have practitioners resisting the school's policies, this affects school progression, her colleagues, the management and even the children*". This could be explained as a communication problem between the leader and her staff, as discussed in the analysis of the first research question.

PRL23W highlighted a number of other obstacles she faced as a leader in a private preschool.

> *and as the leader you can't hesitate to do anything.You need to be ready to bring coffee for someone that stops by and not wait for us to call one of the cleaning staff from downstairs to get something, just walk in and get a bottle of water and bring it to the person who's with you. I don't need to call someone to have them come up to bring a bottle of water* (PRL23W).

In terms of staff, PRL23W noted that *"training is a continuous challenge"*. She also considered time to be another obstacle, because training is a lengthy process. By this she meant that staff take time to perfect the skills they have learnt, "*because in reality people need time to practise a skill and then develop the skill and perfect it*" PRL23W. She was concerned about a number of issues associated with the training, such as efforts, coaching, the training and the follow up. She added,

> *and in fairness to them also they need some time to understand the training, to apply the training, to develop their skills. So all of these are challenges. Then how to fairly assess the quality of the progress that your staff or your students are making. Not to say that it's an obstacle but documentation and assessment are critical and extremely important, but they're also extremely time consuming (PRL23W).*

4.3.4 Ministry of Education

Several issues that were related to the MoE were raised by ECE leaders. The centralisation of decision making was seen as a barrier for preschools' effectiveness, and to challenge their progression. Challenges that face leaders include policies and regulations, supervision and policy makers, bureaucracy, centralisation, lack of anatomy of headteachers and outdated policies.

4.3.4.1 MoE supervision

Supervision in Saudi schools is carried out through regional offices, which are connected to a main office, where a number of superintendents evaluate and record the settings' progress according to the MoE standards. For most ECE leaders, superintendents represent the MoE.

A number of interviewees highlighted issues like the absence and lack of continuity of superintendents. PRL19S, for instance, was disappointed by the absence of the newly appointed superintendent for her school, to evaluate her setting and evaluate practitioners, especially those who were leaving and needed a certificate to confirm their experience. PUL3C echoed the absence of superintendents' support when needed, which led to her seeking advice from the main office.

PRL18R emphasised the issue of lack of continuity of superintendents, which resulted in changes in interpretations of policies and regulations. According to PRL18R, "*Each superintendent brings a new policy with her!*". Further, regarding policy and policy implementation PRL12L stated that MoE superintendents are centralised and given excessive power. As she stated, "*To the extent that the policy has to be implemented as it is. But it is not as a holy book, so there is no reason why we should have to accept it as it is!"*

In order to gain the best support and appreciation, PUL2B believed that ECE superintendents need to have knowledge about the ECE field in general because, although knowledgeable in

their specialist area, they do not necessarily have an ECE qualification.

4.3.4.2 Policies

4.3.4.2.1 *Bureaucracy*

When PRL12L's setting moved under the supervision of the MoE, she experienced limitations to her creativity. For example, she had to follow a daily routine such as written reports and therefore, there was no chance for creativity and innovation.

PUL5E stated that change in policy-makers (at ministerial level) influenced ECE settings, because each has different perceptions, aims and values.

PUL6F and PUL9I reported their concern about the MoE's sudden changes in policies and regulation during the academic year, which they were expected to implement immediately. For example, PUL9I stated that the MoE had created a new strategy called the Noor Project to enhance families' involvement in children's learning, where parents can log online to follow up. However, she said, "*It is a wonderful idea but (1) they asked us for an immediate implementation in the middle of the year, and (2) without providing resources (computers) to support that project in practice (PUL9I).*

Difficulty or inappropriateness of ministry policies was attributed to lack of leaders' professional input into decision-making. For example, PUL2B, as a public preschool leader, suggested that for children's smooth transition to primary education, their classes should be in the same building, to share resources. She said, "*In designing our building, which built was for the purpose of ECE, I would create two primary classes and pupils would share the playground. However, they have never consulted me!*". This indicates the lack of teachers'/headteachers' participation in policy-making, so policies are not informed by understanding of day-to-day realities. Another indicative example of the lack of participation in decision-making is that PUL7G was very concerned about leaders' effective role in contributing to policy making. She saw herself as the closest to the setting's learning environment and thus an expert in the field. Nevertheless, her voice as a leader was not heard/considered when policy was reviewed and formulated. Instead, reliance was placed on international experts and academics, who are far removed from daily practice.

Centralisation in policy resulted in leaders' failure to implement it correctly, despite their awareness. PRL13M, for example, accepted money from families and planned educational trips for children, while trips were not permitted by the MoE. Despite ministerial bureaucracy and headteachers' lack of "voice", some of them are trying to exercise autonomy.

4.3.4.2.2 Different places to take permits from

Two participants agreed that obtaining responses to administrative inquiries from different departments is time consuming and one of the most the influential challenges they face.

PRL20T, as a private preschool leader, stated that

> *The number one challenge for me is government departments. It is too much to spend three days running from one department to another to complete an inquiry in order to get a permit. We have six to seven sectors that we need permits from, for example, Riyadh Municipality, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Labour… there are not enough services support you; e.g. if I need more staff, they ask me to find out for myself (PRL20T).*

PULTB stated, "*There are two different offices that my setting is connected to for inspection, reports and support. But they lack communication with each other, so I am torn between them"*.

4.3.4.2.3 Lack of ECE sector-specific policies

Three leaders; PUL6F, PUL9I, PUL7G, agreed that despite the fact that ECE as a sector has its own department and its own leadership in the MoE, ECE is undervalued, for the reason that policies and regulations such as staff annual holidays and resources, and their applications, have been designed for the primary stage and beyond, but not specifically for the ECE sector, despite the various differences between ECE and other grades in such as examinations and exam periods. They believed such circumstances have a negative influence on leaders and teachers' performance and passion about their work.

Besides, they agreed that the MoE consults experts and academics in the field of ECE to set and improve strategies but leaders and teachers in the actual field are excluded. Leaders believed that the MoE's huge efforts, budget allocated and trust in their consultants had not benefited ECE in practice. Leaders considered themselves and their staff as the closest to the nature and needs of practical ECE in general and children in particular. They believed that their exclusion would result in inadequate strategies, or challenges in implementing them. For these reasons they agreed that they and teachers felt undervalued and disregarded.

4.3.4.2.4 Curriculum

PRL14N, as a private preschool leader stated that,

> *From my experience, the Saudi market now has achieved only 40% of the MoE's desired educational goals. The trend now has turned to international schools, but that does not mean I must forget my culture and religion or become an international school, but we should actually develop our level up to their level. Compared to private schools, whether international schools are managed by Arabs or not, they have ethical concerns. Private schools do not have that; however, they are weak in learning outcomes. It's not only that, which made us fall back, but also, working on the perception that as long as the pupil pays, he will get a certificate, regardless of his level. That is why some children have low levels in reading and writing (PRL14N).*

PRL12L drew an example of one of the challenges her school faced with the MoE curriculum, which was developed around 30 years ago, and had not developed with the rapidly

changing 21th century. As she stated, "*We were under investigation for introducing the IPad as part of enhancing children's learning, despite that it is not against the religion or social values"(PRL12L).*

4.3.4.2.5 Written reports

Five participants discussed the aspect of written reports. PUL5E and PUL7G reported that policies that limit their freedom, such as the routine and written documentations and reports, were considered as challenging issues.

PRL14N and PUL6F agreed, and noted that the MoE's sudden policy changes increased the burden in this respect. For example, the report files were changed in the middle of the year and the setting was asked to fill the new reports for the whole year. PRL20T complained that "*written documents required by the MoE take a long time*"

> *In early years. My goodness, you could write everything down that a child says, or every time they sneeze, cough, don't feel well, if we wrote every single time they had a stomach ache or didn't feel well, you'd spend half your day just writing down (PRL23W).*

4.3.4.2.6 Children's Transition from ECE – Primary

Three of the participants considered children's transition as an issue they faced.

PRL14N perceived that there is a gap between ECE and primary education in terms of pedagogy. ECE applies learning through play, whereas primary education is based more on didactic learning and focuses on reading and writing skills. According to KF,

> *I believe that the ECE programme is futile, especially Kindergarten 3 (KG3). Just before their primary education, this group needs a didactic way of learning & teaching, so pupils can read, pronounce and write the alphabets well. The problem we have in primary education is that year one's Arabic language book is very hard, so once the pupil passes the first term successfully and gains literacy skills, he/she will be OK. But if they do not, they will remain weak in such skills (PRL14N).*

PRL13M, however, stated that she assigned her best teachers for this group of children (KG3) in order to "*practise literacy skills and some of them leave their ECE with appropriate reading skills and are distinct from their group as a result of ECE*" (PRL13M).

PUL2B suggested that for successful transition, preschool and early primary education classes should be in the same building. She stated,

> *Many people have said before and I say that again, children in the ECE have freedom and flexibility, so they may face a stiff transfer to primary. But it could be easier if their classes are in the same building and we focus on their literacy skills, provide bigger tables and give them the freedom and love that help them to shift gradually from ECE. Our nursery is different than other ones in the sense that it was set up specifically for ECE and we have large space available, so we could add two primary classes, but what works for me may not work for others (PUL2B).*

She drew an example of the way the UK eases the transition from ECE to primary education

by having a year in between, called "reception", which is preparatory to the school environment and promotes reading and writing skills.

4.3.5 *Financial challenges*

Another challenge highlighted by ten participants was financial issues. They considered these as a challenge for effective early years setting management and leadership.

Although PRL22V leads a private ECE setting, she faced financial challenges as funds were insufficient. PRL14N as well as PRL13M also faced financial challenges. As these are private institutions, they relied on the owners of these settings to fully financially support and appreciate the needs of the educational settings. PRL14N said, "O*ne of the biggest challenges we face is that the owner does not understand and appreciate the needs of ECE and thus, he does not support us financially as needed*". Elsewhere she added,

> *The aim of the owner of this setting is different than mine. He has financial objectives whereas my aim is educational and pedagogical. Schools should not be bought by non-pedagogically educated owners. This preschool was owned by educationalist, then by a military man, which was fine, and now it's owned by a real estate man, who has closed six classes and opened entrances to them from outside the building for grocery and other shops. It is not safe anymore for our children… An education project is very profitable but the thing is, it is a responsibility (*PRL14N*).*

PRL18R, another private preschool leader, highlighted the difficulty of providing children with various activities and services with limited financial support. She believed that ECE has a particular need for cognitive and discovery toys, raw materials, playgrounds, special parties and activities. Such services require a supportive budget.

The results also show that not only private preschools face a lack of financial support but so do public once, despite the funds provided by the MoE for ECE. In this regard, PRL12L and PUL3C mentioned that the financial support allocated is insufficient for meeting all children's services and needs. PUL3C stated,

> *We provide children with a variety of services such as playgrounds and their maintenance, cognitive toys, stories, water in each class. The MoE funds are not enough for providing all these services. They need to solve this, increase that fund and provide full maintenance for schools, which we lack (PUL3C).*

Nevertheless, she had taken immediate action to resolve this difficulty, whereby she and the staff willingly financially contributed and shared manpower (housemaids for cleaning duties) and resources. Regarding school maintenance, she was disappointed by the lack of MoE support for children's and staff's safety. Despite several communications asking for repair of the outdoor play area canopy, which was on the verge of collapse, no action was taken and they had to repair it themselves, after it fell down, "*I am thankful it fel down at night when none of*

us was here!" (PUL3C).

On the other hand, however, PUL4D was content with the MoE funding for all the basic essential resources, such as "*classroom furniture, workshops, resources and financial support each term*" (PUL4D). Yet, she faced financial challenges as she strove for creativity and innovation. According to PUL4D,

> *For those who like to keep creativity and continuous improvement, more funds are needed. But the Ministry may consider that as unnecessary. I have for example, a playground for children's cars and bikes which needs a huge amount of money to get it done, as one bike is expensive. Up to now we have been unable to complete that section because of lack of funds (PUL4D).*

PUL4D also echoed PUL3C's point about experiencing lack of building maintenance, reflected in such problems as cracked walls and uncovered electrical cables. Therefore, she too managed to face these challenges by solving them through her own personal efforts, to avoid any damage. She added,

> *…not only is the emergency door small, but also if you open it is a disaster, you will find a big hole! When reported it to the Buildings and Emergency Affairs, the one responsible visited us and he was shocked and reassured us but he did not take any action! Only when we are on fire, will they take action (PUL4D).*

The issues of buildings and maintenance were also highlighted by other public preschool leaders; PUL6F and PUL91. PUL6F for example, declared that her building is not an ECE building but an old university building that she had been working on for years, to equip it for children.

Moreover, PUL5E, who represented a public preschool and the only ECE training centre in Riyadh, mentioned that at the establishment of her setting, 27 years ago, they had been funded for training but this was stopped 19 years ago. Although it is a public setting, families pay for their children's services, such as meals, toys, playgrounds and trips. She stated, *"The MoE does not allocate funds for the training we offer, which is considered as a financial challenge that we face because it requires paper, printing and binding; how should I pay for all these?"(PUL5E).* Table 10 below present indicative examples of the challenges leaders face.

4.4 Leadership behaviour

In order to explore whether pedagogical leadership is enacted in preschools in Saudi, leaders' behaviour was examined by asking them related open-ended questions. This section discusses whether pedagogical leadership is enacted in Saudi ECE context and the way it is enacted.

It appears that a number of leadership behaviours enacted by the participants were compatible with the notion of pedagogical leadership. This means that pedagogical leadership is enacted in ECE in Saudi and those headteachers could be called 'pedagogical leaders'. The results show that a number of leadership behaviour aspects have been enacted in the KSA's ECE. Among them were, leader's role and leadership qualities. This section discusses leader's role and leadership behaviour as followed:

- Leader's role
  - Creating a safe atmosphere
  - Power
  - Decision making
- Leadership qualities
  - Flexibility and cooperation
  - Personality
  - Positive energy
  - Prophet Mohammad's morals
  - Skills required from leadership
  - Professionalism
  - Sacrificing health

4.4.1 Leader's role

The role of a leader was discussed by the participants, and they offered examples such as creating a safe, trusted atmosphere, building harmony and understanding the feelings of staff. Other examples were the power to make firm decisions about putting children's needs first, showing appreciation of staff and having a clear shared vision. The skills that the leader builds from the leadership experience will be discussed next.

4.4.1.1 Creating a safe, protective, trusted atmosphere

Eighteen interviewees highlighted aspects related to the environment headteachers provide to their staff. They supported the creation of a safe, open, trusting atmosphere, where teachers can flourish, in order to establish the best learning environment for children, families and the community. The examples below illustrate these aspects.

A number of factors appear to influence the atmosphere that headteachers create in their settings. Examples are illustrated below according to the participants' responses.

Examples show that headteachers focus on their staff's emotional states and support them by demonstrating the importance of assurance, motivation and inspiration in order to create a safe, trusted and protective environment.

> *You're always gauging that your staff members know what they need to be doing, they're aware of their responsibilities and how to meet them or achieve them, and you're just generally trying to gauge are they feeling a bit sick today or off, thank them for coming in, I can tell that they're a little bit under the weather and showing your appreciation that they came in anyway…*
>
> *You want people to feel good and supported and know what they are required to do, then they feel less stressed, they feel responsible for their job, they don't want to not complete it and not be part of the team. So these are external factors. I'm trying to have the staff feel positive and have effective days in the classroom* (PRL23W).

PRL23W showed her behaviour towards motivating and inspiring her staff after assessing their emotional state. She also ensured their awareness of their roles and responsibilities. Regarding the way that she created such a caring environment and assessing the staff's emotional status, she focused on the language she used with her staff as she stated,

> *I guess the how is just simply me adjusting what I say at morning meetings, or the topics I choose based on how the teaching staff seem to be feeling that day. Do they need a boost? So am I going to give a positive comment from a parent that I heard, or a Twitter? Or sometimes give yourself a pat on the back for such and such. So how? Do I give the staff positive feedback? Do I tell them to give themselves a pat on the back? That would be how I would directly behave in order to address the why of where they are emotionally in their thought process that day (PRL23W).*

The way the headteacher perceives her staff and appreciates their efforts helps in creating a caring environment:

> *I think that the teaching staff really made our preschool proud for their attendance and behaviour and their contribution during the presentation, comments that teachers made, and I think it was a great team effort and success* (PRL23W).

Another example about the atmosphere created by headteachers is PRL11K being flexible and cooperative when staff were ill. She focused on providing a "*family atmosphere and spreading the smile*" (PRL11K). 'Family atmosphere' was also highlighted by other headteachers. From their perspectives, it is a happy, friendly and comfortable atmosphere.

Also, PUL4D described her staff as a "*fantastic cooperative team; they have shared goals and always willing to improve. I have no boundaries, they feel free and no one stops them*" (PUL4D).

PUL6F maintained that a family atmosphere and harmony dominated her setting. She stated, "*This atmosphere motivates you to work with them, despite the large number of children and staff with different qualifications and experiences, so my role is to balance that*" (PUL6F). Moreover, as a result of family atmosphere within PUL9I's setting, staff support each other even outside the school environment.

PRL21U believed that being positive as a headteacher, and early preparation and planning for the academic year, would help in creating a comfortable atmosphere.

Also, PRL12L mentioned that, besides the importance of having willing staff, it is important to provide them with training, psychological and financial comfort. She explained that "*the more their work is excellent, the more financial return and the more they are satisfied*" (PRL12L).

A comfortable atmosphere was also highlighted by PUL2B's. Her first goals in her leadership are success and increased productivity by creating a comfortable atmosphere, by fairness and job security, in order to increase productivity and success. She told her staff, "*You are this place's master*s" PUL2B. She also highlighted the importance of providing a comfortable atmosphere. PRL22V added, "*The teacher is the most important. When she is comfortable she will be productive and creative"* (PRL22V). These headteachers demonstrate the notion of pedagogical leadership by motivating their teaching staff to lead.

Not only can a comfortable and supportive atmosphere created by headteacher be influential, but also the ethos set by the top management of the bigger school. PRL16P, as a part of a bigger school, described the top management as "*patient, smooth and open minded*". She then described her behaviour as to "*try to spread the spirit of tranquility to face obstacles that staff face and solve them together"* (PRL16P). Therefore, she described the atmosphere in her setting as a happy atmosphere. It seems that the behaviour of the top management could have influenced PRL16P's behaviour with her staff, in order to create a happy healthy environment. PRL18R, also as a part of a bigger school, described her setting as the happiest in the school, characterized by a strong friendship atmosphere. She showed her commitment and determination by stating, "*Work is work, so if something needs attention I would bring it up with the staff*" (PRL18R). Depending on the relationship between the headteahcer and top management of the school, some headteachers considered the top management a source of problems, which influenced their decision- making. For instance, PRL18R, having had an unstable, conflicted relationship with the top management, preferred to solve problems she face without their involvement. Contrary to PRL16P, PRL18R avoided raising her setting's problems to the top management, as she preferred to solve them within her preschool setting. It appears that, even though, as a headteacher of her setting, her relationship with the top management was unstable, she maintained the best environment possible in her setting by building a friendly and happy environment.

PRL19S said, regardless of her feelings and mood from day to day, she ensured the best educational and comfortable environment for teachers and children. She provided an example of the "*great team we have; they have a sense of responsibility by taking the initiative to provide suggestions for problems, thus, being an effective part of problem solving*" (PRL19S), they supported each other when needed, and shared thoughts and resources in creating the educational environment for children and each one was well aware of her responsibilities. She believed, therefore, they were happy and comfortable, as she treated them equally and supported the spirit of teamwork and creativity. This demonstrates the important role headteachers play in supporting their staff and its effect. Showing understanding and appreciation was also highlighted as,

> *Acknowledging the staff dedication to their job is meaningful to them and hopefully lowers attendance or their lack of attendance even when they're feeling sick. It makes them feel, 'Okay they appreciate that I came in even when I'm not feeling well'* (PRL23W).

The next participant, PRL17Q, highlighted traits leaders should have and suggested steps in order to build a trusting, caring and successful environment. The traits she mentioned were transparency, caring, fairness, openness to others' suggestions, a good listener and a role model. She perceived that these traits would lead to mutual trust, thereby, building respect, and thus, a successful preschool setting.

PRL23W highlighted her awareness of the way she approaches her staff by stating, *"the how is just simply me adjusting what I say at morning meetings".*

PRL19S strengthened the relationship between parents and teachers in order to support children's learning and development. She mentioned that since the teacher is the closest to the child's developmental process, she gives advice to the child's family and "*sometimes moms come to the teacher and ask for her support to help the child get rid of certain behaviour*" (PRL19S). In this way, this headteacher was supporting the ecology of the community by encouraging the synergy of their relationship.

In relation to the practitioner's role as a part of that environment, PRL19S highlighted the aspect of recognition of ECE teachers' experience. She mentioned that the superintendent refused to approve the job title, as an ECE teacher, for one teacher because she was a Learning Difficulties graduate, even though she had five years experience in ECE. PRL19S also highlighted a similar case, but with a teacher who was an Art Education graduate. She stated,

> *In my opinion, she is worth a hundred ECE graduates. I gave her the responsibility of the workshop, despite that all her experience is in ECE.*

> *At story time, if you see how she deals with the children and how stimulating she is in delivering the ideas. I am trying to find someone in the MoE to approve her job title regardless of her background, but because of her experience, because (ECE teacher) title was given to a teacher whose background was in Psychology and who had no experience. So, the priority that the Art graduate teacher has the title of ECE teacher* (PRL19S).

