



# **The Concept of Creativity among Preschool Teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

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### ABSTRACT

The research aimed to explore the perspectives of creativity among preschool teachers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Qualitative methods were administered and data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observations, to explore the different perspectives held by a range of female preschool teachers in the KSA. The sample comprised twenty early childhood practitioners from four different preschool settings, two private and two public schools. The researcher then followed the interview results with observation outcomes to counter and minimise any impact on the participants as well as the data. The information was then integrated in the interpretation of the overall results. Findings from both the interview and observation qualitative analysis processes indicated many different perceptions of creativity were held by the preschool teachers. Three common perceptions emerged, that were found to describe creativity as being artistic, being intelligent and being gifted and unique. Significantly, creativity was linked with arts and more often with intelligent. Teachers have been aware of the importance of their own creativity and its effect on children's creative thinking. The research recommended conducting in-service training courses in order to enrich the teachers' own creativity and to provide teachers with rich examples of the most powerful pedagogical practices.

*Keywords:* Creativity among Children, Preschool Settings, Early Childhood.



## مفهوم الإبداع في بيئة ما قبل المدرسة بالمملكة العربية السعودية:

### تصورات المعلمين

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### المستخلص:

هدف البحث الحالي إلى استكشاف الإبداع لدى معلمي رياض الأطفال في المملكة العربية السعودية، وقد تم تطبيق الأساليب النوعية وتم جمع البيانات من خلال المقابلات والملاحظات شبه المقيّدة، لاستكشاف تصورات مجموعة من معلمات رياض الأطفال بالمملكة العربية السعودية، وتمثلت عينة البحث في عشرين معلمة للطفولة المبكرة من أربعة أماكن مختلفة لمرحلة رياض الأطفال، ومدرستان خاصتان ومدرستان حكوميتان، ثم أردف الباحث نتائج المقابلة مع نتائج الملاحظة لمواجبة وتقليل أي تأثير على المشاركين وكذلك البيانات، كما تم دمج البيانات التي تم التوصل إليها في تفسير النتائج الإجمالية، ولقد أشارت النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها من كل من المقابلة وعمليات التحليل النوعي للملاحظة إلى العديد من التصورات المختلفة للإبداع لدى معلمي مرحلة ما قبل المدرسة، حيث أفرزت النتائج ثلاثة تصورات مشتركة لمفهوم الإبداع باعتباره فن وذكاء، وكونه موهوبًا، وفريدًا، بصورة واضحة أشار المعلمون أن الإبداع أقرب أن يكون فن عن كونه ذكاء، كما أدرك المعلمون أهمية إبداعهم وتأثيره على التفكير الإبداعي للأطفال، ولقد أوصى البحث بضرورة إجراء دورات تدريبية للمعلمين من أجل إثراء مكون الإبداع لدى المعلمين وتزويدهم بنماذج للممارسات التربوية المثلى في التدريس.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإبداع عند الأطفال، بيئة ما قبل المدرسة، الطفولة المبكرة.

## Research Background

There has been much interest recently in the concept of creativity and its relevance in education. A considerable body of research, focussing on creativity in education, gives a great deal of attention and consideration to creativity in children because of its positive impact on their educational future and in developing their daily life skills (Robinson, 2001; Craft, 2002; Craft et. al., 2007; Resnick, 2007).

Many researchers in the field of education agree that creativity is a phenomenon that all children share regardless of their age, gender, or academic ability (Craft et al., 2007; Richards, 2009; Cremin et al., 2013). However, this aspect of child development has not been given much attention in the educational system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (the KSA) (Alfaisal, 2009; Al Omar, 2013). Although the preschool curriculum has developed over the last thirty years in Saudi Arabia, the interest of creativity has remained a low priority and studies of creativity in preschool education are rare (Alfaisal, 2009; Aljabreen& Lash, 2016).

## Theoretical Framework

### Significance of Creativity

Views have shifted from where creative ability was once thought only to exist and be attributed **to a select exceptional few. ( language )** Now, the term is applied more widely and suggests that creative ability is intrinsic in everyone, and this includes young children (Craft, 2002).

Craft (2002) views creativity as a phenomenon that all people share regardless of their age, class, gender, race, or ability. It is not exclusive to rich, famous, artistic, or intelligent people. She further maintains that creativity is a key that has significant effects for future societies, whether in relation to producing a multi-role society or coping with the speed of change. Creativity is applied to everyday norms, through the ways in which people problem solve and how they are more innovative in the ways in which they express themselves and interact with their social and physical environments. Much more precedence is given to thinking and behaving more creatively and this is deemed to be necessary for the well-being of society as a whole, as well as for the individual (Craft et al., 2007).

Richards (2009), in considering the importance of creative functioning and development, identified 12 possible benefits of everyday creativity. The benefits are in relation to the idea that when people are creative, they are being: dynamic, conscious, healthy, non-defensive, open, integrating, observing actively, caring, collaborative, androgynous, developing and brave. Richards (2009) held the view that living creatively had many dimensions, such as having a new purpose, the aspect of possible rewards, being able to make connections, enjoying a rich experience, being comfortable with oneself and with others, the idea of having growth in personal



development, having deeper knowledge and appreciation of the meaning of life, as well as the aspect of being able to enhance mental and physical well-being. These features seem positive in value as well as transformative in potential. Hence the use of the term 'benefits'.