4.4.1.2 Power

17 out of 23 participants discussed aspects reflected power and control. An example was given by PUL7G, who used the power of her leadership position to establish a 21st century educational environment using technology. Despite the superintendent's opposition to using IPads for educational purposes, as she saw its risks to outweigh the benefits, PUL7G assigned one of her staff to download educational applications related to the themes covered in the ECE curriculum, which would facilitate learning. This example demonstrates the application of pedagogical leadership in the Saudi ECE context, when the headteacher supported children's learning and creativity for a 21st century learning environment.

Another example was shown by PRL10J when setting internal procedures based on external regulations, the MoE's. On this matter she stated, "*If we have a regulation from the government that was not applied by my staff, as a reaction I would create a punishment to avoid problems with the MoE"* (PRL10J). Nevertheless, in another instance, PRL10J mentioned that she did not apply the government regulations strictly and took into account her staff circumstances.

PUL2B, however, stressed the importance of empowering teachers as they are the most influential actors for children in the setting as they directly interact with them and support their learning and development.

PRL21U highlighted the power of "*good words*" and well-mannered behaviour in which to maintain respectful and influential relationships with others. Similarly, PRL23W highlighted the power of influence and professional behaviour in dealing with other people, as she stated, for example, "*how you speak to people, using polite greetings… they need to be able to feel like they can come to you and share and ask for advice… etc.".*

PUL1A controlled the application of the new trialled curriculum in her setting by emphasising the importance of the Arabic identity instead of strictly applying a Western curriculum in her context. For instance, she stated,

> *Since the MoE chose to try the new developed curriculum in my setting, I requested permission to add Quran and Arabic language into. I would never neglect these, even if they have different ways of delivering them. We did add them* (PUL1A).

The power of team building and making change regardless of the challenges was also cited.

According to PUL4D, despite the MoE's limited support in establishing a safe educational preschool environment, she and her team had established the best possible safe educational environment for children in a deprived area, where her setting is located. Her efforts were not limited to creating a safe learning environment, but also included reassuring awareness of the community of various aspects, such as ECE, health and safety and how to deal with life pressures. To enhance teamwork building, leaders valued creating a clear shared vision, according to PRL23W, *"We certainly promote that everybody should be working hard, that everybody has responsibilities and that they need to meet those responsibilities"*.

This example indicates the powerful role ECE leaders can take in the Saudi context by establishing the best possible environment for children and families according to their needs, notwithstanding the external challenges those leaders may face. It also shows the notion of the ecology of the community by supporting interaction and sharing knowledge with the community.

4.4.1.3 Decision making

Decision making is seen as a part of leadership role. Indicative examples have been discussed in section 4.2.2.2 as a factor that influences pedagogical leadership. The results show decision making processes have been taken by leaders such as operational; day to day decisions, as well as strategic decisions such as the involvement of policy development.

Another example was taking account of the community's needs when making decisions according to PUL1A, "*When making decisions, you have to be aware of your school's community's, families and teachers, social class"*. Also, putting rules to ensure the smooth run of everyday schedule was part of the leader's role and decision making, as stated,

> *In admin you have to expect people to meet deadlines, follow schedules and produce the work that needs to be done. The best way to do that is do all those things yourself, stay on the schedule, don't just make the rules for others and be above them. A lot of educational leaders want to make sure everybody else is following the rules, but not me, I made the rules so I can tweak them for myself. And that's doesn't work. You have to talk the talk and then you have to walk the walk, it's a combination of the two* (PRL23W).

4.4.2 Leadership qualities

A number of leadership qualities were identified by the participants in this research. Some of these were discussed in section 4.2 above. This section adds to those factors that influence leadership and presents the results here as a part of leadership behaviour. The results show that leadership behaviour is influenced by leadership qualities. Among these qualities are the flexibility and cooperation with the staff advocated by the leader, power, the positive energy

that the leader creates, the leader's personality, the influence of the prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) morals as a part of Islamic values and sacrificing your health for the sake of the school's success. Section 5.3.4 in the next chapter will discuss the key qualities of leadership behaviour in the KSA.

4.4.2.1 Flexibility and cooperation

Flexibility and cooperation in creating a safe and loving environment were discussed by fifteen participants. They provided examples of flexibility and cooperation and how that influenced their setting atmosphere. For instance, PRL23W described her understanding and openness to staff, stating,

> *… We also have a very open transparent atmosphere, if you have a problem please come and share your frustrations or your challenges, and let's try to brainstorm or think of ways to solve them (PRL23W).*

PRL11K mentioned that as a result of flexibility, support, and understanding staff's needs and providing comfortable environment, her setting had a very low rate of teachers' absences, whereas absenteeism was considered as an issue for other headteachers, as discussed above in section on the challenges that face leaders.

PUL4D stated another level of flexibility and cooperation that created a comfortable workplace 'without restrictions'. That was the support, openness, and flexibility she experienced from one of the MoE superintendents. Therefore, not only flexibility and cooperation between headteacher and teachers would influence the setting's atmosphere, but also that between superintendent and headteacher.

4.4.2.2 Personality

Eight participants highlighted leadership qualities that were related to the leader's personality. An indicative example, PRL17Q stated that

> *A successful leader is a socially successful person. Unfortunately, being socially successful is not easy. You have to try and exercise different skills and have a high degree of wisdom/being wise as well as putting yourself on other people's shoes. For example, how do you deal with strained parents or teachers when they come to you?*

Being socially successful, understanding people situations and needs, and being wise were highlighted here as leadership qualities that are embedded in the leader's personality.

4.4.2.3 Positive energy

14 participants discussed the role of creating a positive energy in the success of the setting and to establish a happy culture in the school. Examples highlighted such as PRL23W, when she concluded that, *I like to think that we have a very positive work culture in the school"* (PRL23W).

Also, PRL21U believed that dealing nicely with parents, children and staff would enhance positivity in her setting. She perceived that as in compliance with the Prophet Mohammad's method of dealing with people, which will be discussed next.

4.4.2.4 Prophet Mohammad's morals – religion

PRL17Q modelled her behaviour on the example of the prophet Mohammad PBUH, and she described what this meant in terms of her personal values:

> *I believe in the principle that you 'treat others the way you would like to be treated'. If I am transparent, fair and trustworthy, others will be too. What I accept for myself I accept for others and what I do not accept for myself I do not for others too. I have a very strong philosophy in my work, which is that before being a leader I am a mother. My character as a leader is my character as a mother. My usual statement in all my meetings that I pass to my staff is: "what I would like for my own children, I would like for other people's children"* (PRL17Q).

She not only discussed reciprocal tolerance, but also the importance of being a role model as a leader of her setting. In this regard, she stated, "*It is impossible to ask the teacher to do something I would not do*" (PRL17Q).

Moreover, PRL21U brought the Prophet Mohammad's traits into practice by encouraging children to learn and implement varied traits such as smiling and taking initiatives in order to build their knowledge.

PRL21U's behaviour with her staff, children and parents was also influenced by the Prophet's (pbuh). She stated, "*Being strict in treating people alienates them, whereas good words attract everyone. This is one of our values that we follow and is in compliance with the Prophet (pbuh)"* (PRL21U).

Another illustrative example for the influence of religion on headteachers' behaviour is that of PUL1A. She believed that good manners are crucially important for a healthy relationship with others. Quoting the Prophet's (pbuh) saying, she stated, "*You will not own people with your wealth but with your good morals*". She added,

> *The first thing placed in your scale in the day of resurrection is your good morals… I have discovered that whenever you behave in a good manner and deal with others in light of the Islamic moral values, you own people, even your enemies* (PUL1A).

PRL17Q also highlighted the sense of responsibility and accountability underpinned by the Islamic faith. She believed that the more the staff develop such senses, the stronger self-conscience and self-discipline they will have, thus there will be no absenteeism, as in the following comment:

> *I believe that if the person has faith on God, knows that he/she is accountable, because everything they do and say is recorded, they will not fear from a leader, manager or anyone but God. It actually generates a degree of self-conscience, sincerity and honesty* (PRL17Q).

Sincerity and generosity at the workplace were also discussed by PUL4D. She added,

> *Your sincerity and putting God in front of your eye, means that everything you do is blessed. So your money that you spend in your setting is blessed, I will not claim that money back, because I am not doing that to please people, but God* (PUL4D)

As another example of leadership behaviour towards other people, PUL4D paid attention to the mental and emotional state of the staff by "*understanding staff's psychological needs"*. She also declared her concern for dealing with others and how she strove to avoid treating others unequally, when she emphasised equality and fairness. Therefore, she explained, she offered supplication every morning to ensure equality:

> *I pray: "O Allah, I take refuge with You lest I should stray or be led astray, or slip or be tripped, or oppress or be oppressed, or behave foolishly or treated foolishly". You have to deal with people carefully and never strip their rights* (PUL4D).

In terms of understanding others, PRL17Q stated that, "*you need to put yourself in other people's position to understand theirs*", also she emphasised the importance of being a role model when she stated, "*I am a principle that I do not ask someone to do something if I do not do it*" (PRL17Q).

4.4.2.5 Skills acquired from leadership experience

Two leaders highlighted the rich experience of leadership that allowed them to acquire leadership skills such as wisdom. For example, PUL1A discussed the skills required for a successful leader, such as being wise and persuasive, as stated,

> *Over 20 years experience, I have not had obstacles with the MoE that I could not face. In politics, you have to be wise and never confront others from the first instant, reply leniently… if they are not convinced, ask them for some time to try what you are intending to do. Show them that you are value them and learning from them. You then give them your successful experience by proving your success. It basically depends on your cleverness in persuading* (PUL1A).

PUL1A headteacher's preschool was chosen by the MoE as an excellent preschool; thus, it was chosen to participate in trialling the new ECE curriculum. PRL17Q also agreed on the importance of being wise as a successful leader and added being socially active and understanding, "*putting yourself in others' shoes*" (PRL17Q).

Other skills acquired from the leadership experience were highlighted by PRL17Q mentioned that over 11 years her leadership experience had boosted her communication skills with others, as a result of dealing with so many personalities.

4.4.2.6 Professionalism

The term "professional" was clearly identified by PRL23W, who saw it as,

> *You have to be behaviour wise a role model to all of your staff of professionalism, you have to be a role model dedicated to children and how to value children and respect them… and you have to expect that behaviour from your staff if you want to have high quality classroom…*
>
> *My behaviour is gauged by my personal perceptions of what is important as a leader in a team in any environment. So you're talking about the level of professionalism that you exhibit in front of all of your staff, so that's how you speak to your staff, what topics you speak about to everybody in a group and what you call people in to discuss privately and confidentially. It is how I conduct myself in the sense of coming in on time, rarely if ever being absent, following through on what I say I'm going to do for them or for the kids, or to repair something that's broken. When you're talking about a leadership role you're talking about your behaviour toward everyone else, you're talking about your professionalism and how well and seriously you take your job…*
>
> *In everything that you do as a leader in an environment. You're the role model, you set the standard for professionalism in the whole building, and that means you have to have an understanding of what is the quality level of professionalism you're trying to achieve, and then you need to make your environment look like that* (PRL23W).

Being professional, from her perspective, is concluded in aspects such as the leader's believes and perception of leadership role, being a role model, and respecting and valuing people.

Despite other leaders did not state the word professional, they have indicated professional leadership behavior. For example, PRL21U as discussed above in the Prophet Mohammad's section, the way that she dealt with her community, being courteous and respectful in speaking to others.

4.4.2.7 Sacrificing health for the sake of the school's success

An indicative example of leaders who has been sacrificing their health in order to ensure their setting's success was PRL17Q, who highlighted a number of qualities that leaders should possess. She stated:

> *In Arab countries leaders believe that they have to be respected. But there are steps to gain people's respect. Leaders need to manage people carefully. Their relationship needs to be loving, needs to be transparent, into consideration take equality/fairness into consideration. If you have these qualities and the staff see you practicing them, you will gain their trust and then their respect will be built spontaneously and consequently*

> *the success of the place you are in. When you enter your work place, you put aims/goals to reach. You won't be able to achieve this alone, I have to earn people's trust/respect/loyalty so that they are self-motivated but not forced to achieve the shared goals. When you enter such environment/field, staff conscience becomes stronger towards their work. No one wants to be absent, everyone is there; feeling of responsibility. I have a principle that I do not ask someone to do something if I do not do it. Of course, in order for these steps work well, you need to build a teamwork culture, your door have to be always open, take account of other staff views and at the end as a leader you take the best suited views and the same time you need to listen more because the differences in people perceptions will add to you a lot of information (PRL17Q).*

4.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the results of the study. It discussed three main themes from the Saudi preschool leaders' perspective, pedagogical factors, the key challenges that face leaders and leadership behaviour. In order to explore how pedagogical leadership is practiced in Saudi preschools, leaders' perspectives and experiences were examined by asking them related, open-ended questions. It appears that a number of leadership attitudes held and put into practice by the participants were compatible with the notion of pedagogical leadership. This means that pedagogical leadership is evident in Saudi ECE, and those leaders could be called 'pedagogical leaders'. Although there seem to be significant differences between Western and non-Western contexts, the results of this research show that no major differences exist between the Western literature and the Saudi context.

5 Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The ECE context is different from any other educational context because it requires a very close synergistic relationship with the child, the school community and the local community. ECE requires leaders who can engage in hands-on practice, build close connections to children, develop great relationships, foster strong community involvement and take risks to achieve the highest learning potentials for the 21st-century learning environment. Indeed, it requires a pedagogical leader who combines her/his pedagogical knowledge with leadership competencies, directly communicating with individual children. It also requires a leader who is emotionally intelligent and diplomatic in handling social relationships: a leader who cultivates a positive, inspirational and motivational culture leading towards a clear shared vision. An ECE leader should be a celebrant of success, transparent, a creative thinker, an improvement-seeker and capable of empowering staff to lead and own their practice and supporting their professional development to build a competent team. Such a leader should prefer take actions based on each situation rather than following a rigid leadership model that could be inappropriate for certain circumstances.

An ideal learning context is one in which children build lifelong learning skills that shape their personalities. It requires 21st-century learning environment that transcends academic development, promoting the long-term development of the whole child: a holistic approach, in which the leader's role is to facilitate, support and inspire others.

This chapter discusses and analyses the results presented in the previous chapter.

ECE leadership:

> *Internationally, ECLs are expected to drive quality improvement through mentoring and modelling: a concept associated with distributive leadership. However, ECLs often move into leadership positions by accident and are ill-prepared for their role (Sims et al., 2014: 1).*

Sims et al. (2014) argued that the difficulties many leaders face come from their perceptions of leadership. Many leaders follow models of leadership that could prevent them from reconceptualising their leadership role and critically evaluating the quality praxis. This standpoint confirms what has been discussed in the research theoretical framework: Leadership should be context- rather than model-dependent. Pedagogical leadership, therefore, is '*concerned with the links between desired educational outcomes and the set of social realities that surround the educational setting'* (Male and Palaiologou 2013: 228).

This research adds to existing arguments concerning the complexity of pedagogical leadership in ECE. Pedagogical leadership is shaped not only by the interaction of internal and external factors, but also by the interaction of the emerged interrelated factors and the identified challenges. This complex interaction was called contextual pedagogical leadership (CPL) to illustrate the important role of context in shaping pedagogical leadership in ECE.

5.2 Factors that influence leadership and pedagogy

Several factors appeared to influence leadership and pedagogy in Saudi Arabia. As discussed in the literature, pedagogical leadership is concerned with connecting the desired outcomes and surrounding social realities. Thus, it was important to study the factors that influence leadership.

To determine whether or how pedagogical factors influence leadership in ECE in the Saudi context, the respondents were asked to identify aspects they found influential, how and why. Several of these aspects are psychological and biological and leadership- and management-related, while others are contextual aspects of the area where leadership operates. Diagram 3 below summarises the key aspects highlighted by the participants and identifies the internal and external factors.

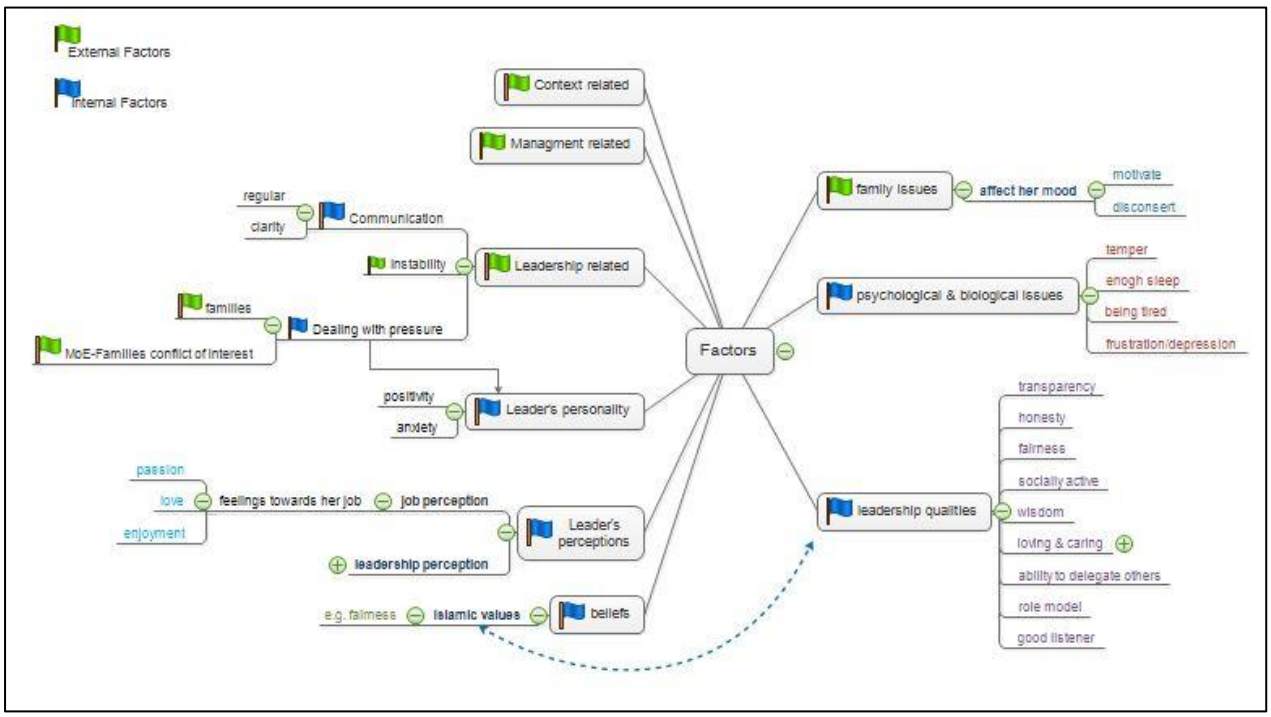


Diagram 3: Internal and external factors influencing Saudi ECE leadership

Diagram 3 evolved from the results and in-depth analysis conducted to identify the various external and internal factors that influence pre-school leaders' leadership in Saudi Arabia based on the conducted interviews. These factors can be classified as either internal or external. This section will discuss first the internal factors and then the external factors. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2017), *internal* is something '*situated or existing in the interior of something; interior'*. It also refers to something *'existing solely within the individual mind: internal malaise'*. The present study considers the following factors to be internal:

5.2.1 Internal factors:

5.2.1.1 Psychological and Biological Factors

The study found five internal factors that affect Saudi ECE leadership. Psychological and biological factors, such as temper, sleep deprivation, depression and fatigue, were reported by 3 of the 23 study participants (12%). Basic biological aspects, such as sleep and exhaustion, were also mentioned in the research results, demonstrating the relationships among leadership, psychology and biology.

According to Pilcher and Huffcut's (1996) meta-analysis, overall sleep deprivation seriously debilitates human functioning, affecting mood more than cognitive and motor performance. This may partially explain the mood changes experienced by the study participants. Furthermore, this factor has a negative impact on leadership. As Olsen et al., (2016) asserted, long-term, partial sleep deprivation has a negative influence on effective leadership behaviour.

Despite the argument that Maslow's hierarchy of needs is not necessarily applicable in some organisations or parts of the world (Jerome 2013), this study found a strong impact on the participating educational institutions. Specifically, these needs were found to directly influence leadership actions and motivation.

Approximately 60% of participants said that their leadership was affected by social, psychological, and biological factors, as well as personality, values and beliefs. Personality may include positivity and an ability to manage family issues; psychological factors include temper and depression; and biological factors include having enough sleep and anxiety. Furthermore, perceptions of leadership involve feelings towards one's job, and Islamic values, such as fairness.

5.2.1.2 Leadership qualities

Another important factor influencing leadership, as reported by the interviewees, is leadership qualities. The participants described transparency, honesty, fairness, social activism, wisdom, lovingness, caring, delegating to others, being a role model and being a good listener

as effective in building trust and gaining staff/people's respect. The strong relationship between leaders' qualities and leadership was also heavily discussed in the literature (Sylvia 1992; Solly 2003; Aubrey et al. 2013).

5.2.1.3 Leaders' personality

The interviewees stated that leaders are influenced by personality traits, such as anxiety or positivity. For example, one leader reported that work-related issues caused anxiety that affected her mood at work and even at home. This factor can be linked to the discussed psychological factor.

Another factor influencing pedagogical leadership is a positive attitude. One of the participants in this study reported that a positive attitude affected the work environment in many ways, including pre-school development, the spreading of happiness, clarity of responsibilities and systemisation. Leaders face various circumstances, and they should use them for development instead of viewing them as barriers, as one leaders described. She affected her institution through positivity by creating a stable and positive culture. This result matches the findings of Luthans (2002), who suggested a link between a leader's personality and positive attitude and organisational effectiveness. The results of this research show that personality influences leadership through leadership behaviour and decision-making. Examples highlighted by participants included aspects like emotion management, positivity and anxiety. A similar result was found by Male and Palaiologou (2013), who argued that leaders must make prudent practical decisions and actions. Hogan and Kaier (2005) extended this theory, arguing that a leader's personality can determine how an institution behaves and stating: '*personality predicts leadership—who we are is how we lead'*.

5.2.1.4 Beliefs

Beliefs are a very important factor that have also been found in other cultures and religions (Geertz 1973; Weber 1963). In the current study, 58% (14 of 23) of the research population mentioned beliefs. Specifically, participants discussed several aspects that they believed to be rooted in their Islamic beliefs.

Values are '*principles or standards of behaviour; one's judgment of what is important in life*' (Oxford Dictionary 2017). Values like fairness among staff and leaders themselves can influence how leaders behave. For example, one leader showed her religious beliefs by stating, '*I am afraid of becoming unfair when dealing with my staff, so I pray to God every morning for me to be fair with others and for others to be fair with me*'. Her beliefs influenced how she

dealt with her staff in a way that increased her sense of fairness, allowed her to serve as a role model and linked to how she hoped to be treated by others.

> *The set of beliefs and practices that is associated with the local community, as well as in the work place, can adversely reflect on the effectiveness of women leaders and their ability to exercise a positive leadership role*
> *(Al-Ahmadi, 2011: 152).*

It was not surprising, however, in a context in which every aspect of life is rooted in Islamic values and principles, to find leaders clearly explaining their behaviour by referring to their Islamic values. While some leaders clearly referred to religion, others mentioned indirectly through their discussions and justifications.

This result is compatible with many studies showing the strong impact of faith on leaders' practices (Strachan, Akao, Kilavanawa, and Warsal 2009; Striepe, Clarke and O'Donoghue 2014). Religion is seen as the process of meaning-making that guides people and gives meaning to their existence (Geertz 1973). It is also perceived as a system of beliefs and symbols (Weber 1963).

These values are confirmed in the Quran in a number of verses. For instance, the dialogue between God and the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him (PBUH), guided him to lead his people and nations through leadership qualities and values, such as eloquence, patience, forgiveness, fairness, justice, kindness, generosity and wisdom. God also commanded him to avoid indecency, wickedness and oppression. These values and sets of beliefs are embedded in Islamic and Saudi culture, and they were present in the interviewees' responses. Below are some indicative examples from the Holy Quran:

> *And talk to people with eloquence and forbearance* (The Holy Quran 2:83).
> *[O Prophet!] Show forgiveness, enjoin equity, and avoid the ignorant* (7:199).
> *Allah enjoins justice, generosity and kind treatment with kindred, and forbids indecency, wickedness and oppression* (16:90).
> *O Prophet invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and excellent admonition and discuss things with people in the best manner. Your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His Way and He knows best who rightly guided (16:125).*

The emphasis on values in Islam is shown not only in the Quran, but also in the literature. According to Jacobson (1998), an Islamic leadership perspective is emphasised through Muslims' values and principles, which guide their attitudes, codes of conduct and behaviours and lead them to the 'righteous path', not through the notion of the 'knowledge-givers' text. Moreover, Jacobson (1998) noted that an educational leader must be value-conscious. Similarly, Shah (2010) argued that, from the Islamic perspective, the basis of teaching and leading is leaders living up to a value model.

The factors that affect pedagogical leadership in Saudi Arabia are very similar to those in other cultures (e.g. Confucianism in China, Buddhism in India and Shinto in Japan) with respect to the way in which they inform leadership behaviour. Each belief is reflected in leadership behaviour and practice. Below are some relevant ideas from the literature supporting this notion.

Buddhist (McClain 2007): leadership requires characteristics like generosity, discipline, patience, joyous effort, meditation and wisdom;

Confucianism in China (Wong 2001; Tung 2003): leadership is drawn from its ideology and social values; and

Shintoism in Japan (Ono 1999): leadership power derives from the notion of family.

Thus, it seems that these factors affect Saudi and leaders from other cultures in the same way. Cultural and religious differences do not significantly change these basic factors. This finding is very interesting, as Saudi Arabia is very different from other countries in terms of the culture, religion and even gender (females only) of early school leaders.

> *The set of beliefs and practices that is associated with the local community, as well as in the work place, can adversely reflect on the effectiveness of women leaders and their ability to exercise a positive leadership role*
> *(Al-Ahmadi, 2011: 152).*

5.2.1.5 Leaders' perception

The participants' responses revealed a link between leaders' feelings towards their job and their performance (e.g. being passionate, loving and enjoying leading their setting) and leadership and pedagogy. The leaders' enthusiasm influenced how they behaved. It encouraged them to be creative and enthusiastically lead change in their settings. Among many other successful leaders, PUL4D was able to transform her preschool, which was located in a disadvantaged and poor district, to become a main source of education, health, safety and knowledge for children and their families.

As Paxson (2016) noted, *'Engagement in the work describes the positive emotion that a person attaches to the organisation… regulation of emotions and promoting ability to collaborate with others…'* (141). The emphasis on 'emotions' indicates how feelings and emotions towards the organisation and the job itself impact leaders and organisational culture. On the other hand, a negative perception of the job impacts the leader's performance and enthusiasm (O'Sullivan, 2015: 9).

5.2.2 External Factors

5.2.2.1 Leadership related factors

An indicative example of the complexity of leadership is leaders managing pressure from external factors. In this research, *managing pressure* was considered an internal aspect that influences leadership actions and is linked to the leader's personality. Pressure, however, was seen as being rooted in an external context, such as children's families, the MoE, management pressure or the conflict of interest between the MoE and families. These pressures overlap with internal factors because they are rooted in inner personality and leadership qualities. Hogan and Kaizer (2005) showed that leading under pressure is an important factor in leadership and that being tough and resolute under pressure is a short-term strength of leaders.

Leadership-related factors included *instability* in preschool leadership appointed by the MoE, which resulted in inconsistent responsibilities and unpredictable practice. This is considered an external factor because leaders are assigned by the MoE. Because of the current educational reforms, the government is constantly changing those occupying key positions in the MoE to ensure the best possible decision-makers and practice for a 21st-century education.

The Minister of Education has changed twice during the past three years. These changes have influenced the stability of all leadership levels and trickled down to the level of school leadership. They have also caused constant changes in policies and procedures. More will be discussed later in the challenges section.

Communication is considered a key influential factor in ECE leadership (Moyles 2006; O'Sullivan 2009, Clark and Murray 2012; Rodd 2013; Davis and Ryder 2016). Of the research participants, 50% (12 of 23) participants discussed successful communication with staff as a vital aspect for strong teamwork, which results in a stable, happy school environment. However, the literature has shown that a greater emphasis on communication is necessary for leadership and management. The 50% statistic is relatively low for workplaces, perhaps because Saudi culture rarely acknowledges or emphasises communication among people in the workplace.

The participants highlighted the importance of communication with staff as an influential factor. The leaders said that their ability to communicate with staff was influenced by their years of experience, such that more experience meant greater effectiveness in communication.

Many interviewees stated that both clarity and regularity of communication build a sense of responsibility among staff. Regular communication, a positive attitude, and leaders clearly

assigning each staff member responsibilities were considered important in communication. Regular and clear communication were said to result in less stress and higher responsibility. As one interviewee stated: '*then, they [practitioners] feel less stressed; they feel responsible for their job. They don't want to not complete it and not be part of the team'* (PRL23W).

The participants stated that leaders must not only clearly assign staff responsibilities, but also foster staff cooperation and willingness. Another vital aspect of communication involved showing appreciation for teachers' achievements. Two of the interviewees also focused on acknowledging positive attitudes and ignoring negative ones to reinforce positive attitudes. Some described their teams as families with respect to social communication in such matters as attending and celebrating an engagement, wedding or birth. Describing the team as a family highlights the strong relationships among team members in terms of sharing and communication, which is consistent with other research emphasising building a team culture (O'Sullivan 2009; Rodd 2013; Male and Palaiologou 2016). Communication and interaction are key aspects of pedagogical leadership. An important factor in communication is understanding of staff's psychological and emotional needs in order to understand others' positions.

According to one interviewee, a well-communicated team motto that is used to enhance team coherence is both motivational and influential. It creates team spirit and supports not only the practitioners, but also the children in achieving pedagogical excellence. A team slogan that supports self-motivation and enthusiasm in the workplace was also proposed by Shea (1990), who discussed the role of a positive school culture in the success of an educational organisation. Effective communication is achieved through regularity, clarity and a team motto. Of the seven positive controls in a leadership role identified by Shea (1990), one is controlling 'the means of communication'.

Another external factor is the type of education system. The results show that private school leaders do not have full autonomy to practice their ECE knowledge for the best of their schools' and children's needs. Instead, they are often restricted by schools' 'top management' or owners. One preschool leader (PRL12L) shared that the decision-making in her private preschool was undertaken mainly by the school's top management and was 'based solely on cost'. Another private preschool leader (PRL22V) also showed annoyance with decision-making restrictions. The results contradict Ghemrawi's (2015) conclusion concerning private school leadership in the Middle East by demonstrating that the private preschools in Saudi

Arabia are not necessarily more democratic or permissive.

Many of these external factors are also internal. For example, one of the internal factors related to a leader's personality is positivity. This factor is also related to communication in terms of positive communication messages. According to PRL23W, the key to communication with staff is a positive attitude, or trying '*to be positive most of the time to try to make any external factors seem less challenging to the staff*'.

The literature asserted that effective school leaders enhance the environment of cooperation and '*assist others to work together toward common goal*' (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003: 4).

5.2.2.2 Context related factors

The findings also revealed context-related factors in leadership. The Oxford Dictionary (2017) defines *context* as '*the set of circumstances of facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc*.' Context-related factors are either staff-related or related to the nature of ECE.

5.2.2.2.1 Staff related

Staff absenteeism influences not only the leader, who must find an alternative, but also the children. Frequent practitioner changes impact children's enthusiasm to come to school and perform learning tasks. Children often connect with their practitioners, and the appearance of new faces can be very disturbing for them. This important factor was discussed by 19 of the 24 interviewees (79%).

> *Unsatisfied teachers are more likely to contemplate leaving their position while more satisfied teachers feel more committed to the field of early childhood education*
> (Zinsser and Curby, 2014: 2).

The instability among preschool practitioners could be associated with a variety of circumstances, such as '*isolationism, perceived lack of career reward, and lack of preparation … stress and low overall job satisfaction'* (Zinsser and Curby 2014: 2). The participants expressed concerns about children's resulting emotional instability. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) argued that absenteeism degrades practitioners' ability to emotionally support their students.

Teachers can be impacted by the leadership decision-making style. An autocratic style, for instance, causes more staff turnover, dissatisfaction and absenteeism (Gastil 1994). This might explain the problem of staff absenteeism, especially since this study showed that some preschool leadership styles are autocratic. Further research needs to be done to explore other

explanations for issues of staff absenteeism.

5.2.2.2.2 Nature related

The nature of ECE is an influential contextual factor that requires enormous effort and time. The environment must be carefully planned based on children's abilities and interests. This requires a knowledgeable practitioner of children's development and personal needs and differences. Parental involvement must be strong because children are minors (see the discussion in the introduction). A total of five participants (20%) talked about the influence of the nature of ECE on leadership. Further discussion about this factor as a challenge in cases involving a knowledge gap between leaders and others will be offered in the challenges section.

5.2.3 Interrelated factors

A key finding emerging from the in-depth data analysis was that several factors were interrelated. For example: 1. *Family-related factors* were found to both motivate (positively impact) and challenge (negatively impact) the mood of the leader (*psychological*). 2. Leadership *qualities,* leadership *behaviour* and a leader's *beliefs and personality* were found to be interrelated. When leaders' actions are reflected in practice (behaviour), this reflects a part of their personalities influenced by their beliefs (e.g., their belief in fairness as a religious value). 3) A *leader's personality*, for example, is related to how she deals with pressure, which is reflected in her behaviour and ultimately shapes practice.

Not only did the participants perceive some of these identified factors as interrelated (connected), but they also perceived some of them as simultaneously opportunities and challenges. For example, in the case pressure from the MoE and some families' conflicts of interest, the former focuses on play-based learning ECE, while the latter is interested mainly in literacy. The participants clearly recognised the learning opportunity created by these situations and, instead of seeing such pressures as challenge, they turned them into opportunities to learn. This is where elements of pedagogical leadership can be found: in the recognition of the learning opportunities.

To handle pressure from the MoE, some superintendents engaged in strict supervision according to the rules and regulations, whereas others believed that there must be room for negotiation according to the needs of the children, the preschool and the dramatic changes of the 21st-century educational context. Therefore, for the participant preschool leaders to sustain the best environments for their staff and children, they resisted responding to superintendent requirements that did not fit the context. For example, one of the superintendents was not only

centralised and given excessive power, but also obsessed with implementing regulations, '*to the extent that the policy has to be implemented as it is*' (PRL12L). Yet, the leader argued that, *'it is not as a holy book, so there is no reason why we should have to accept it as it is!'* (PRL12L). The leader overcame this challenge by being resilient and determined concerning what she perceived appropriate for her setting: '*I have a persistent personality, I work towards the goal I believe is important for my institution, by eliminating negative energy and motivating creative minds…*' (PUL2B).

The approaches superintendents used with preschool leaders tended to impact their emotions and performance. Carr (1994) found that 80% of factors causing stress among school leaders were job-related and that they included perceptions of a lack of support from the education department and exceedingly demanding staff. Beatty (2000) found that when school leaders were asked to work under pressure without sufficient autonomy or support and under threatening or over-controlling supervisors, they experienced annoyance that was reflected in feelings of insecurity, anxiety, anger, fear and desperation.

The participants believed that the MoE's selection of superintendents should be aligned with 21st-century educational requirements. Many current superintendents were perceived as having traditional thinking regarding change and improvement. Many of the interviewees expressed concerns that the superintendents' backgrounds were not relevant to early years education or even education in general. For example, many had bachelor's degrees in history, geography, religious studies, Arabic literature or English literature. This lack of background qualifications led to a limited understanding of the needs of ECE. Moreover, one academic who provided training for superintendents said that the superintendents' knowledge about ECE was less than essential. For instance, some did not understand the areas of development for early years. This knowledge gap in communication between leaders and superintendents led to frustration and raised questions concerning the role of the MoE in staff selection, development, and continuous growth. The new Saudi Vision 2030 places significant emphasis on investing in ECE development, refining the national curriculum and training teachers and educational leaders. The implementation of such a vision, however, will take time, resilience, leadership support and engagement.

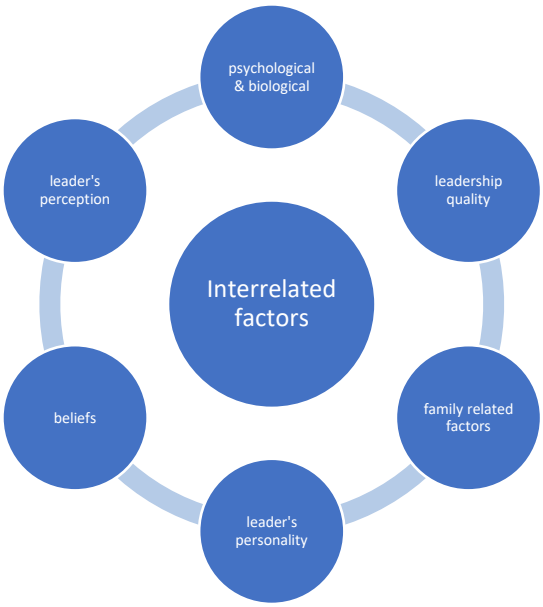


Figure 5: The interrelated factors that shape pedagogical leadership

Another leadership-related factor that was identified as a challenge (discussed in more detail in the challenges section) was leadership instability. The MoE changes leaders frequently, affecting preschool stability. The ways in which leaders dealt with these changes were significantly determined by their personality (positivity or anxiety) and their leadership qualities. For instance, a leader's wisdom and patience shaped her behaviours. Positive job perceptions could make a leader passionate, and being joyful could make her more positive: a personality characteristic influenced by psychological and biological factors. Together, these impacts help leaders better handle the context and interact with challenges in a more proactive way.

The participants reported communication with staff as an aspect that could lead to either positive outcomes or challenging circumstances. This result seems consistent with other studies by O'Sullivan (2009) and Fourie and Fourie (2016), who found that, 'for leaders it has disproportionate significance when they do not get it right' (O'Sullivan 2009: 52). Moreover, Fourie and Fourie (2016) indicated that manager–staff communication can become a challenge when managers lack communication skills (e.g. when they disvalue views or contributions).

The interactions among all these factors shape leadership actions and, thus, pedagogy. As discussed in the literature review section, Male and Palaiologou (2013) confirmed the interactions among a set of internal and external pedagogical social axes that shape leadership and pedagogy, summarised below in figure 6. These social axes interact to shape practice. From this point of view, pedagogical leadership deals with the 'tension between the needs and desires

of larger society and those of the learner within their local community', such that a leader's decisions and actions are informed by the sets of pedagogical axes and exhibit behaviours that support their ambitions. Pedagogical leaders are those who build the capacities of their staff and children by recognising their needs and interests and maintaining an equilibrium across all the interrelated factors that influence leaders' behaviour and inform pedagogy.

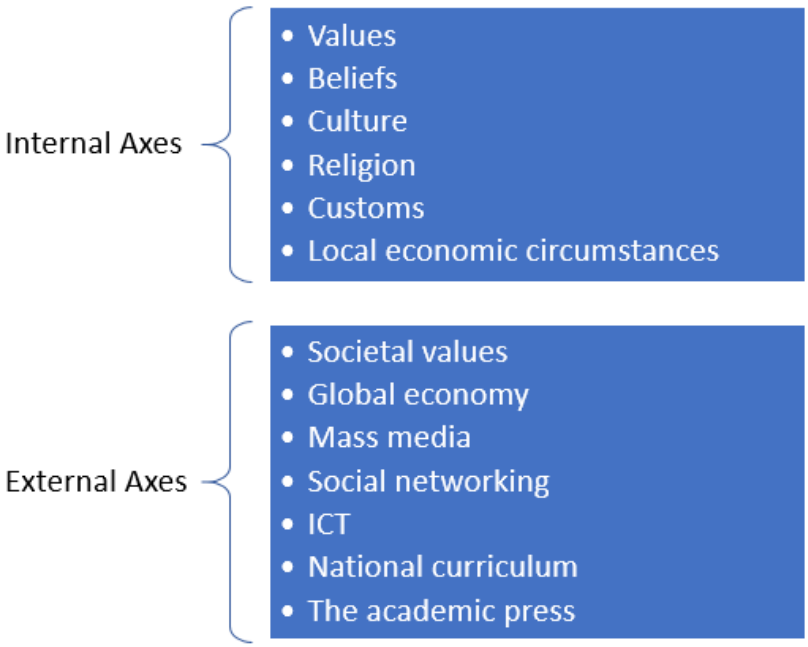


Figure 6: internal and external factors influencing Saudi ECE

The interactions among these internal and external factors shape leadership behaviour and, thus, practice, reflecting the complexity of leadership within the educational context.

5.3 Leadership behaviour

A research question that needs to be answered is:

Is pedagogical leadership enacted in ECSs in the Saudi context? If so, how?

The findings show that pedagogical leadership is suitable for the Saudi ECE context in which it has been operating, especially in a context in which '*people believe in the importance of social relations and connections, and are influenced by their Islamic religion—which supports working together, caring about each other and showing respect to all people'* (Aseri 2015: 219). A previous study on collective leadership in action in Saudi organisations described leaders as '*those who make other people's lives better by something they say or something they do—they influence by action*' (Aseri 2015: 219).

The next section discusses the key leadership behaviour aspects as followed:

1. Leader's role
2. Decision-making
3. Atmosphere
4. Leadership qualities
5. Religion
6. Relationships

5.3.1 Leader's role

Of the participants, 83% discussed the leader's role, which they believed defines their leadership behaviour. The leader has no clearly defined role, according to 20 of the interviewed leaders. However, the MoE recently published an organisational guide clearly illustrating preschool leaders' roles and duties and notified the leaders about it to assist them in becoming efficient leaders.

Although the leader's role is not well defined, some leaders mentioned inspiring staff to reach their highest potential. The interviewees also highlighted professional development and training for both the leader and practitioners. This is supported by Sergiovanni (1998), who argued that the leader's role is to build the capacity of students and teacher and distribute responsibilities among staff. Furthermore, many scholars have emphasised the importance of professional development as part of the pedagogical leader's role (Heikka and Waniganayaka 2011). These works have discussed not only professional development for staff, but also the distribution of responsibilities. The results were found to be consistent with the literature.

A leader differentiated her leadership role from management and recognised the importance of staff capacity-building by encouraging them to learn from their mistakes when she stated that:

> *Management is to supervise and follow up the work, I am not only managing. I do not want to sit at my desk saying "do this or that, or you have a new regulation to follow" and focus on trivial things that not only add nothing to our practice but are also demanding, and encourage fear of mistakes. No, mistakes lead to success*
> (PUL2B).

This quote illustrated the importance of encouraging risk-taking and mistake-making in the leadership role.

5.3.2 Decision-making

Part of pedagogical leadership is decision-making. According to the interviewees, decision-making is performed at two levels: operational and strategic. Operational decision-making has to do with planning, organisation and community involvement in the preschool's internal day-to-day practice: complaints and suggestions, the sharing of knowledge and information and the use of technology (e.g. Twitter). Strategic decision-making includes participating in policy-making. One of the participating schools reported taking part in strategic policy-making when the MoE requested its input on developing the ECE curriculum. This anecdote offers a clear example of how the MoE is involving schools in the development of policies and curriculum, consistent with pedagogical leadership.

The results show that private preschool leaders lack the full autonomy required to practice their ECE knowledge for the best of their schools' and children's needs due to restrictions imposed by their schools' 'top management' or owners. This was evident in the interview with one preschool leader (PRL12L), who said that decision-making in her private preschool was conducted mainly by her school's top management and 'based solely on cost'. Another private preschool leader (PRL22V) also exhibited annoyance with decision-making restrictions. This result contradicts Ghemrawi's (2015) conclusion in her policy review of school leadership in Arab states: 'Leading better learning: School leadership and quality in the Education 2030 agenda, published by the UNESCO'. Ghemrawi (2015) argued that the decision-making style in private preschool leadership in Saudi Arabia might be more autocratic and that supervision may be more directive than that in public schools, as the two types of schools are restricted by diffrent parties (i.e. govermental supervision and school owners).

5.3.3 Atmosphere

The environment created by the leader is one of the areas of pedagogical leadership discussed by the interviewees. Of the 24 leaders, 18 (75%) highlighted the importance of creating a safe, positive atmosphere to build a comfortable environment. Staff relationships and friendships were considered important factor. Psychological and financial comfort were part of the environment the leaders highlighted. Additionally, 63% talked about flexibility and cooperation. Motivation, inspiration, appreciation and verbal praise can be considered to belong to both the environment and language, as they overlap. ome of the preschool leaders in this study showed support and motivation for their staff, which can enhance the staff–leader relationship and improve staff feelings of satisfaction and security.

The literature showed that teachers are attracted to supportive environments and tend to like school leaders who respect them; who are honest, communicative and informal; and with whom they can work together and not through (Haeheraves, 2000)

5.3.4 Leadership qualities

Leadership qualities and traits influence leaders' behaviours. Many leadership traits were mentioned by the interviewees and are described in the literature. According to our interviewees, though Saudi culture states that leaders in positions of authority must be respected, to gain trust, leaders must also have certain leadership qualities. Leaders need to have positive attitudes, manage people carefully, have loving and transparent relationships, foster equality fairness, be visionaries, be reachable, be good listeners, be decision makers and be respectful of staff views. These qualities will help leaders serve as role models and enable their team members to be self-motivated.

In one example from the interviews, PRL17Q highlighted a number of qualities that leaders should possess:

> *In Arab countries, leaders believe that they have to be respected, but there are steps to gain people's respect. Leaders need to manage people carefully. Their relationship needs to be loving, needs to be transparent, and take equality/fairness into consideration. If you have these qualities, and the staff see you practicing them, you will gain their trust, and then their respect will be built spontaneously and, consequently, the success of the place you are in. When you enter your work place, you define aims/goals to reach. You won't be able to achieve this alone. I have to earn people's trust/respect/loyalty so that they are self-motivated but not forced to achieve the shared goals. When you enter such an environment/field, the staff conscience towards their work becomes stronger. No-one wants to be absent; everyone is there; [there is a] feeling of responsibility. I have a principle that I do not ask someone to do something if I do not do it. Of course, in order for these steps to work well, you need to build a teamwork culture; your door has to be always open; [you must] take account of other staff views and, at the end, as a leader, you take the best-suited views, and the same time you need to listen more because the differences in people's perceptions will give you a lot of information (PRL17Q).*

Prior studies have also noted the importance of leadership qualities for leaders. For example, Solly (2003) highlighted *enthusiasm, passion, inspiration* and *advocacy* as important leadership qualities. Moreover, Carr and Kemmis (1986) emphasised the importance of being wise and prudent, and Rodd (2013: 33) identified a number of personal qualities, such as being encouraging, supportive, a good communicator, engaging and a decision-maker.

Building on this discussion, much research has examined leadership qualities and their influences on leadership behaviour. Leaders who have these qualities seem to have less trouble and to enjoy more successful and peaceful educational settings.

The Saudi MoE *Organisational Guide for Educational Supervision* handbook identifies the following characteristics of early years education leaders:

1. Ethical
2. Healthy/fit
3. Leadership
4. Being a good role model
5. Ability to adapt to workloads and demands
6. Team work spirit
7. Taking the initiative
8. Respectfulness and appreciation
9. Emotional balance
10. Self-confidence, humbleness and flexibility
11. Objectivity

According to Rodd (2013): '*Followers only follow people they believe to display authentic leadership capacity'* (28).

> *Regardless of position or power, followers recognise an individual as an authentic leader when certain qualities, attributes and characteristics are displayed. Credible leaders are perceived as: honest, forward-looking, inspiring, and competent (Rodd, 2013: 29).*

5.3.5 Religion

As mentioned earlier in the research context section, Islam in Saudi Arabia is strengthened by the country's association with the personality and life of the prophet Mohammad (PBUH), the prophet of Islam (MOE 2012). Saudi constitution and law are based on the Quran (the Holy Book) and Sharia (Islamic law). As a result, every aspect of Saudi life is influenced by the Islamic religion, and education systems, policies and curricula reflect Islamic values centred on the Quran, jurisprudence, the Islamic tradition and theology.

Of the participants, 29% (7 of 23) clearly stated that their ethics are based on the teachings and practices of the prophet Mohammad (PBUH). This percentage is somewhat low for a country rooted so strongly in religion. Religion is considered an internal factor in the literature (Male and Palaiologou 2013), since, traditionally, there is a separation between religion and the state. However, in Saudi Arabia, this is not the case; instead, religion is embedded in people's daily lives to the extent that they do not always recognise when they are directly or indirectly linking their behaviours to religion. For example, one of the leaders highlighted the power of '*good words*', well-mannered behaviour and maintaining respectful and influential relationships with others. This is also mentioned in the Holy Quran and illustrates the influence of religious teachings on the leader's behaviour.

> *It was thanks to Allah's mercy that you were gentle to them. Had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would surely have scattered away from you. So pardon them, and pray for their forgiveness, and take counsel from them in matters of importance. And when you are resolved on a course of action place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).* (3:159)
> *Do you not see to what Allah' has likened the `Pure Word' ? It is like a good tree which has got deep roots into the earth and whose branches have spread high up into heaven.* (Holy Quran 14:24)

It can be argued that Islam impacts leadership positively, as the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had the characteristics of an efficient leader. Extremism, on the other hand, has a negative impact and was proven in the literature to restrict organisational leaders' ability to make decisions, change values or managerial strategies and achieve self-development (Yeghi 2008).

5.3.6 Relationship

Relationship is the core aspect of pedagogical leadership. It encourages the building of synergistic and productive relationships with all stakeholders to develop a learning community. A positive learning community should share values and a vision and work together towards a shared goal to support children's learning and development, especially in the dramatically changing 21st-century educational context (site of emergence).

Relationship-building is a part of pedagogical leadership and an important aspect of leadership behaviour. In the literature, Male and Palaiologou (2013) and O'Sullivan (2015) emphasised the significance of relationships in influencing the pedagogy of the setting and supporting excellence. The current study found that the primary relationships in ECE are parent–teacher and leader–teacher. As mentioned in the results section, one of the leaders discussed her relationships with teachers as means of influencing their behaviour. Having a strong relationship with teachers, understanding their feelings, knowing when they suffering hardships and appreciating them are important leadership behaviours that were highlighted by several leaders. Interestingly, leader–parent and leader–community relationships were barely discussed by the interviewees. This may be because the government only recently acknowledged the importance of the community and parents and included them in feedback/suggestions. Furthermore, culturally, Saudis typically see children's education and curriculum development as the responsibility of the MoE and schools, not the community.

Showing appreciation is an aspect of positive relationships that is reflected in the language used by leaders. Continuous thanks and appreciation for teachers' achievements will impact

the quality of a leader's relationships with practitioners, as stated by some of the interviewees. As one leader noted:

> *I think that teaching staff made our preschool proud for their attendance and behaviour and their contribution during the presentation, comments that teacher made, and I think it was a great team effort and success.*

Leaders play a role in reconceptualising perceptions of their leadership, which are socially constructed and critiqued through quality praxis. Slater (2005) found that school leaders who respect their staff and support them emotionally achieved enhanced collaboration and reduced anxieties and fear.

5.4 Challenges facing leaders

One of the research questions is: What challenges do ECE leaders face in order to be effective pedagogical leaders?

Leaders were asked about the challenges they faced in their efforts to be effective leaders. Their answers can be classified into four main areas:

1. Social challenges
2. Financial challenges
3. Top management of the school
4. Ministry of Education related

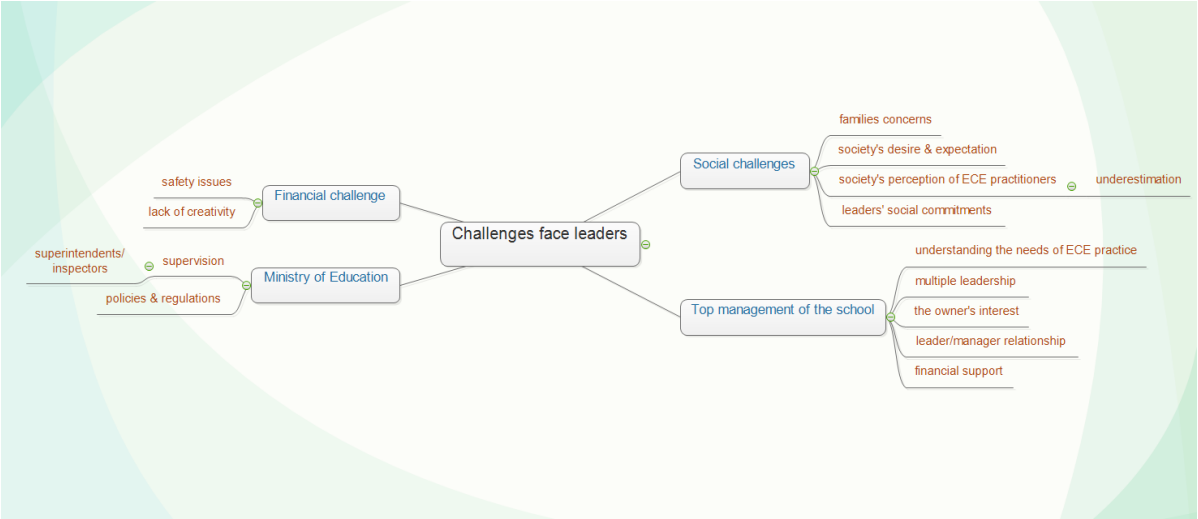


Figure 7: Challenges facing leaders

5.4.1 Social challenges

One of the social challenges facing ECE leaders is society's perception of ECE practitioners. According to our interviewees, this is a true challenge: *'My staff are not seen by the society as practitioners, but as child carers. Yet, they have dignity, and each has her level of education and*

qualification'. Similarly, PRL15O (in a private preschool) reported facing challenges related to society's perceptions of schools in general, which limited the openness of her setting.

> *Society judges a school from the way it looks! So, if the school is large, has luxurious buildings and has an intensive English language course, it will attract more people in the society. My school, among others, however, is a small school in a rented building, even though the staff I have are well educated and qualified. I am not able to meet all society's desires, because this will create high pressure personally and financially. I stick to my values, which I cannot relinquish.* (PRL15O)

ECE practitioners are underestimated and underpaid, especially in the private sector. Thus, teacher's involvement and relationships with the school, parents and children are limited to working hours. The researcher in the current study has had personal experience as a parent in private schools in both the UK and Saudi Arabia. Access to teachers was not limited to the school day; teachers were passionate about working with their students. Teachers could often be found working in their classrooms and preparing for their students until 6 pm. This practice differs dramatically from that common in prestigious private schools in Saudi Arabia, in which access is limited to the school day.

There are several cultural differences between Saudi Arabia and the UK. For example, most school teachers in Saudi Arabia are young Saudis who, along with their job responsibilities, have responsibilities to their families. In Saudi Arabia, a woman is expected to care for her children and her husband. She also has responsibilities to her own family, parents, sisters, brothers and extended family. Finally, she is expected to be available to her family-in-law for social activities and various responsibilities.

Males do not face the same social obligations. For males, too, the culture and social expectations of UK practitioners differ dramatically. In the UK, both partners are expected to participate in caring for their families, and extended families are not as big a part of daily life. Whereas the average Saudi family has 2.5 children, the average British family has 1.7 (Statistic, 2013).

Social commitments apply to both leaders and practitioners. Society's desired expectations and concerns simultaneously pose important challenges and opportunities. With the right resources, high community and family expectations can pressure leaders and increase the quality of ECE. To be productive, leaders must meet these demands or justify why they cannot.

The MoE currently encourages community involvement (e.g. fulfilling societal needs and aspirations). A synergistic relationship within the learning community is at the heart of pedagogical leadership.

5.4.2 Financial challenges

Financial challenges were highlighted by 33% of the participants (8 out of 23). The MoE prohibits public schools from collecting any form of financial funds from families or communities. Financial challenges are especially common among the preschools. This has been shown in other studies, especially Arabic ones. Some interviewees stated that the only funding supporting their preschools (beside the MoE's funding) was income from the cafeteria (AlJunaid and Hussain 1994; Abukhalil 1999; Shaban 2014).

The lack of funding leads to a failure to address safety issues, such as stairs that need to be fixed and fire safety issues. The interviewed leaders also agreed that insufficient financial resources can also impact creativity. However, it can be argued that necessity is the mother of inventions. Thus, what the leaders referred to is not necessarily creativity; instead, it is necessary to fulfil basic needs before creativity can be considered. Creativity can be fostered once basic safety needs are fulfilled. For example, one of the leaders indicated that her school had a safety exit that overlooked a hole and that it took her a full year to get the funds to repair the area. In another example, shades fell onto school grounds. Though, fortunately, no one was affected, the falling shades caused a major health hazard. These issues consumed the leader's attention and, thus, negatively impacted creativity.

Shaban (2014) recommended providing financial resources to support public preschools and reconsidering the issue of preschool fees to reduce the cost to children's families. Even a 10% reduction to the fees of private preschool would be helpful. However, it can be argued that this could not completely solve the financial problem, as even private preschool leaders complained of insufficient funds. One participant attributed her school's funding issues to the owner's lack of understanding of ECE and its needs. It can also be argued that greater financial management competence among ECE leaders could lead to more cost-effective management of preschool financial sources.

This was also argued in the literature, as some researchers have shown that ECE leaders lack adequate financial management expertise (Ryan, et al. 2011; Nupponen 2006). Mitchell (1997) concluded that a solid business experience is an important skill for effective ECE leadership, next to good personal leadership skills. The MoE requires preschool leaders to have strong knowledge of administration and finance.

5.4.3 MoE-related challenges

Leaders must follow MoE legislations. The frequent changes in ministers over the past three years have led to frequent changes in policies, regulations and leadership staff at all levels. By the time schools adopt one policy, it is changed again. An example of this is schools' method of report preparation: '*After implementing a new reporting system at the beginning of the school year, another change came from the Ministry in the middle of the school year, ignoring all the work that was done previously and the time invested in this change as one of the leaders stated*' (PUL9I).

The MoE also causes challenges related to the subjectivity of superintendents and inspectors. Many leaders reported that MoE supervision goes by the book and is subject to superintendents' subjectivity, removed the context and environment of the school being inspected. Furthermore, while some of the preschool leaders highlighted the positive impact of superintendents' support on their performance, other leaders reflected on the negative impact of superintendents' lack of flexibility and support. As discussed previously, superintendents' approaches with preschool leaders can influence their emotions and performance (Carr 1994; Beatty 2000). On the other hand, challenges may also stem from preschool leaders' lack of communication skills and emotional intelligence.

The MoE first initiated an organisational guide for educational superintendence in 2015. In this guideline, they stated clear roles for superintendents with the following aim: '*To provide support and consultation to the schools' leadership through skills improvement, empowerment, evaluation, and improvement of the operations*'. The guide was meant for all schools, as all schools and preschools are supervised under one umbrella (the educational superintendence office). Thus far, there is no specific guide for preschool superintendence; hence, little is known about the regulations and qualifications required of preschool superintendents. This explains this study's findings concerning preschool superintendents' lack of knowledge about ECE. Many preschool leaders in this study struggled with superintendents' ignorance and the absence of a common ground. In fact, some leaders stated that their superintendents' background were completely irrelevant to education and ECE (e.g. history).

Some argued that performativity policies negatively impact school leaders. As Blackmore (2004) found, school leaders reported 'dissonance' between the requirements of their roles and the need to support students. This made some school leaders feel dishonest with respect to staff, deepening their sense of emotional distress. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) found that emotional dissonance is negatively correlated with school leaders' efficacy. Thus, it can

be argued that performativity policies should be considered a guide for leaders to follow flexibly, not an obligation.

The fourth challenge concerned the negative bureaucratic image of education as a profession. Some parts of Saudi Arabian society underestimate the profession of education. Therefore, the government's strategic goal is to attract and recruit teachers and to boost their training and qualification. To achieve this goal, three sub-goals were established. The MoE designed a holistic framework for the continuous professional development for teachers and leaders in education, improved the national strategy to boost the level of education as a profession by focusing on the educational environment and the services provided for teachers, and promoted a positive perception of the education profession in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

5.4.4 Top management

Top school management was considered challenging by 25% of the sample (6 out of 23) in circumstances like conflicts of interest between the preschool leader and the owner. An indicative example involved an owner with a financial interest and a leader with a pedagogical/educational interest. The leader found this situation challenging. Her private preschool faced several challenges created by the top management that combined the pressures of the owner, on one side, and the MoE, on the other. The conflicts occurred when the MoE told the leader to follow its regulations, while the owner selected a deputy head to follow his interests. Thus, the conflicts (e.g. concerning financial support) existed not only between the head teacher and the deputy head, but also between the deputy head and the owner. These relationship complexities negatively affected the setting and the children's learning. For instance, limiting the space for children and teachers (when the owner closed three classes to open shops outside, as mentioned in the results section) resulted in spreading children over other classes.

Some of the leaders indicated that their top management/leader lacked an understanding and knowledge of the needs of ECE practice. For example, one of the leaders indicated that top management did not understand the need for soft carpet as a safety measure for ECE students and instead made decisions driven mainly by financial costs. Although this leader had the knowledge and experience to manage the ECE school, she needed empowerment, support and understanding from her top management. The lack of support not only resulted in poor safety standards, but also affected parents' trust in her as a leader. In this case, the leader was part of a bigger leadership group, and the ECE was one of a complex of schools (early education,

primary, secondary, and high school). Each school level was competing for the same budget, and top management had to prioritise the needs; thus, not all ECE needs were recognised as priorities.

Many of the private school leaders expressed a lack of understanding among top management of ECE needs and requirements. This might indicate that the owners had business and financial interests, despite being supervised by the MoE. By contrast, public school leaders indicated that their challenges with top management centred mainly around bureaucracy, rigidity and some superintendents' traditional attitudes. Although this is not a comparative study, this difference is worth highlighting as a finding of the cases covered.

It is important to note that top management can also enable leaders. One of the leaders was extremely satisfied with her top management's support, enlightenment and empowerment. The top management's understanding of the needs of ECE was enough to bring out the best in the leader.

5.5 Summery

This study investigates pedagogical leadership in Saudi ECE. It aims to identify the factors that influence pedagogical leadership and related leadership behaviours. The third aim of this research study is to pinpoint the challenges facing leaders in the Saudi ECE context.

The factors influencing ECE leadership and pedagogy can be classified into internal and external. One of the significant findings to emerge from this study illustrating the complexity of pedagogical leadership and leadership in general is how factors interrelate to shape practice.

This research extends our knowledge of pedagogical leadership behaviour. It finds that leadership behaviour in Saudi ECE is similar to that in other cultures, despite differences in contexts. Leadership qualities, relationships with community and staff, decision-making processes, communication and the environment are consistent in both the literature and the Saudi context.

ECE leaders in Saudi Arabia face several challenges that affect their leadership behaviours and decisions. These challenges involve social, financial and top management issues, as well as problems related to the MoE. The social challenges seem to differ from those identified in the literature in that Saudi ECE practitioners face stronger social expectations and responsibilities to families and extended families due to the nature of the culture.

6 Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Recent years have seen increasing interest in ECE leadership (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007; Bush 2012; Aubrey et al. 2013; Davis and Ryder 2016; Clark and Murray 2012; Rodd 2013; Sims et al. 2014; O'Sullivan 2009), particularly pedagogical leadership (Heikka 2014; Male and Palaiologou 2016). Despite these theoretical perspectives on ECE pedagogical leadership, a broad holistic perspective in this specific area has remained very limited, and scholars have paid far too little attention to non-Western leadership experience.

This study has aimed to contribute to the minimal body of literature on this area, as well as to bridge the gap in knowledge and inform policy implementation in Saudi Arabia. The research recognises the distinctive Saudi context, where Islam is a key component of people's lives and the education system is gender segregated, with ECE being the only mixed-gender institution but with a female-only staff. Bearing these factors in mind, the study has aimed to explore leadership by focussing on three areas: first, to explore pedagogical leadership in the Saudi context; second, to identify the factors that influence leadership in Saudi ECE; and third, to identify the challenges associated with ECE leadership in the Saudi context.

This chapter draws together the various threads of the research and concludes the key aspects of the study, including its key findings, limitations, contribution to knowledge, research implications and suggestions for further research. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the influential pedagogical factors of ECE leadership in the Saudi context? How and why are they influential?
2. What challenges do ECE leaders face in order to be effective pedagogical leaders?
3. Is pedagogical leadership enacted in ECSs in the Saudi context? If yes, how and to what extent?

6.2 Key findings

This section summarises the key findings that emerged from the data gathered for the purposes of this research. It first presents the key factors to influence pedagogical leadership in Saudi preschools, followed by the challenges that those leaders faced; the section then presents a discussion of pedagogical leadership in the Saudi context.

6.2.1 Factors

One of the current research objectives is to investigate the factors that influence leadership in Saudi ECE. The results of this investigation show several factors the participants highlighted.

For example, the majority of the participants discussed factors related to *people management*; examples primarily had to do with handling staff, such as discipline, satisfaction, motivation, teamwork, training, career paths, staff relationships, staff collaboration, understating staff needs and establishing a successful culture by creating a school motto.

The reason most of the participants discussed how staff-related factors influenced their leadership could be because the staff are usually the first people to communicate with the leaders, and because of their important role in the success of the educational institution. These internal factors influence leadership, in that the leaders can help in the success of the organisation by, for example, collaborative work and by having self-motivated staff, while they can also have a negative influence on the setting by continued absence or a lack of collaboration.

The way people are managed, however, directly influences their attitude and thus pedagogy and the setting's performance. For instance, those leaders who created a close relationship with their staff by understanding their needs and who maintained a supportive and motivational school culture found that their staff were productive, reliable, contented, disciplined and collaborative workers, all of which had a positive influence on leading, teaching and learning.

Communication with staff was thus found to be influential. Half (50%) of the research participants discussed the importance of this factor and asserted that their successful communication with their staff had resulted in boosted teamwork culture and a stable and happy school environment. The leaders in this study also linked their ability to communicate with their years of experience: the more leadership experience they had, the more effective they were at communication.

This factor was interrelated with other factors such as personality and the leader's leadership qualities. For example, participants highlighted other important factors that enhanced communication with the staff. Among these factors were (1) regular communication, (2) a positive attitude, (3) clarity and regularity that together built a sense of responsibility among the staff, (4) the creation of a team culture, (5) the use of a team motto (which motivated the staff as well as the children), (6) the support and empowerment of staff and (7) the understanding of the staff's psychological and emotional needs.

Regular clear communication resulted in less stress and a higher sense of responsibility among the leaders and the staff. This creation of a positive culture in the preschool was consistent with the findings of other studies; some authors have considered such a culture as a characteristic for effective school leaders (Shea 1990; Leithwood and Riehl 2003; O'Sullivan 2009; Rodd 2013; Male and Palaiologou 2016). Some leaders reported the cooperation of the

staff to be an important factor that could become a challenge when the staff members were unwilling to cooperate. This resulted in frustration for some leaders, thus hindering the preschool's progression and affecting the overall preschool environment.

Self-management factors such as *psychological and biological* needs were found to directly influence the leader's leadership performance. The psychological state of the leader affected the participants in ways such as their temper and lack of sleep, tiredness, enthusiasm, passion, enjoyment and love. The leader's psychological state also influenced the leader's leadership perception, the values and beliefs of the leader, the leader's qualities and personality, the environment of the preschool, and the staff, all of which were compatible with discussions in the literature (Luthans 2002). The *personality* of the leader in such areas as positive thinking was also influential.

One part of self-management is a leader's family influence, which is compatible with the literature on women's employment and leadership. Work-family balance was a major concern for the working women, as both work and family were demanding, which resulted in conflict and stress. Female leaders, on the other hand, cited family support as an important factor in their success (Allen et al. 2000; Bryon 2005; Cheung and Halpren 2011).

But managing people requires certain qualities. *Leadership qualities* were another factor to influence leadership. Some of the examples highlighted by the majority of the participants included a leader's abilities and competencies, such as in managing her personal life versus work pressure. Other examples included the demands of the top management (in the case of the preschools, which are part of a larger school), the Ministry of Education's (MoE's) formal inspections and regulations, and pressures from children's parents. Nevertheless, some leaders managed to establish their own space by making these external pressures less onerous to the staff. Examples included ensuring regular communication with staff and having clear responsibilities and guidelines.

Leadership qualities appear to be a key area of research on leadership because of their importance on leaders' behaviour, attitudes and leadership provision. Qualities such as transparency, honesty, fairness, wisdom, being a good role model, having good listening skills and being able to delegate were all found to be influential in gaining people's trust and respect. Some leaders highlighted such qualities from an Islamic perspective as being a successful leadership provision.

This is where *beliefs and values* were found to be another influential factor that influences preschool leaders in Saudi Arabia: the leaders appeared to be driven by the Islamic *religion* and the Saudi culture. This finding was consistent with the literature, which has shown a strong

influence of faith on leadership (Strachan et al. 2009; Striepe et al. 2014). Slightly under three-fifths (58%) of the participants in this research highlighted the influence of religion on their leadership practice. Religion had an influence on their leadership attitudes and practice, for example by considering the prophet Mohammad PBUH as a role model who guides their leadership attitudes. This finding is consistent with the literature of other religions and faiths, such as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Confucianism (McClain 2007; Wong 2001; Tung 2003; Strachan et al. 2009; Striepe et al. 2014).

Similarly, as it was illustrated by the participants considering the societal values and Islamic beliefs are keys for decision making. For instance, the example of teaching Music in the schools. It created a conflict between some conservative and liberal parents and the MoE inspector. The former believed that children can learn sounds from natural sources rather than musical instruments, while the latter were of the opposite perspective. Such conflict was determined by the leader's decision, driven by her own beliefs, children's developmental needs, curriculum requirements and resources available.

The sense of responsibility, from a Saudi preschool leader's perspective, was a moral duty in which she became responsible in front of God, the parents and staff. Such internal/external factors influence the leader's decisions and actions. Her role was hence to maintain the equilibrium between the interactions of all these factors and to create the best possible learning environment for the children. Some participants appeared to succeed in maintaining such equilibrium, while others struggled.

The positive influence of religion, which was evident in the Saudi preschool leaders' attitudes and leadership qualities, was found to be consistent with aspects of pedagogical leadership reviewed in the literature, such as compassion, honesty, fairness, courage, responsibility and competency (Rodd 2013; Kouzes and Posner 2017). There appeared to be no conflict between religion and leading in the Saudi ECE sector. The Islamic faith was not found to have restricted leaders and practitioners from practicing their roles. One potential exception is the case of extremism – the literature has asserted the negative impact of extremism on leaders' decision making and performance – although none of this study's participants demonstrated tendencies towards extremism. Culture, however, in cases such as centralisation and bureaucracy, can limit leadership effectiveness.

Decision making and the authorities were other influential factors. 'Decision making' discussed here is related to the operational and strategic decisions made by the leader, while 'authorities' refers to MoE figures and the top management of a larger school. The leader's

decision making was influenced by the MoE, the top management (for private school leaders), culture and religion.

Because preschools in Saudi Arabia have a hierarchical system, preschool leaders' decision making was mostly limited to internal operational decisions. The style of ECE preschool decision making in Saudi was mostly described as being autocratic, and as being done by the top management or the MoE rather than by the leader, with private preschools suffering more from this situation due to further restrictions by a school's owner. This finding contradicts the literature, which has found that private schools in the Middle East are more democratic and permissive than the public (Ghemrawi 2015). In the literature, an autocratic style has been found to cause staff dissatisfaction, absenteeism and turnover (Gastil 1994), all of which were considered challenges for the leaders in this study.

The current study found that these external factors influenced the leaders' decisions in terms of the way the setting operated. For example, the more support and autonomy on decision making leaders had from the MoE and top management, the more the leaders focussed on their effective role within the setting. Having limitations to their leading abilities distracted the leaders and bound their space. For example, a conflict of interest between the leader and the investors in the private preschool created challenges for the leader to meet the children's safety needs; she thus had little autonomy in terms of decision making. Despite the Saudi government's current efforts to decentralise its system, the majority of preschool leaders still have issues with the centrality of the decisions and policies established for the education system. The strategic level of decision making, which involves policy making, is the sole task of the MoE, yet the MoE invited one of the twenty-three randomly chosen preschool leaders who participated in this study to take part in policy development for the ECE curriculum and to share her feedback and recommendations.

The *instability of the leader* and the MoE's frequent changes in leadership were other factors that influenced the leaders, staff and the setting as a source of pressure. For example, the head teachers were exchanged five times within seven years as a result of the MoE's recruitment efforts, which affected the setting's environment and created uncertainty. The way in which leaders responded to these changes appeared to depend on their perception, however: for example, optimism versus pessimism and on their leadership qualities.

Leaders' perception, and the way leaders felt towards their jobs, thus influenced their performance, as this study found. Positive perception was linked to positive leader behaviour and therefore had a positive influence on the preschool environment. One indicative example was found with a leader who expressed her enthusiasm for and enjoyment of her job; as a result,

she had successfully managed to transform her preschool (which was in a poor district) to a successful school that became a source of knowledge, education, health and safety to the disadvantaged children and their families. Such positive job perceptions or engagement in one's work has also been described in the literature as having a positive impact on leadership (Paxson 2016; O'Sullivan 2015).

Participants also considered *social networking* to be an important element in community involvement. Social networking today has a vital influence on the success of any organisation. The technology's proper use can bridge gaps in communication between the organisation, the community and the entire world; its speed and cheapness are other important factors. Social networking allowed the leaders in this research to be more aware of their communities' needs and allowed their communities to recognise the preschool setting. Such relationships strengthened the communities' involvement in ECE and was often considered a factor that shaped a leader's behaviour and the decisions she made in her setting.

The *type of preschool* also influenced leadership. With the study having participants from both private and public preschools, the independently owned private schools appeared to have more restrictions in decision making than the public schools did. Examples were found in those cases where many stakeholders were involved, including the MoE, the top management and the owners. The owners in these examples, however, typically based their decisions merely on costs, regardless of the children's needs or the nature of ECE.

When investigating the factors that influence leadership in ECE and shape pedagogical leadership, one may conclude that the factors that emerged from the results of this research are related to perception, decision making, social networking, school type, people management, leader self-management, personality/leadership qualities and values/beliefs (including religion). The factors found in the literature included values, beliefs, culture, religion, customs and local economy, societal values, the global economy, mass media, social networking, information communication technologies, national curricula, personality and leadership characteristics.

The participants also highlighted several challenges they experienced, which will be summarised in the next section.

6.2.2 Challenges

The second objective of this study was to identify the challenges that ECE leaders experience. These challenges were identified as being social, staff related, and those related to the top management and the MoE.

Social challenges: The way some people in Saudi society perceive ECE was challenging to many preschool leaders; one example is the underestimation of the role of ECE leaders and practitioners, and the common perception that they are caregivers. Underpayment, especially in the private preschools, was also reflected in some of the leaders' and staff members' job satisfaction. Some of the leaders also considered society's desires, expectations and concerns to be a challenge, as were the leaders' family and social commitments.

Financial challenges: One-third (33%) of the participants highlighted financial issues as being a challenge. In Saudi Arabia it is illegal for public preschools to seek any external funding through the school. The only source of funding allowed is through the MoE, which the leaders reported to be insufficient for ECE needs. This lack of financial support affected their preschools negatively: for example, safety was affected because the building needed maintenance, which the preschools could not afford. The private preschool leaders also identified the same challenge when the leaders complained about the preschool's owner, who restricted funding as a result of his financial interests (rather than that of meeting the needs of ECE) as well as his lack of knowledge about the nature of ECE.

Top management of the preschool: One-quarter (25%) of preschool leaders appeared to consider top management to be a challenging factor. Having multiple levels of leadership, as in the case of some private preschools, often created uncertainty and troubles in making decisions; examples included having top management pressures on one side and MoE supervision pressures on the other. Another example was the conflict of interest of the preschool leader with the preschool owner. The private preschool leaders complained about the lack of understanding of ECE needs by the top management and owners, whereas the public preschool leaders complained about the bureaucracy of the top management and the lack of flexibility of the MoE's superintendents. One leader stated that the superintendent did not have a qualification in general education or ECE despite the MoE's professional development; she was specialised in unrelated fields such as history, which could have explained her lack of basic ECE knowledge, which in turn resulted in conflicts with the leader and limited the progress of the preschool. In other examples, however, the superintendents' empowerment, support and flexibility affected the preschool leader's performance positively. One interesting finding was that the private preschools in Saudi Arabia appeared to have more challenges in decision-making autonomy than the public preschools did. This finding contrasts with those studies that have found that private schools in the Middle East appear to be more democratic than the public (Ghamrawi 2016).

MoE-related challenges: Some leaders reported that the lack of open communication with the MoE affected the preschool negatively, including financial issues (safety and buildings), supervision (inspectors), unresponsiveness, the MoE bureaucracy and the constant exchanges of some preschool leaders. Other MoE-related challenges included the ministry's policies; for example, the frequent changes of policy makers had implications on policies (such as sudden changes and implementations of policies), which created bureaucracy, negative effects and a lack of leaders' involvement in policy making.

Family-related issues: Family support was found to have a positive influence on the leader, while family members' discouragement had a negative effect. Handling families can often be challenging. Some of the examples the study participants provided included the conflict between the MoE and families related to the play-based approach (required by the MoE) and the traditional teaching of literacy skills (requested by some parents).

Communication: This is an important result to have emerged in this study. Communication between leaders and the MoE appears to be a problem. One leader reported a lack of open communication with the MoE and a lack of coordination between the preschools in Riyadh, which resulted in a lack of teachers in some preschools and a surplus in others, thus affecting the preschools negatively. The recent MoE e-service (*twasul*) communication, where the details of communication are recorded, could help in minimising this problem.

Staff-related challenges: These challenges were related to implementing school policy: for example, the wearing of proper work clothes. Another staff-related challenge was absenteeism, which not only affected the leader but also the children and the daily running of the preschool. This factor was reported by 79% of the participants.

Examples from previous research on the challenges leaders face in ECE can be summarised as follows: low-level professional status, poor public image, lack of unity with the profession, decision making about limited resources, concerns about staff well-being, and government reforms and the impact of funding cuts (Waniganayake and Hujala 2001; Ebbeck and Waniganayake 2005).

Other indicative examples related to the context and current dramatic changes include the challenges that leaders face while dealing with dramatic 21st-century changes. Some of the examples that Fourie and Fourie (2016) have highlighted include creating innovative practice, a lack of management skills, leaders' lack of leadership knowledge when leading, lack of communication skills, and lack of resources and learning materials. Bureaucracy and the top-down leadership approach were also challenges that previous research in the Saudi ECE context

has found (Alameen et al. 2015). Another interesting challenge was that highlighted by Oluremi (2008), who found that leaders need to decide their leadership behaviour appropriately so that they can influence their school culture, performance and student achievements.

6.2.3 Pedagogical leadership in the Saudi context

Drawing on Sergiovanni's (1998) argument that school leaders are actually pedagogical leaders, since they subscribe to pedagogy, all the leaders in this research were considered pedagogical leaders, although the focus was on the way in which pedagogical leadership is enacted in the Saudi preschool context.

The preschool leaders' enactment of pedagogical leadership was analysed by asking them open-ended questions to describe and define their roles, their relationships and their interactions with the community; the factors that influence their leadership attitude; the practitioners' and families' participation in decision making; and the challenges they face.

Based on the participants' experiences and leadership perspectives, pedagogical leadership in this study encompasses decision making, the community, the language people use, relationship building, leadership qualities and traits, the environment/atmosphere created by the leader and the leader's role. The discussion of the leader's behaviour is concluded in the following aspects.

The language used: Examples highlighted included providing verbal praise when leaders expressed their appreciation to the staff, which had a positive effect on the relationship with the staff as well as on their motivation.

Relationships: The main relationship that most of the participants in this study highlighted was the close leader-practitioner relationship. Such leaders recognise the importance of having a strong relationship with the practitioners by appreciating their work, understanding their feelings and knowing when they are experiencing difficulties. Leader-parent and leader-community relationships, in contrast, were highlighted by only a few leaders, which could be because the notion of parental and community involvement in Saudi ECE is a new concept. The MoE has only recently started to emphasise and encourage this concept in education, including the practice of education and the community.

Environment/atmosphere created by the leader: This factor was emphasised by 75% of the participants, whereas flexibility and cooperation were highlighted by 63% of the leaders, which demonstrates that the majority of the leaders in this study recognised their vital role in creating a safe and positive atmosphere in the preschool. They asserted that the comfortable atmosphere

they tried to maintain had resulted in enhancing the relationship with and among the staff and had boosted their psychological status.

Leadership qualities and traits: This was another aspect the Saudi pedagogical leaders mentioned. The way leadership is enacted in Saudi preschools encompasses a number of characteristics based on the views and experiences of the research participants. They also highlighted a number of leadership qualities they found to be effective, such as transparency, faithfulness, respect, flexibility, equality/fairness, motivation/inspiration, having a clear vision, establishing positive energy, being a good listener, being socially active, being caring and loving, having a sense of responsibility, valuing a team culture, being a role model and being able to delegate to others.

Such leadership qualities seemed to be consistent with what the literature includes in the notion of pedagogical leadership, such as enthusiasm, passion, inspiration, advocacy, wisdom, supportiveness, encouragement, being engaging, communicating well and making decisions (Carr and Kemmis 1986; Solly 2003; Rodd 2013). It is important to mention, however, that leadership qualities in the Saudi context were enormously influenced by Islamic values and beliefs. As in the examples highlighted earlier, some leaders stated that they had adopted Islamic moral values in their leadership, such as using fairness and justice and considering the prophet Muhammad PBUH as their role model. The same leadership qualities were identified by the MoE as part of identifying the leaders' roles and responsibilities.

Pedagogical leadership in the Saudi context also encompasses the capacity building of leaders and practitioners, for example by giving the staff members room to make mistakes and encouraging them to learn from their errors. Another example is training and professional development, which some of the leaders highlighted as an important process of their leadership journeys. This finding was consistent with the literature, which has asserted the importance of professional development in pedagogical leadership (Heikka and Waniganayaka 2011).

Finally, the interaction of these factors (whether internal or external) and challenges shapes the way pedagogical leadership operates in the Saudi context. Examples include the religion aspect – such as when pedagogical leadership is shaped by an individual leader's religious belief of the Prophet's central role when managing staff – and the barriers to decision making that result from having reluctant top management.

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6.3 Research Contribution

The rapidly changing 21st century has created dynamic sites of emerging educational contexts, which means that most pedagogical leaders would rather take actions based on situations rather than to follow a model of leadership that may no longer fit all situations (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007; Osberg and Biesta 2007; Giles and Morrison 2010). Previous research on pedagogical leadership has only focussed on social pedagogical factors in the Western ECE context (Male and Palaiologou 2016) but has not identified the challenging factors among these factors or addressed any other contexts. In addition, previous studies have not examined pedagogical leadership by taking into consideration religious or cultural perspectives. This research contributes to the body of literature and corrects the previous general assumption that religion can be a barrier to the effective practicing of leadership. In particular, the participants in this research demonstrated the positive role their Islamic values played in their leadership provision and attitude.

In this study, not only did some of the internal and external factors positively influence and shape pedagogical leadership, but some of these factors were also found to be challenging. Some of the internal factors interacted with pedagogical leadership. One example included managing staff members' and the leader's religious beliefs when applying equity among individual staff members, which was reflected in the leader's actions when managing her staff. Other internally and externally interacting factors that shaped pedagogical leadership were indicated in examples such as staff's needs (internal) and MoE requirements (external), all of which influenced the leaders' decision making.

While some of these internal and external factors were found to be challenging, such as staff (internal) and top management (external), all were shaped by the context in which pedagogical leadership operated. When compared with the literature, these internal and external factors can differ from one preschool setting to another within the same cultural backgrounds, and from one culture to another. For example, some preschool leaders met the challenges they faced and demonstrated strong leadership positions by prioritising their setting and the children's needs and then making decisions accordingly. Other leaders followed the requirements of the MoE or top management or society's desires, regardless of their children's learning and developmental needs. Both types of leaders were under the same supervision, policies and regulations; the difference was based on an individual leader's personality and ability to deal with the surrounding environment and to balance all these factors and the challenges they faced

to maintain equilibrium in order to offer the children and the staff the best possible learning environment.

Despite the argument stated in this study that takes into consideration the influence of the context where the leadership operates (rather than having pre-determined leadership models), along with the numerous differences between Saudi and Western culture, commonality does exist between ECE leadership in Western and non-Western contexts. But despite the common leadership factors and challenges that were found to be shared among educational institutions, contextual differences were found to exist in every educational setting included in this research. Because this is not a comparative study, however, the focus was on leaders' experiences rather than on identifying the differences and similarities among these two cultures.

To demonstrate the complexity of pedagogical leadership in action, this study hence suggests the notion of contextual pedagogical leadership (CPL) to illustrate the idea of context-dependent pedagogical leadership, which means pedagogical leadership that is shaped by its context. The study extends our knowledge by offering a broader perspective of pedagogical leadership. As shown in Diagram 4 below, not only do the interactions of the internal and external factors shape the way pedagogical leadership operates, but the challenging factors themselves also have an influence, either on their own or from challenges that arise from interactions with the internal and external factors. The broader context then influences all these elements and shapes pedagogical leadership in that context, thus making the name 'contextual pedagogical leadership' an appropriate one.

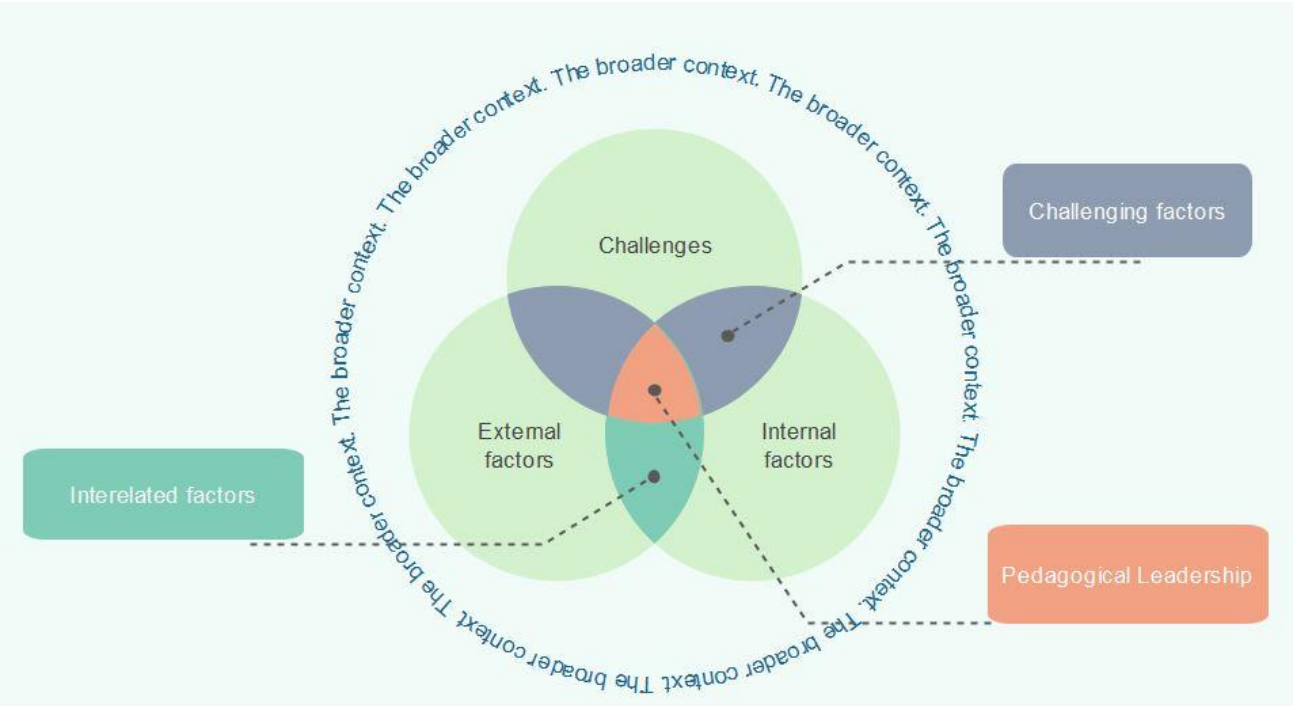

Diagram 4: Contribution to knowledge: CPL

The complexity of pedagogical leadership in the Saudi context therefore appears to emerge from the interrelated factors that interact with one another to shape pedagogical leadership. The complexity also arises when such factors interact with the challenges that leaders face, all of which directly influence leadership behaviour. The flexibility of CPL that this research advocates allows leaders the freedom to make decisions based on their specific circumstances to respond to the ECE setting, children, families, and the local community's needs and requirements, as well as the national context.

6.4 Implications for practice and recommendations

The findings of this research suggest a number of implications for practice, including

1. enhancing the public image of the ECE profession;
2. emphasising the role of leadership in the success of educational institutions;
3. understanding and appreciating the individual differences of educational contexts, settings and leaders;
4. enhancing the culture of parental and community involvement at the preschool level and at the policy-making and educational-reform levels.
5. encouraging the enhancement of open communication between policy makers and preschool leaders;
6. establishing a support system to overcome the challenges leaders face.

In light of the in-depth analysis of the participants' views and experiences in leading preschool settings, this research also offers a number of recommendations.

First, creating a more participatory culture at the governmental level and at the institutional level allows for leaders to become involved in policy making and can lead to more community involvement in schools. Such participation (of any kind, whether in person or by the use of technology) could fill the gap in communication between the MoE and the leaders in their educational institutions and could transfer leaders' insights and experiences to policy makers, which could reduce the challenges leaders face. Perhaps the more effective the communication is, the closer to the ECE practice the policies and regulations will be in responding to ECE's needs and challenges.

Second, leaders should be given more autonomy to have their own space and to make decisions based on their known abilities, their staff, the children's learning and developmental needs, and the needs of the school and its community.

Third, the stability and consistency of policies and regulations should be stressed, in addition to finding ways for smooth transitions between policy makers, especially those who are frequently exchanged. As was evident from the results in this study, the frequent changes in policy makers had implications for the practice of education in the field. For example, sudden changes in polices and regulations created implementation challenges for leaders.

Fourth, as part of their professional developmental plans, all stakeholders in ECE (including owners, superintendents, leaders and practitioners) should be encouraged to enrol in programmes in areas such as communication skills, stress management, emotional intelligence and financial management of the preschool setting.

Finally, the relationship between the superintendent and the leader could be smoother and more effective if they mutually recognise their roles and responsibilities. Allowing room for making mistakes and showing appreciation could effectively strengthen such relationships.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

Slight confusion occurred in the Arabic-language interview questions in terms of English-Arabic translation, although the confusion was solved when a pilot study was used to test the clarity of these questions. Another limitation was the lack of Arabic-language research related to pedagogical leadership generally and to ECE within the KSA context in particular.

Although the single qualitative method that was used could be considered a limitation of this research, the method did allow the participants the opportunity to freely, deeply and broadly explain their leadership experiences and to confidently respond to the interview questions. Some of the participants also drifted away from the areas of the discussion while answering the open-ended questions, although the researcher was able to patiently and politely return the discussion to the question that had been asked. Doing so increased the researcher's skills and confidence in managing the dialogue that developed during interviews.

At the beginning of some of the interviews, the participants' concerns were mainly about ethical issues; they were concerned about expressing their views in public or that the data might be used against them. The researcher's role was to assure them from the beginning of each interview and to explain the ethical procedures of the research that had been followed, along with assuring them of the study's confidentiality and that the data would be used for research purposes only.

Another study limitation was the change in context that took place during the time this research was conducted. Significant political changes took place in Saudi Arabia that influenced the status of all governmental and non-governmental institutions, the local economy and the nation's citizens. With the death of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and the ascension of his brother King Salman bin Abdulaziz to the throne, all policy makers were replaced in order to lead the country towards a new vision that will suit 21st-century requirements, including the nation's local and global changes and needs. Although the MoE's role has expanded in terms of responsibilities during this time, more departments and agencies have been created to work collaboratively and to support the ministry's role. There is thus a strong possibility that the challenges found in this study could be solved, while other challenges might emerge from such dramatic changes in the country. The current gradual improvements have included major changes in setting strategic developmental plans to be fully achieved by 2030; so far, however, no dramatic changes have taken place in terms of ECE practice.

During the final stages of this study, multiple agencies were also involved in raising the standard of the education system. In addition, with more women now in decision-making positions and being able to vote and take effective part in elections, women's role in society has been shifting (one example is that women are now allowed to drive), which may have implications for practice and the way in which society perceives women's role.

6.6 Future Research

The findings of this research elicited a number of questions that can warrant future studies. Further research is needed to study the implications of the Kingdom's 2030 Vision and explore any further changes and challenges leaders experience in the ECE sector. Such areas of research could include investigating whether the current educational reforms have addressed the issues ECE leaders face, or whether it creates other new challenges.

One question is whether investigating ECE leadership provision from other stakeholders' perspectives (such as those of superintendents, owners, deputies, practitioners and families) would help to clarify their perspectives on ECE leadership provision and offer another perspective of leading in ECE.

Despite the MoE's clarity on the role of superintendents, further research is required in this area to investigate the reasons conflicts occur. For example, why would the superintendent's role be challenging to ECE leaders? Could the reason be related to the ECE field being female only, with women supervising other women?

In terms of the research methodology, in order to generalise or to gain quantitative data from the research, pedagogical leadership could be studied from a quantitative perspective to investigate a hypothesis and to study variables that might affect and shape leadership.

6.7 Conclusion

Although conducting research may seem straightforward when planned properly, identifying a research problem, planning the research methodology and data collection, collecting and analysing the data gathered, and finding interesting results can sometimes be a messy and fluctuating process.

The importance of the ECE field is widely recognised, as the field influences both urban and rural development and the socio-economic infrastructure of healthy and wealthy communities (Dahlberg et al. 1999), all of which requires a leader 'who is guided by moral, rational and socio-emotional concerns more than structure and systems' (Rodd 2013, p. 39). ECE leaders thus play a vital role in the success of ECE settings. Furthermore, by recognising ECE's dynamic nature in the 21st-century learning environment and the individual contextual differences within the same contexts, the complexity of such a field arises.

The reason that ECE leaders were chosen randomly to participate in this research is that they are the people who interact with all stakeholders of an ECE setting, from the top MoE decision

makers down to teachers, families and children. They are in a position to deal with those above them, and all other factors influence their decisions and shape their behaviour. Their role is to strike a balance between all these factors and the challenges people face, thereby maintaining equilibrium in order to offer children the best possible learning environment.

Based on the researcher's readings of the literature, secondary data analysis and analysis of the results that emerged from the interviews conducted in this research, we can conclude that the context in which leadership operates shapes pedagogical leadership, whether through internal or external factors or the challenges that leaders face – or all of these factors combined. Despite cultural and contextual differences, preschool leaders worldwide appear to experience common factors and challenges. Having differences/similarities among various preschool settings shapes pedagogical leadership in such settings. This research thus suggests the contextual pedagogical leadership (CPL) concept in order to contribute to and extend our knowledge of pedagogical leadership in ECE.

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Appendices

Appendix (1): Research Ethical Approval

Canterbury Christ Church University

Overseas Ethics Declaration

A declaration of compliance with appropriate ethical procedures and protocols for research undertaken with human participants in countries outside the United Kingdom

✓ I declare that I, Lubna Alshanqiti

have followed all the necessary procedures to ensure that the research involving human participants I have carried out entitled

An Exploration of Pedagogical Leadership in Saudi Early Childhood Education

in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

between 1st September 2013 and 30th December 2013

as part of my research project or research degree, conforms in full to the ethical requirements of that country.

✓ I have acquired all the necessary permission from all the necessary parties with regard to access, use of research instruments or any other invasive procedures, and confidentiality.

✓ I have made the purpose of my research appropriately clear to all the parties that I am required to, and have behaved appropriately in response to the outcomes of this communication.

✓ I attach a copy of any regulatory or ethical documentation/certificates that I have had to sign or have been awarded by the jurisdiction within which I am operating.

Signed: Lubna Alshanqiti

Date: 05/03/2014

Completed declaration should be returned to the Research Governance Administrator, Graduate School and Research Office. Researchers should retain a copy for inclusion in their thesis/dissertation.

Overseas declaration ver3 02/09

Appendix (2): Participants' consent letter

Al-Nasekh Al-Arabi
Certified Trans.
License No. 578

مكتب الناسخ العربي
ترجمة معتمدة
ترخيص رقم ٥٧٨

C.C.No. (216941)

غرفة تجارية: (٢١٦٩٤١)

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Ministry of Education

Girls Education

Directorate of Education at Riyadh Region

Planning and Development Department

No.: 3412085690/7 Date: 30/7/1431H

STATEMENT

Subject: approval on applying the study tools in schools following the Directorate of Education at Riyadh Region

Researcher	LUBNA MOHAMMED ALAMEN ALSHENQITI
College/ University	University Of Hull
Purpose Of Study	Obtaining The Doctorate Degree

His Excellency the Saudi Cultural Missioner in London

After Greetings,

Based on the resolution of his highness the minister of education No (610/55) dated in 17/9/1416H relating to delegating the directorates of education to issue the permission letters for the researchers to conduct their studies and researches, and based on the delegation of the general director of education (Planning and Development Department) No (33674823/11 dated in 14/4/1423) regarding the facilitation of the tasks of the researchers. We would like to inform you that we have no objection to apply the study on the sample scope of the schools following the Directorate of Education at Riyadh Region. Regarding that the researcher bears the complete responsibility on the research issues, and the permission of the Directorate of Education at Riyadh Region doesn't mean that the directorate agrees on the research problem of the study processing methods. She was awarded this statement upon her request.

Thanks for your kind cooperation

Principal of Planning and Development: WADHAA SAAD ALSHAREIF

On her behalf: NORAH ALDHWAIHI

Signatures and official seal are available in the original.

WE CERTIFY THAT THE ENGLISH TEXT IS A FAIR AND ACCURATE TRANSLATION OF THE ARAB TEXT ATTACHED HERE TO

ص.ب ٢٢٦١٣ الرياض ١١٤١٥ - بريد الكتروني: al-nasekh@hotmail.com - هاتف وفاكس: ٠١ ٢٨١٦١١٧
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Appendix (3): Interview Questions

Introduction (general questions)

- Can you talk about yourself?
- Tel me what it feels like when coming to work in the morning?
    - What about the rest of the people?
        - Are there any examples of really happy moments?
        - Is there anything troubling people generally?
- How well the school doing?
- How well is it thought of? = How well is the school reputation?
- How do people get on with each other?
- Do you feel it is a happy place?
- Are the staff happy people?
- What sort of atmosphere during the working day? E.g. are people any fun or stressed?

Main themes:

Factors

- Can you identify any influential factors that influence your leadership behaviour?
- Why they are influential?
- How do they influence the setting's leadership?

Challenges

- What are the main obstacles hindering you from leading your setting effectively?
- How do you manage these obstacles?
- What do you suggest to improve the situation?

Pedagogical leadership in action

- How can you describe or define your role as a leader?
- To what extent do you take account of the ecology of the community?
- What examples do you have of workforce and family participation in decision making?
- Do you have any other relationships to support the learning community? Who and how?

Closing the interview

- Where do you see yourself (as school) after 10-15 years ahead?

Appendix (4): Examples of research participants transcripts

Example 1: Private

Participant: PRL23W
56 minutes

Q At the beginning I'll ask some questions about the school, and then I'll move to the main theme of my research. First of all, can you talk about yourself, your academic qualifications and your practical experience?

A I actually am unique in the sense that I don't specifically have early childhood education as my educational background. I am a Certified Teacher from Canada, Province of Ontario. I have two undergraduate BAs: one in History; with a minor in French. Because for my Bachelor of Education you have to choose an age group, so I'm intermediate senior level qualified, which is senior elementary through high school level qualified. You have to have two teachable subjects in that age group, unlike the lower age groups, so I am actually Certified Teacher for History or Social Studies, and French language. I have a BA in History with minor in French, and I also have a Bachelor Degree from France where I studied also in French History in French language, and that was at Université Jean Moulin in Lyon, France, for a year. So I have two undergraduate Degrees and I have a Bachelor of Education in intermediate senior level teaching qualifications.

Q Thank you very much. Can you please tell me what it feels like when you come into work in the morning?

A I think that when you come in the morning for me first thing I have a morning meeting with my teaching staff specifically, every morning, and so I am usually thinking about what I'm going to try to inspire them with in the morning whenever possible, or give them a pat on the back in order for them to hopefully be set up to have a good positive day with the kids.

Q How do you think the people feel like?

A In the morning it really depends on the day. Some days they are tired and lacking energy, especially on days where for example right now it's cold and flu season and we've got a lot of kids sick, and a lot of teachers picking flu and colds up for kids. So some days they don't feel 100% physically, which sometimes can be challenging. Of course working with young children takes a lot of energy. But I think that for the most part they all arrive with a smile and they are ready to welcome the children and greet them and have a good day. That's their goal. You're asking me how they feel, so it's a bit tricky because you're asking me to answer on their behalf.

Q This is your interpretation.

A My interpretation is that when I see them welcoming the kids between 7:45 and 8:00 and interacting with them, I hope that they're set for a good day.

Q Can you think of any examples of happy moments or maybe sad moments?

A For me with staff or with students?

Q The whole school.

A Last night, as I just mentioned to you, we just had a parenting one-on-one workshop here at the school. It was a workshop to cover some of the basics of parenting, skills and important information that parents need to know. Myself, my admin, my teaching staff, we were all here for the event and the presentation, greeting mums, saying goodbye. Certainly from a team perspective the workshop went very well, the parents really enjoyed it, they found it very helpful, informative and interesting. So it was a really positive feeling and experience for all of us last night. Many of the teachers that were there are mums themselves, several of them came to me after and said it was really, really helpful and can I have the PowerPoint slides from the presentation, I want to review all your points and information. I think it was a great team effort because you don't do an event like that without everybody's involvement and support in one way or another. A parent evening or a workshop event doesn't happen with just the person giving the presentation.

Q Everyone's contributing.

A Yes. It was a wonderful opportunity to see everybody do that.

Q Absolutely. So I guess everybody has enjoyed the event.

A Yes. There's always room for improvement. We debriefed on last night's event this morning and talked about ways to improve parent attendance, it was a bit low. We talked about the things also to improve as well. But overall no, I think that the teaching staff really made Talat school proud for their attendance and behaviour and their contribution during the presentation, comments that teachers made, and I think it was a great team effort and success.

Q How well is it thought about the school?

A Sorry?

Q How well is the school thought of?

A Building curriculums, that's a very big broad area. The school itself is a purpose-built building, it's not a renovated villa for example. We built the building for this purpose with 11 classrooms. We built the classrooms large to accommodate the type of curriculum or programme specifically that we implement in the KG classrooms. We're using a specific active learning curriculum called HighScope. I have done all the training in the States directly from the home base for this curriculum. It's a US developed or created curriculum or programme. So from a facility perspective I think it's very well thought out. We designed the whole place to fit the needs of our students and the daily routine and schedule they follow. They have a very specific daily routine and schedule which is all laid out and research based and supported by the HighScope Curriculum that we use, which I have training in, and as the team leader I train then

all of my teachers and staff on how to implement the HighScope Curriculum in the classroom environment.

Q By this question I mean how well is the reputation of the school?

A That's completely different from the first question.

Q How well is it thought of?

A Ah, I'm sorry.

Q You have mentioned very valid and good points.

A I'm sorry. I thought you said thought out. We have positive feedback and comments on Twitter and on other areas. Again this is strictly to some extent opinion, because unless you're asking third parties what the reputation of the school is like. I'm sort of too internal to really answer that question. I feel that certainly a lot of people know about the school, and they're aware that our reputation is that we are trying to do something different, or perhaps maybe a little bit more unique because the curriculum we're using is active learning, and that's not something that is heavily used or applied with young children here in Saudi Arabia, they still tend to use more traditional teaching formats or styles. So I think that certainly the impression we have is that we're new, we're different, we're unique, and certainly of course having a Western Director or Leader in the school, for many people from outside they perceive that as higher quality than having local. Which is a shame to some extent. But when you're asking what do people from outside think, sure they are going to be impressed or think that the quality is going to be higher because the Director is Canadian and not Saudi. So some of these elements I think are things that people think about when they think of Talat school.

Q The last question from my ((directory 0:11:13?)) of questions is, what sort of atmosphere that you provide during the day?

A Myself personally or-?

Q You provide others and atmosphere. For example, do staff feel happy and relaxed or stressed that they need to finish their work?

A I think that it's a combination in the sense that the staff set their daily plan and schedule so they know what their plan is. They're not waiting for someone to tell them what to do. So when eight o'clock starts and the daily routine begins, they're running their daily routine with their group of children. There is a schedule, at a certain time they should be in gym and at a certain time on the playground, so yes they do need to maintain time limits on certain activities to make sure that the day goes smoothly. Sometimes they might maybe be a little bit stressed about meeting deadlines for certain things. On Wednesday and Thursday they need to meet their deadlines for the newsletter, they need to send in their pictures and their write-ups for the weekly newsletter.

Q Oh it's weekly.

A It's weekly. But usually the teachers handle that fairly well. I like to think that we have a very positive work culture in the school. We certainly promote that everybody should be working hard, that everybody has responsibilities and that they need to meet those responsibilities. Sometimes that is stressful in order to meet them within the timeframe. But we also have a very open transparent if you have a problem please come and share your frustrations or your challenges, and let's try to brainstorm or think of ways to solve them.

Q You have just mentioned that everybody has their responsibilities. Can you just give me an example of the responsibilities that teachers have?

A They're running the daily routine for the 20 children from 8:00am to 1:00pm. They need to have greeting time first thing in the morning, and for greeting time they need to have a message board ready that they have prepared, to talk with the children on the topics that greeting time, they need to have visual pictures or symbols for that. They need to have their planning time activities and their recall time activities ready and the materials on-hand so that when those activities start they're ready to grab their materials and get started. They need to be assessing the children in the classroom environment throughout the day and taking notes, and then documenting those notes in the students' files on a daily basis. They need to follow through in the daily routine of having small group time, large group time, outside time, facilitating the kids moving to the gym, library, for other activities. Of course they also have breaks within their day as well. Then at the end of the day they need to make sure that their plans are in place for the following day, the activities of small group, large group planning and recall etc. And they need to enter any assessment documentation that they have done during the day that still needs entering into the computer.

Q Thank you very much for that. One of the main themes in my research is the social ((0:15:14?)) that influences your behaviour as a leader. Can you please identify any influencing factors that influence your behaviour as a leader? Either internal or external factors.

A External factors, the main one for me would be taking a look daily and trying to gauge in the morning how the teachers are feeling in order to try to get their day starting off right. If I sense that the teachers feel a bit stressed about upcoming report cards or an event that we're planning, then you try to address that to make them feel better or more relaxed. Or maybe you just try to lighten the mood generally by sharing positive comments from mums, or something that was a positive comment on Twitter about one of the activities, or myself just commenting on the quality of the newsletter write-ups this week. So I think that you try to be positive most of the time to try to make any external factors seem less challenging to the staff. Again from an external perspective, you try for the most part to be clear with your staff on the expectations of their responsibilities that they need to meet.

Q What do you mean, to be clear?

A The outline of what I just gave you of what teachers need to do. When they don't know what they need to do and then you come and say your newsletter is late and why don't I have a picture? But when everybody knows the deadline for the newsletter is Wednesday, this is your Tweet day. Again from an external perspective, making sure that you communicate regularly with everyone so that everybody is aware of their role and their responsibilities. Because sometimes that changes daily. If I have a staff member off sick, all of a sudden I need to verbally give somebody else her tasks or responsibilities for the day. But once you have done that in the morning, is that clear, do you have any questions? If you need come and ask me throughout the day. So those kinds of external factors.

You're always gauging that your staff members know what they need to be doing, they're aware of their responsibilities and how to meet them or achieve them, and you're just generally trying to gauge are they feeling a bit sick today or off, thank them for coming in, I can tell that they're a little bit under the weather and showing your appreciation that they came in anyway. Remarking on their dedication to their job is meaningful to them and hopefully lowers attendance or their lack of attendance even when they're feeling sick. It makes them feel, 'Okay they appreciate that I came in even when I'm not feeling well'. So these kinds of external factors. You want people to feel good and supported and know what they are required to do, then they feel less stressed, they feel responsible for their job, they don't want to not complete it and not be part of the team. So these external factors.

Then for me personally, my behaviour is gauged by my personal perceptions of what is important as a leader in a team in any environment. So you're talking about the level of professionalism that you exhibit in front of all of your staff, so that's how you speak to your staff, what topics you speak to everybody in a group and what you call people in to discuss privately and confidentially. It is how I conduct myself in the sense of coming in on time, rarely if ever being absent, following through on what I say I'm going to do for them or for the kids, or to repair something that's broken. When you're talking about a leadership role you're talking about your behaviour toward everyone else, you're talking about your professionalism and how well and seriously you take your job.

Then your behaviour, how you speak to people, using polite greetings. Always when staff come in you always say good morning, when they leave you say goodbye, at the end of the week you say have a nice weekend. You have a professional phrase when you answer the telephone. In everything that you do as a leader in an environment you're the role model, you set the standard for professionalism in the whole building, and that means you have to have an understanding of what is the quality level of professionalism you're trying to achieve, and then you need to make your environment look like that. That means that when a guest walks in someone greets you at the door and hopefully already knows who you are and that we're expecting you, and asks you to sit, and then they're going to bring you to my office, and they're going to explain that, "Just take a seat for a moment and I'll let Miss Julie know you're here and then

you'll come in". All of this, from the way that you greet, answer the phone, to the way we solve problems with teachers and issues they have. They need to be able to feel like they can come to you and share and ask for advice and say how do I do this or what do you suggest, etc.

So you can't be intimidating, you can't hide in your office and just do paperwork, you have to be behaviour wise a role model to all of your staff of professionalism, you have to be a role model of dedication to children and how to value children and respect them and how to treat them, and you have to expect that behaviour from your staff if you want to have high quality classrooms. In admin you have to expect people to meet deadlines, follow schedules and produce the work that needs to be done. The best way to do that is do all those things yourself, stay on the schedule, don't just make the rules for others and be above them. A lot of educational leaders want to make sure everybody else is following the rules but not me, I made the rules so I can tweak it for myself. And that's doesn't work. You have to talk the talk and then you have to walk the walk, it's a combination of the two. But you have to know what you're talking about in order to walk it. So the challenges that you run into, you have a lot of leaders that say things but they don't know how to implement it, and that again becomes a problem. They want a professional workplace but they don't know what that means. Then you're not going to have one.

Q You as a leader you don't do it yourself. You don't expect the other teachers will do it as well. You're the role model.

A Right. I'm the role model for everything and anything. There isn't anything that I wouldn't walk into a classroom and do myself. Therefore I'm not asking any of my teaching staff to go in there and do anything that I wouldn't personally walk in and do. In fact, I would even go in and help kids in the bathroom, and probably most of my teaching staff wouldn't do that. So I think again as the role model the idea is that there is no boundary to how far I will go for a student in the school or a staff member.

Q From my own point-of-view ((0:25:18?)) that the leadership of ((early years sittings 0:25:24?)), that any other leadership, that I guess there really needs to be very close to the children to the extent that as we said for example ((0:25:34?)) with them is fine.

A Yeah. Then that's what we have to do. And not to say that my teachers would not in a pinch not help kids in the bathroom, of course they would, but in certain cases they prefer not to do it or they will hesitate to do it, and as the leader you can't hesitate to do anything. You need to be ready to bring coffee for someone that stops by and not wait for us to call one of the cleaning staff from downstairs to get something, just walk in and get a bottle of water and bring it to the person who's with you. I don't need to call someone to have them come up to bring a bottle of water.

Q It takes time to get used to Saudi culture.

A Yeah. There are external factors that drive my behaviour and my leadership requirements of me, and also my personal vision of what professionalism and leadership-

Q As internal.

A Yeah. As internal it's my vision of what is professionalism and what is a professional leader that drives me internally as well.

Q Why do you think these influence you and how are they?

A The internal and external factors or my behaviours?

Q The internal and external factors, why do they influence your behaviour and how? Can you think of any reasons?

A I think that obviously the external factors influence your behaviour because you want to try to make your staff feel at ease, more positive, and have a good day with the kids. You want them to feel as much at their best as possible, and you want them to feel like successful professionals who know what they're doing and send them off into their classroom to have a good day.

For example, we have a motto that we develop during our team training at the beginning of every academic year. Again internally this is something that I feel is a good team builder and leadership thing, which is to create a positive teamwork and team environment you should have some kind of team spirit, and in order to create a team spirit one of the things we have is a team motto or saying. Last year it was 'go and be the light in the darkness', and it was a daily reminder to these preschool/early childhood education teachers that they are using a more unique approach with these kids, and that unlike a lot of traditional schools here we're not going to shout at young children, we're not going to be aggressive, we are going to use critical thinking and problem solving, what they call the 21st Century skills of learning.

So we have a team motto, this year it is that teachers are the life of the school. So every morning at the end of our morning meeting it's called, where I'm trying to send the teachers off with a positive morning feeling/making sure they're meeting any responsibilities they need to by the end of the day. At the end of it I say, "I hope you all have a great day and go and be the life of the school". That's something that they developed as a team during team training, and as I mentioned last year it was a different one, it was you are the light in the darkness. The idea is that it's a daily morning reminder to them that what they are doing is important, that what they are about to do in the classroom they need to just be aware that it is important and influential and that every day they are making a difference. And every day they are influencing, the question you asked earlier, which is people's thoughts about Talat school.

Q Did you call this team spirit, or what did you call it?

A Team spirit. It's a team cheer or it's our team motto for the year. We develop it. It's a team motto, but the idea is that it creates a team spirit or a teamwork or a team feeling. Because only we as the Talat team know this motto and we say it with each other. So it's unique to our team. So we do that, that's one thing that maybe is

something that influences why. This is one thing that I do and why I do it, for team building or team spirit, and we do it daily. What was the other part of the question?

Q How do these influential factors influence your behaviour?

A Why is you're trying to develop team spirit. Like I'm trying to break it down for you.

Q It's not really specifically for this. The why is why these internal/external factors? You see it yourself as things that influences your behaviour. Why and how? That's the ((tool 0:32:39?)).

A They influence my behaviour because I'm trying to have the staff feel positive and have effective days in the classroom. I guess the how is just simply me adjusting what I say at morning meetings, or the topics I choose based on how the teaching staff seem to be feeling that day. Do they need a boost? So am I going to give a positive comment from a parent that I heard, or a Twitter? Or sometimes give yourself a pat on the back for such and such. So how? Do I give the staff positive feedback? Do I tell them to give themselves a pat on the back? That would be how I would directly behave in order to address the why of where they are emotionally in their thought process that day. Does that make sense?

Q Yes it does, thank you. I'm talking also here about ((the ecology 0:34:02?)) of the community, the interaction between the learners/children and teachers, you as the leader and the local community. How far do you see these interactions in the school?

A The event that we had last night that I mentioned was a very good team success, we had community mums, mums that are not mothers of children that actually attend our school that called us, saw our event posted on Twitter and asked if they could attend, and did. We reach out to the community through Twitter, we make a lot of our workshops and events open to the public, so we're sharing our knowledge and information with the community. We also have community mailing lists for parents and teachers, so again for events and certain things we invite community teachers. We had a reading workshop and it was for our staff, but currently our staff is small, we only have two KG classrooms, six teachers, but we brought in a speaker that we were paying for anyway for our staff to benefit, so we called some other schools and said you're more than welcome to send teachers because we can take up to 20 and we only have six. We welcome community teachers at workshops and events and we welcome mums as well.

HighScope promotes what you call positive adult-child interaction, the curriculum that we use, so it is very much focused on speaking with children at their level, get down and get eye contact with them. Our teaching staff you will see in the classrooms on the carpet and on the floor and interacting and playing with kids. On the playground I have a tricycle that's adult size so that an adult can bike around the playground with the kids. Children and adults are focusing on having positive adult-child interactions. That goes for the teachers with the children and myself with the children and myself with the teachers, and all of that as I'm saying also goes out into the community, we also try to share this knowledge and information.

As an example of one of the ways that we have shared positive adult-child interaction, we use discipline and problem solving techniques that are what we call shared control. So we don't just make rules for the classroom, we talk to the children, and they formulate rules as a group or as a community. It's not dictated by the teachers. Another example is our uniforms. Our uniform shirts are exactly the same as what the children wear, it's not something different or separated. Every teacher has a long sleeve polo like this and a short sleeve, and if you take a walk maybe after we finish you'll see that the uniform of all the children is this exact same shirt. And it's navy jogging pants and it's a jacket exactly like the jacket that I have here, this is the same only child size version for our students. So both through the uniform for staff and students we are creating an atmosphere of what we called shared control and positive adult-child interaction. Where this isn't my outfit because I'm a teacher, and this is your uniform because you are the student, which in a lot of schools that's what happens. And that's the message. Without anybody on purpose doing it, but that's the message that you give the kids, if you're this person you wear this, if you're that person you wear that. Here we're all the same, children and adults are all wearing this. So that would be an example of that overall environment, the uniform is the same for all of us, which again facilitates that adult-child interaction.

Q I'd like to talk about now the challenges or the obstacles that ((hinder 00:39:07?)) you from leading your ((settings 0:39:11?)) effectively.

A Obstacles that affect my leadership.

Q Yeah.

A The attitudes sometimes and perspectives of others on their idea of professionalism, on the concept that it's okay to come 20 minutes late.

Q For example?

A That's my example! For example, it's okay to be 20 minutes late, and then of course as the leader my behaviour of course has to address that behaviour. Certainly you run into challenges of people, even though they have their responsibilities clearly laid out not meeting their laid out and clear responsibilities, which sometimes often happens. So you struggle with things like attendance and punctuality, because that affects your daily work, and it heavily impacts the children. In particular in our job when adults are absent it alters daily routines, it alters people interacting with children, and it can really impact young children. So attendance and lateness are issues that sometimes make your job more difficult. They make it more difficult because when you're not here to do your job that makes my job more difficult, I have to ask others to take over your responsibilities etc.

Outside of that just different people's perspectives on what is professional and what isn't. What kind of behaviours are acceptable and not as far as language. Some people's perspectives on confidentiality and what they can or can't discuss are different. So again you have to clarify all of these kinds of things. Obstacles you run into are the fact that people don't have a lot of work experience and/or they haven't

had a lot of training in professionalism and professional conduct in work ethics, in dedication to your job and taking your responsibilities seriously. Then at the end of the day if everyone did their job I wouldn't have any of this, everybody would show up, do the list of tasks they need to and go home. If they did that right I wouldn't have obstacles, or you'd have very few, or all you'd be doing is looking okay let's just look for ways to improve, how do we do it better? Of course you have these types of obstacles.

And you have training and continuous growth and development. Even if you're an excellent teacher and you attend every day, then you just have ongoing growth and development. Training is a continuous challenge. Understanding your teaching, how to teach better and adapt your programme to children's needs and interests. This is a skill, it takes time. You don't just read it in a book or take a class and then okay now you're an expert. Obstacles are time, because in reality people need time to practice a skill and then develop the skill and perfect it. So again these are obstacles. Training takes time and effort in itself, then the people need follow up and they need coaching. So you have the training, the follow up, the coaching, and in fairness to them also they need some time to understand the training, to apply the training, to develop their skills. So all of these are challenges. Then how to fairly assess the quality of the progress that your staff or your students are making. Not to say that it's an obstacle but documentation and assessment are critical and extremely important, but they're also extremely time consuming.

Q Absolutely. Especially in-

A In early years. My goodness, you could write everything down that a child says, or every time they sneeze, cough, don't feel well, if we wrote every single time they had a stomach ache or didn't feel well, you'd spend half your day just writing down.

Q There's no interaction ((0:44:35?)).

A Right. So balancing, documenting an assessment along with interaction with your staff, with your parents, with the students themselves. Your continuous obstacle is time, there is never enough. One day last week I had a spitting incident, followed by a hitting incident, followed by a student with a fever, followed by a mum calling me regarding another incident, and you just go from one thing to another, and half the things on your to-do list never happened. So again all that documentation or something else you were planning on doing didn't happen, but the things that you did deal with you had to deal with. So time is always an obstacle.

You can make wonderful plans and then your day can go sideways. A couple of weeks' ago it was head lice, having kids coming in and checking them, making sure no he's still not clean. Call the parent, can't reach the mum, have to call their dad, "Please come and pick your child up". So you're running into everyday unplanned things that come up that have to be dealt with that are obstacles to you getting the other important things in your day done as a leader. I'm sitting here talking to you right now, I've had two teachers walk by and look to see if they can come in. Obstacles are always there.

Q Sorry for taking your time.

A No, no, no. Obstacles are always there.

Q I wanted to ask you, how do manage these obstacles and what do you suggest to solve these?

A Of course with the examples I just gave you, prioritise. That's the best, you prioritise. For example, where are my teachers right now, do they need training or do they just need coaching? You need to prioritise in the sense that I can't fix every single thing I don't like happening in the classroom in one day, and I can't fix all of them at the same time. So you have to choose one at a time and say okay next week I want to work on fixing this, then that, then that. So I think that's the best. And make to-do lists and try your best to get them done. If they don't happen that day, later. And plan in advance trainings, workshops, ways to support your teachers throughout the academic year.

Q How do you describe your role as a leader and to what extent do you think it counts to your professional development?

A The last four years all of my professional development has been focused. Every summer I take HighScope training on the curriculum that we're implementing here in the school. My goal for professional development for myself right now is to become a HighScope trainer and I am two courses away from doing that. I will probably be taking one course this summer and completing next summer. It will have taken me a total of five summers to complete my training, first learning all about the HighScope Curriculum and then becoming a trainer of it. So that's my professional development goal, to become a trainer of the curriculum we're using and implementing here in the school. I am doing that direct from the main source in the US. Sorry, what was the other part?

Q Your role as a leader.

A What are my goals, sorry, as a-?

Q How can you define or describe your role as a leader?

A I guess in my opinion my role is to try and inspire my teaching staff to reach their highest potential as teachers, to want to reach that, and to want the best for themselves, and therefore in turn they'll want the best and want to help to the best of their ability the children in the classroom environment.

Q Can you think of any examples in relation to supporting teachers and children's capacity?

A For teachers how do you support their capacity to teach and their skills, you provide them with resources. In our staffroom I have a cabinet full of books, activities, books on how to implement the HighScope Curriculum and Programme. That would be the best. They need resources and training. You can't use the resources without the right training and explanation of what to do. So resources and training.

Q How about children, can you think of any examples?

A Of what I need to provide them?

Q No, of supporting their capacity.

A Of supporting their skills and capacity.

Q Hmmm.

A First off I think respecting their intelligence and their capabilities and skills, and valuing them as people and valuing their ideas and their opinions.

Q Lastly, do you have any examples of teachers participating in decision making, either inside the classroom or outside?

A Oh sure. Our parent handbook, after we wrote it we made hard copies of it and gave it to all of the teachers and asked them to review it. We went through sections of it with them specifically and we asked for their input and any additions that they wanted in. We had handbook focused groups and discussions. We did the same thing for the teacher handbook. They were involved in helping us finalise and formulate the attendance rules, regulations and consequences.

Q How do you see this role after 10 to 15 years?

A Right now we only have Kindergarten so it's going to take us the next four years to implement fully five KG classrooms, because right now we have two. Then we're going to be phasing in First Grade, Second Grade and Third Grade, for girls and boys. So that's going to take us the next five years. 15 years from now I hope that the school has an excellent reputation for teaching Arabic and English language at a high level. I hope that we of course are full. We have 11 classrooms, five KG, 100 Kindergarten students, and another 120 First Grade in six classrooms for First, Second and Third. I hope we're full, that we have a waiting list of parents eagerly trying to get their children into the school environment. I hope that we've developed an excellent after school programme that takes advantage of the gym and the studio that we have built as part of our school facility. I hope that we are running ongoing basketball, indoor soccer, volleyball, ballet, dance, hip-hop, Taekwondo classes. That we're running a full after school programme in athletics as well as possibly languages. We'd love to see an after school or weekend library programme using our library as well.

Q Do you have a library?

A We do. It's a borrowing library for our students. They take home two books a week, one English, one Arabic. So I would love to see our reading programme go out to the community as well. The after school programme and reading programme would be for the community as well as for our students, so it would be reaching the community and our Talat kids. I hope in 15 years it's booming, at least we're economically supporting ourselves, because right now with two classrooms we're not currently. So I hope we are financially viable in 15 years, that we're full, and we're running successful day educational programmes and after school athletic and educational programmes for our students and for the community at large. I also hope that we have a training programme

to support teachers other than teachers working here at our school, to learn more about HighScope.

Q Okay, thank you ever so much for your time. These are really valuable points that you have made.

Example 2: Public

Participant: PUL4D
68 minutes

Can you start by talking about yourself and your practical and academic experiences?

I graduated from the Dar es Salaam National School system. Upon graduation, I taught Kindergarten. Of course, I was employed for seven years before I graduated. During the first four years, I was the manager of the Kindergarten (KG) department. Then, for three years, I was the manager responsible for overseeing all schools. I then moved into governmental work at King Saud University.

How do you feel when you arrive for your full-time job in the morning?

Well, I was not employed at the primary school for a specific position, and I was actually hired by chance. At the time, I was training at the University of Dar es Salaam. Prior to graduation, the owner of the school, who happens to be my husband's sister, approached me. She was the acting section head of the KG department (a position that did not formally exist), and she offered me the opportunity to assume that role and develop the position. I jumped at the opportunity not realising that the KG department was literally incomplete. When I arrived for my first day at work, I found no building, just ruins and dust. However, I had experience in the governmental sector, and I knew when they gave me the key that 'every cloud has a silver lining'. I also love a challenge and a sense of achievement, so I was more than up to the task at hand. I am used to waking early and putting in a good day's work. In the beginning, the work was a bit haphazard as I was simultaneously developing the section head position and completing the physical structure for the KG. However, I was happy when I was working, and I enjoyed the work. Thus, I continued in a position that I had never planned to undertake. When you feel that you have achieved something from your work, you are motivated to start again the next day and take one more step, even though the new day is just like the day before—nothing new.

All of the teachers who worked with me were excellent. Together, we established the KG in full in less than a year, including the workshop, tools and materials. I should add that this KG was in 1929H, a very poor district of Irqah. The people here were unfamiliar with KG and did not understand the basis for it, as it was non-existent in their culture. In turn, we were somewhat unprepared for the condition of the children arriving at our school. The socioeconomic status of the families coming to us was disquieting. Some mothers and children were shoeless; their clothes were simple and often appeared to be pyjamas. When the KG was fully functional, it became a source of good for the whole neighbourhood. The teachers and I tried to spread awareness to the parents so they could understand the basis for the KG and its goals. In some respect, I did something here that no one had ever done before, which was 'community awareness'. Both the KG and the environment were in need of this, and I worked with the Ministry to meet these needs. I prepared lectures for the community that encouraged Dr. Haniya Al-Murza, a Professor at the University of King Saud—May Allah reward him— to give lectures and conduct several sessions with the mothers. In two of my lectures, I worked with the mothers and helped raise their awareness about their children's culture and environment using a survey questionnaire. Moreover, I brought them to the Health Centre where they were educated about hygiene and nutrition. I also encouraged one of my friends, who studies energy and breathing, to educate the teachers and the women, in sha Allah, in the community on how to release themselves from the pressures of daily life in order to have the energy to actively participate in society. While working on meeting the needs of the KG, we were introduced to Professor Hafsa, who has a very good reputation in the Ministry. She visited with me regularly, and we toured potential outsource companies to contract for the KG. Professor Hafsa also brought representatives from the companies to our meetings, where we discussed the activities I was passionate about doing for the district. Professor Hafsa gave her approval for me to pursue the activities, which she said would be entered into the Ministry's policies, thereby implementing the mission of the KG.

Was Ms. Hessa interested in the Ministry or not?

Um, Nizar, no. Professor Hessa is aware of our work and placed no restrictions on us. Her open-mindedness made us unafraid of accountability. This is most important as it allowed me to work comfortably. She examined the subject and saw what we did; she saw how the people were more civilised and were becoming educated. Professor Hessa could see how our work was a source of good, even providing people with financial aid and buying clothes for the children. During the break, the children were given food free of charge. All the teachers, including those in the KG, are doing good work, Allah bless it.

What do you feel when you come to your full-time job every morning? Are you enthusiastic?

Yes, of course. I love the work and our staff is wonderful and helpful. In the morning, you find them coming up with goals, talking about innovations and developing the work. I cannot say that we are perfect. Two lazy people have joined the group, and we dare to say to them, 'What do you want? I agree'. They think that nobody can stop them.

Do you pass through times of happiness or sadness?

Yes, of course. Sometimes you want to do something, but you are shocked by the rules and laws, and dealing with them affects you. One year, my appraisal was downgraded. I was astonished and asked why that happened for work I did quickly and enthusiastically. However, I forgot that it is government work, and I have to refer everything to my reviewer before implementing it. Although, if you lose your enthusiasm, this is harmful, too. However, praise be to Allah, everything is good, especially for the KG. If you look at the curriculum of the KG, you will find that it has been developed, but there are still things that are bothersome. For example, written tasks and correspondence cause time loss, and although we have added all the information to the computer system, we still receive statistical data and forms that need to be filled out. We enter all data into the system; there is no time for handwritten documentation. The greatest benefit is that all of our work is practical, and we do not use handwritten information. There is no time for that, and it is counterproductive to our practical observations. In addition, KG management is not like that of other schools where they sit in their offices. You will not find the manager of the KG sitting at her desk for an hour or even a half an hour.

How do you feel about the atmosphere of the KG?

If our teachers are absent and there are not enough teachers to cover the classes, this creates a big problem. If there are no substitutes available, this puts extra pressure on the teachers who are in school that day. Consequently, the teachers cannot give the full care and attention to the children that they deserve. This also leads to an increased workload and added stress. Thus, a full complement of both teaching and administrative staff is very important to ensure a comfortable and giving environment

Do you feel that there are worrisome things in the KG?

We do have some problems that worry me. We receive children who have learning difficulties or severe mental retardation who should be attending specialised centres or special needs schools. However, we are told that they should be enrolled in the same KG as the children without learning disabilities and that they do not require special needs centres. We must pay extra attention to these children to monitor their changes, or else we might just have to dispense with the KG. I also worry about the lack of cooperation from the parents. As I said, they have no awareness. This is a poverty-stricken district with no possibility of recovery. So, I worry about these children and hope they move to the elementary stage. My only wish is that they graduate from our KG and that they go on to be excellent.

What do you think of the KG's reputation?

In sha Allah, our reputation is good thanks to our exerted efforts and the large number of children who are registered to attend our KG or who are on our waiting lists. Last year, our KG was chosen as an ideal KG on a level with Riyadh. Praise be to Allah, as our KG was built from nothing. We started completely from scratch.

What are the factors that affect your behaviour as the manager of the KG?

My understanding of the teachers' psychologies; before the teacher comes in, I give a lot thought to what I want the teacher to achieve. Then, I prepare and help deliver the subject information to the teacher clearly and effectively, in sha Allah. The teacher is satisfied because I deliver the subject matter in such a way that the objectives are clear. I develop the subject so that the teacher has clear guidelines of the result I am expecting. I do not give the teacher a problem to resolve, but rather a subject plan to follow. I consider this my major achievement, all of which is psychologically stressful for the manager. They say the manager is in a comfortable position, but I get nervous if I'm late for work. Most importantly, I am afraid of being isolated as the manager, and I am also afraid of inequality. When I get in my car every morning, Oh Allah, I seek refuge in you from oppressing or being oppressed, meaning that I do not want to oppress anybody or be oppressed. I am always worried about how I deal with others. No one should be keen on oppressing any one or taking away their rights.

Why do you think these factors affect your behaviour?

Because they cause you worry when you find yourself waiting for a teacher or you want to reach a particular goal. You begin to wonder whether or not you will reach it, and how this worrisome situation is encroaching on your time. I expect that all managers have these types of concerns with their employees and such factors will affect you.

Are there any other factors affecting your behaviour?

When my husband originally agreed to my taking the position, it was only supposed to be for one term. Now, I only work if I feel comfortable, as the most important thing is your family life. However, social events and visits take up your time at night, particularly special occasions such as weddings and parties. So, you come into work the next morning fatigued, which affects your performance, and this is another type of pressure.

How do these things affect your management?

This acts against you sometimes when you see people around, but you have rules and regulations to uphold and that can hamper you. You find yourself sitting alone a lot and thinking. My first priority is the children, but when I have issues on my mind, they distract me and make me feel nervous. By the way, I distribute work well. I have an assistant who came to me two years ago, and she is great. At the beginning, I was on my own. I didn't even have an administrative officer. The only administration in the KG was the administrative staff and employees. When the staff was incomplete, I would be perplexed and wouldn't know where to start. This created some tension for me; even my dealings with the teachers were a little tense. Now, when I look back at what I did, I see that I was tough with them, and I didn't give myself opportunities to relax. Now that I have an assistant, I am more relaxed, I am able to give more, I have become quieter and I am more careful about my decisions. However, when you are alone, have no one to assist you and you are the only manager in the whole KG, teachers and employees do not know what to do. I'd handle the basic tasks, but these details do affect you and you become stressed. I mean, it is not true to say that they do not affect me. When the assistant came, I became more comfortable as she is well informed and has experience. Thus, when she came, I felt myself relax more and was more able to give.

What are the obstacles you face as a manager and which have an impact on the effectiveness of your management?

As I mentioned, laws and regulations sometimes limit your ability to give as well as a lack of administrative staff, teachers and even general employees. We have an elderly guard who should retire as he has exceeded the legal age limit, but we extended it for him. He was in good health, but this year, his health deteriorated and he became a danger to the children when they entered and exited the building. I even made him responsible for closing the door on entry and exit, which is a bit of a worry. This can be an obstacle that can make you feel restricted and all you care about is the door. In addition, a lack of materials can be a major obstacle inside the KG. These are issues that need a large amount of money, but they are considered non-essential. The Kingdom did everything in its power to address such issues, providing us with a full budget for complete classroom furniture, including tools and workshops. We are given a sum of money every term, but when you want to create or do new things, more money is always needed. I have a carpark that I was supposed to have completed, and it is a very important part of the infrastructure. Up till now, I have not been able to complete because bicycles are expensive, very expensive. What you need is something you can throw away, but bicycles can cost you thousands of riyals extra. Thus, we have not completed it due to money.

Are there other difficulties?

Honestly, on the subject of KGs, direct experiences, such as visits and fieldtrips, never stop. Trips are very important yet dangerous because they carry a great deal of responsibility. However, their advantages outweigh their disadvantages, and might entail going to the park, the House of Science, or embassies for a change. One of the obstacles is that the most experienced are not always women, but there are some great men who give lectures and courses. We would like to be allowed to have men come on the fieldtrips to deliver the lectures, and we could be separated by using a screen in order for them to do so. These obstacles must be referred to the Ministry. As long as they give us so many powers, they should give us the right to do everything.

We face many obstacles, another of which is the multiple referrals we must make before anything can move forward, which wastes time. For example, in the KG, we make many referrals. If we only had to make one referral, it would save time and effort, and it would be more giving, allowing us to reach solutions quickly and accurately in the follow-up. Now, we must refer to several sources, first of whom is myself. Then we refer to the KG management and the office of the two prime ministers. Thus, if you want to complete a transaction or so, you suffer, or when you get the approval, you find you have missed the deadline. The referral system we have is very bad; they have a long sequence of steps. I mean, I cannot speak to the public administration before I address the KG office. I have to tell them and they, in turn, have to notify someone else—a very long routine. Then, we have an office of supervisors who supervise the KGs. This helps us to coordinate and facilitate our matters. However, we now have a lack of supervisors. Before, we had enough supervisors so it was easier, but now the office is under pressure and has no supervisors.

Are there other constraints?

Poor buildings frankly leave you in awkward and cautious situations. In the KG, there are cracked walls and exposed electrical wires. I will show you the damages that we have personally repaired to evade danger as we cannot enter the KG in that condition. We did the repairs ourselves in order to overcome the difficulties of getting anything done. If we did not fix them, they would not be fixed. We have an emergency exit to help teachers exit out to the street that lies between us and the other schools, the preparatory and elementary schools. However, if you opened this exit door, it would be a disaster. The door is small and it opens into a hole. It is just something abnormal. I uploaded photos and they sent me the official who is responsible for the affairs of buildings and emergencies. When he saw the dangers, he was totally shocked but did nothing. Believe me, they are very bad. They come to us but

they never move on anything. They wait until a disaster happens. We have become tortured by these kinds of obstacles.

Can you think of any other obstacles?

In general, I will send you the responses to the emails and you can do what you like with them. However, I may forget obstacles, such as buildings and such, as they are personal efforts and what I feel I can accept for my children and my own house. As long as you turn to Allah for assistance and support, money is a blessing and permissible, meaning that we are judged and we do not behave out of fear of other people.

How do you face these obstacles?

I always feel that in the administrative hierarchy, we are all specialists; all of those supervising us should be ECE specialist. Among the men, all of them may have an awareness of ECE; yet, they do not accept it when their children say, 'Papa, we want our classrooms to be expanded, and we want proper toilets and wash rooms.' However, the fathers ignore these requests from their children. They just close the door on them and leave them. Why? Maybe it is because they are unaware of the importance of KGs! I mean it is a necessity to raise the awareness of everyone involved in a KG. That is why I execute educational programmes for all concerned. This includes working with engineers to create a safe and healthy environment for the children. So, building a KG means not having small corridors and classrooms that are on the street or completely blocked up and grounds that are barren. When I first saw the site of my KG, I was shocked and thought this is not a KG, it is a plan in progress. They have never entered a KG. So, we brought a plan to the capital, but we faced a lack of awareness and a lack of proper planning. There has to be a model plan, but to apply a plan costs a lot of money. We were in a large meeting in the main office and I told them, from my experience, what these obstacles were and how I overcame them. They told me why the principals did not share the privileged teachers with the supervision to develop a full plan for the KG. Any KG built on this plan was facing demolition, re-construction and major repairs. Now, expenses are interest free for any school closed for restoration. This means a waste of money, energy and time due to mismanagement. All of this together makes me feel very agitated because of the lack of awareness about KGs. When they tell you to refer to the referral system, I feel some comfort and somewhat encouraged. When we completed the KG, they refused to fund us, and we had already started to receive the children. The supervisors who visited us, however, told us to close the KG.

I opened the KG and worked alone in it for about a year with no help at all. When the KG started, the manager of the main office was the only one working. I was dealing with tradesmen regarding the electricity, water, plumbing and so on. I had no experience working with public KGs, and no one came to me and said that this is the system that I must follow. When a KG opens, there is supposed to be a committee with you, and you are not to accept the key until you see the site. However, in my case, I was given the key and asked to enter, which I did. I entered normally thinking that the KG was ready, but I was shocked to find it in ruins. I was put at a table with no guard, employee or any other person. I was alone. A supervisor came to me on only one day to see if I was working, may Allah reward her well. She taught me how to file records. I knew nothing. It was a great event to open a KG from the ground up in all aspects, such as electricity, water, plumbing and furniture, and when I finished, two supervisors came to inspect what I had done. One was the officer of KGs at the head office who the KG department had delegated for the task. When she came and saw what I had done, she was so astonished and proud of my achievements. When she asked who had assisted me, I told her no one as that was the truth. After all, I couldn't give names of people who hadn't been there. They talked to each other, thinking that I was complaining about my supervisor. How could I complain about you when I do not know you? They manipulated my words, although they did not want to do that. If I were to do something wrong, I would

expect to be sanctioned. But I did right and I know what I did. They did not even have the right to intervene. In the morning, the officer of the KG unit arrived before we opened the KG but left immediately. She did not want to confront me. I asked Allah for His forgiveness for causing problems.

They told me to close the KG, but I refused to do so. They gave me two teachers to assist me. I opened anyway because the KG was totally ready. I sat down in the KG and asked them what they wanted. They left and seemed to be embarrassed with themselves. All I know is that I do not care about them. I told them that they hunt for mistakes, but they do not see the achievements and good deeds we performed. Anything I send them, they finish immediately. They even downgraded my appraisal. My supervisor gave me 99% on my assessment, and they downgraded it. I rejected it, but they insisted on downgrading it in my first year. They were supposed to support me psychologically, but I received no thanks or appreciation, and this hurt me. Frankly, they do not seem to appreciate the great efforts exerted by one person to build a KG. When one does something good, it should be appreciated and rewarded. It was good that they encouraged me, but what do they care if I properly arrange papers?

There seems to be a great lack of appreciation in general, especially from the management. They ask us to appreciate our teachers, and we do thank them as the management does not do so. They have never sent a thank you letter to any teacher, and each one does the work they need. The management will express their annoyance over something, but we receive no positive feedback about one's work, no thanks or appreciation at all. Even when they said that they chose a gift for us, they did not inform me and did not bring a certificate or a note. I learned about it indirectly.

Finally, these buildings have been poorly maintained and are in poor condition, while the furniture provided by the furniture companies is broken, all of which are additional obstacles after the fixtures. I would like to have laptops for each classroom to keep pace with advances, but we are constrained by a lack of equipment and devices. We should open a room of tools and equipment, such as a device for the management and a projector for presentations. However, each classroom also needs a device, as processes are hindered when tasks must be performed manually.

How do you evaluate your role as a KG teacher?

Follow-up and development are necessary. Providing nutrition to the KG people in their homes is important. The community support the school. My responsibility is to grow each child's talent, but his/her intelligence must be nurtured through proper nutrition and other means, such as procurement and workshops. The children's development and nutrition is a continuous process in KG.

What examples do you have?

Some examples are renewing tools, continuously preparing raw materials, sanitary ware, and other such items, which are bought by the manager or some might collaborate. In short, we do all the buying. In the first year, the Ministry was buying, but they no longer do. Now they give us a budget and we buy.

To what extent do you take into account the external community or even the internal community?

The first thing I established was a social partnership with Irqah Social Education, a non-governmental institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs. I formed the social partnership on the basis that it would be beneficial when various activities needed to be organised, such as lectures, brochures, special occasions and so on. We made a contract with them; however, I worked with them before the contract was formalised because I knew I could count on them. They started to provide us with doctors for healthcare and lecturers to give talks to parents and teachers. I have appealed for a doctor at King Saud University, and I have appealed to the Self-Development Authority, stressing the importance of the KG and awareness of social education.

At the KG, I prepared first aid kits and put one inside each classroom. It contains the basic first aid that a child may need, and its contents were also distributed to the parents to have at home. This is a simplified model of it. I also went to King Fahad Hospital and the Security Forces Guards and Specialists sent me their first aid kit. I selected those things that I considered most important for children in the KG, such as medications for abdominal pain or asthma attacks, and I arranged them in a simplified way. This was followed by a series of health and safety lectures on a variety of topics. These included: how to define the location and nature of pain in non-life threatening situations; the proper use of syringes, i.e. not reusing syringes on a second patient, and other medical equipment in the classroom; identifying and treating swine flu, etc. I also gave a detailed lecture on the method of administering first aid and the importance of communication.

In another lecture intended to educate parents about the KG, brochures were distributed to all attendees that explained what the KG is and what are its aims. It is important for parents to understand that their child's attendance at the KG is not only for play. We also arranged a family violence programme, in which we hung posters on the walls and distributed brochures to the parents. We also held a morning session with the children in which they were taught how to protect themselves when exposed to family violence. This was presented in a simple format, which was accompanied by roleplay performances and a song that were clear and comprehensive.

We also gave a lecture to the teachers on appropriate behaviour along with child rights. Other lectures included one on the usefulness of food, which we took from the health unit, another on hyperactivity, and one on children's guidance. A particularly important lecture was one on children's eyesight. We have children who suffer from eyesight problems; thus, it was important to educate the teachers on how to refer their students when they complained of sight problems. We had a teacher who faced this problem with one of her students, and she bought her eyeglasses. In addition, a lecture on childhood intervention was given by Dr. Haniyeh Mirza. We also gave lectures on how to make bread and electric magnets.

I took photos of all of these activities, and I had carpenter build a display case for them. I made a primitive television to make the photos into a story. The children can view the photos as if it is one story book; it is an excellent lesson. May Allah bless her, the author Manahel, who specialises in children's stories; I have used her work as references here. Although I initiated all of the aforementioned activities, these are the efforts of all the teachers, not only my efforts. To implement them, we first arranged the tools that would be required for each initiative. They were then packed in containers located in the workshops. We collected these achievements in one record that reflects our reputation and how we accomplished these.

What is the role of family participation in decision-making?

There is a visiting program for the mothers and we also share some meals. The intention is to foster cooperation between us and the home. We send them information about our programmes, and we maintain records of our meetings with the parents. For example, we might have a meeting in which the child is present if it involves what is required of him/her. There are many programmes in place to deal with family violence. In these situations, we seek the mother's cooperation to discuss anything she might have noticed about her child's physical, emotional or mental condition. Thus, the mother helps us to work with the child in the school because she has determined the problem. We have had some mothers who leave their children with the driver. Can you imagine? When we follow up with the child, we find that the driver has caused problems for the child, such as physical or mental abuse. Therefore, we must cooperate with the parents all the time.

Are there other relationships affecting the child?

This is a complex matter. We have appealed to many entities, including King Saud University, the Self-Development Authority, teachers and some mothers working in health-related fields. They come to participate with us. Then there are also the fathers. We started organising parties, but some devices were not functioning. We called one father who has an am audio system. He came and installed an advanced system.

Finally, how do you see KG in 10 years?

Honestly, my wish is that we do not stop at this stage. My wish is that the young girls who come to us find more and more opportunities for development and advancement. I mean after 10 years, we should not be standing still; we should all have renewed energies. I hope that the younger generations can make everlasting changes that will strengthen their status in society and decrease their family duties. I would like to see ECE graduates who have enthusiasm, motivation and who make changes for the better. I would hope that young girls benefit from all the potential presented to them after 10 years of growth.

What do you want from research in general?

I want to do research that is useful, which develops us in sha Allah and eliminates these obstacles in general.

Thank you.

Appendix (5): Strategic goals, Current Challenges and 2020 Outputs

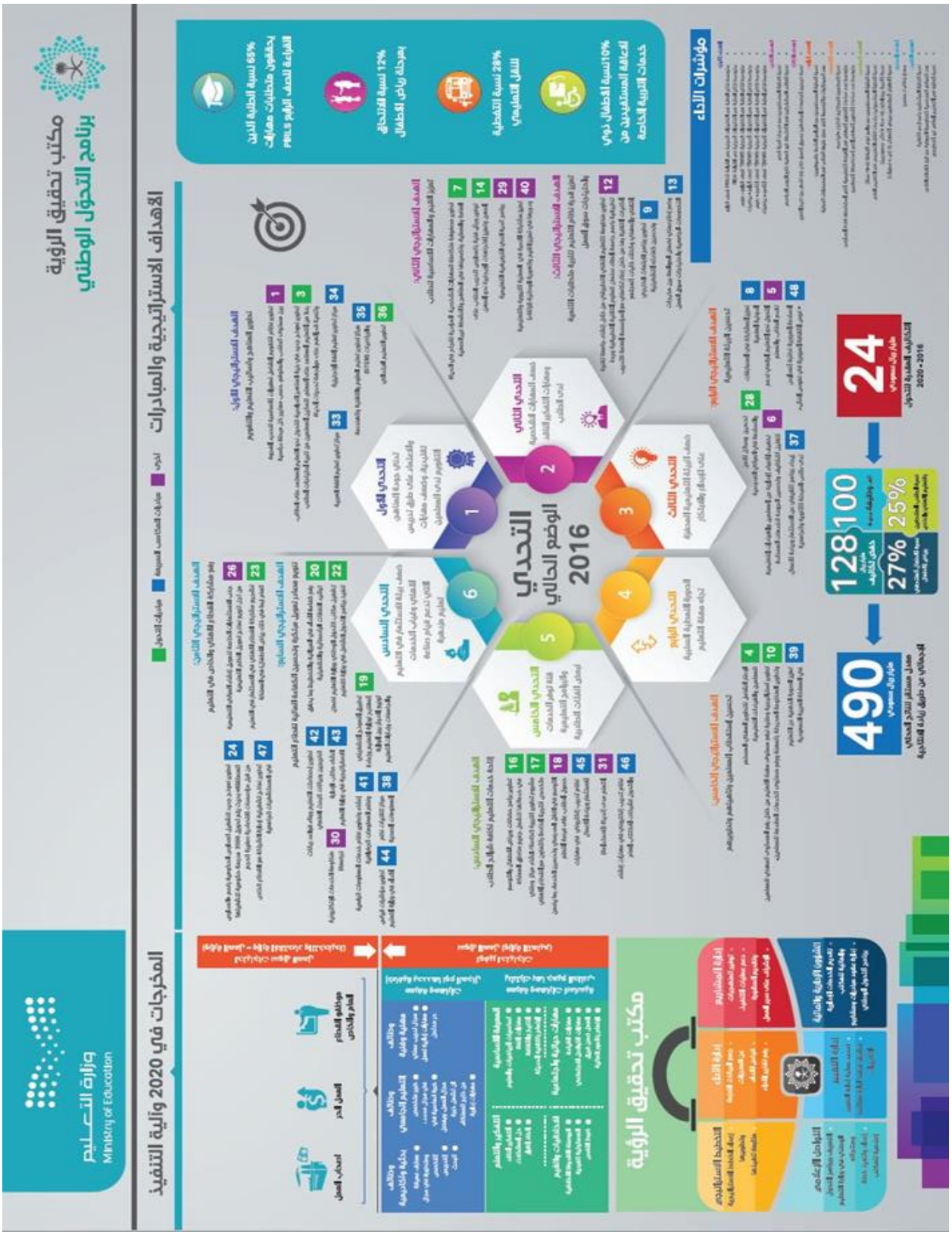

Figure 8: The MoE strategic goals, challenges and 2020 outputs (CEDA, 2016).