Robinson (2001), asserts that early years curricula have experienced dramatic changes since the first preschool class opened in Germany in 1837, about 200 years ago. In that era, children were drawing pictures, telling stories, building castles, learning to express themselves and were exploring how to contribute to their worlds. Today, this picture has changed a great deal, as preschool becomes like the rest of school, where children spend much more time filling worksheets and learning mathematical problems, for example. Likewise, children were not distracted or absorbed by technological gadgetry or advancements, as we see with the modern-day child. Children in past times utilised more of the natural resources they had around them and were able to engage in much simpler activities and yet still be creative. It could be argued that this shift has the potential to stifle the creativity of children in today's times.

With regard to the changes that the preschool curriculum has undergone, Resnick (2007) agrees with views of Robinson (2001) as stated earlier. More importantly though, Resnick (2007) confirmed that creativity allows children to be able to meet the challenges and empowers them to cope with change. The need to give more consideration to the development of creativity could be considered a necessity in order to accommodate the rapid changes in everyday life which social, economic and technical developments have been recognised as causing. Robinson (2001) argues that these changes cannot be predicted. He asserts that the social and economic revolutions that communities are facing now are similar to the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to his perspective, in order to survive this revolution, a great deal of attention should be paid to supporting creativity. Creativity should be viewed as a human resource and talent which should not be wasted and that individual capabilities ought to be explored.

In recent times, research in the areas of creativity and early childhood has undergone vast changes and development, which has altered the way in which we understand children's development and how creativity can be conceptualised. The progress made in research in these areas has had a positive impact on the way in which creative thinking in children is explored in preschool settings (Cremin et al., 2013).

Despite all the importance given to creativity all over the world, educational research in Saudi Arabia does not appear to have given creativity or creative thinking the attention or value it deserves (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016). Alfaisal (2009) commented that in Saudi Arabian schools, it is difficult to recognise creativity and this might create a serious situation within which creativity and talent may

disappear, especially in the early stages of a child's development. He noted that there is a lack of programmes designed to discover and enhance creativity, as well as a lack of methods and tools which would enable teachers to identify potentially creative children or aspects of their creativity.

In addition, there is a need to provide adequate educational programmes and to prepare teachers with the right skills and knowledge to work with students in these circumstances. This could be because of the distinct lack of research in the field of creativity in the KSA and hence this is why the researcher has felt a need to embark upon this research.

### **Conceptualisations of Creativity**

There are many definitions of creativity, as the research of it extends far back into human history (Craft, 2005). Many theorists, psychologists and educators have contributed a great deal in order to generate a specific definition of creativity, each definition showing an important aspect of creativity as everyone considers it from a different angle (Sharp, 2004). It could be argued that the diversity and ambiguity that emerge when searching for a definition of creativity are a positive sign, as this reflects the nature of creativity, with flexibility being one of its features.

It is important to present some of the definitions to demonstrate how much diversity exists in defining what creativity means. Some definitions are concerned with the process of creativity, others are based on the person who is being creative and another group of definitions consider the products of creativity, whilst there are some additional insights into creativity that explore the context and environment in which creativity takes place. Torrance (1962:16) defined creativity as "the process of sensing gaps or disturbing missing elements; forming ideas or hypotheses concerning them; testing these hypotheses; and communicating the results; possibly modifying and retesting the hypotheses". This definition deals with creativity as a process. According to Houtz (2003), the Torrance definition of creativity is clear and concrete because it focuses on practical skills that can be taught and improved through thoughtful teaching and other related activities.

Another definition of creativity by Kaufman and Sternberg (2010:55) is that creativity is "a creative response to a problem that is new, good and relevant". This definition is concerned with the products of creativity. A notable definition given by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) in the UK is that "creativity is an imaginative activity fashioned in order to produce outcomes that are both original and of value" (NACCCE, 1999:30). This definition has many important components: imagination, purpose, originality and value.

However, it could be argued that most of the above definitions do not reflect upon creativity at the preschool age. It was suggested by Craft (2005) that when it comes to providing a definition of creativity



in children, the whole concept takes on a different prominence, in which less attention is paid to outcomes. According to many studies, when it comes to considering children's creativity, much more consideration is given to the environment in which creativity actually takes place, in the belief that all children have the potential to be creative (Meadows, 1993; Robinson, 2001; Craft, 2002). Craft (2002:2), a leading researcher, defined creativity as "far more than the arts, it is a way of thinking, doing and knowing", therefore expanding the scope of creativity to go beyond being limited just to the arts.

Sharp (2004) reported that all children should be considered as having a creative potential. Glăveanu (2011) supported this conclusion and argued for considering children as active and creative individuals, developing forms of creative connections in interactions with adults as well as through play. He also confirmed that, despite the importance of creativity, very little is known about it in children; this is not only because of the complexity of the phenomenon, but also because of people's general thoughts about children and about creativity itself (Glăveanu, 2011).

Despite the differences in the definitions in the literature, there are some varied conceptions concerning creativity which have been addressed by researchers. One of the most common ideas about the concept of creativity is that it is rigidly associated with the arts (Robinson, 2001; Fumoto et al., 2012). Robinson (2001) argued that this is one of the reasons and misconceptions that have restricted attention being paid to the creativity of children in the school curricula and, consequently, opportunities open to children to be creative have become limited and incomplete. In much recent work, Fumoto et al. (2012) felt that this traditional notion about the relationship between the arts and creativity has not changed and that this was worrying for the overall holistic development of creativity.

Creativity seems to be at the forefront of teachers' minds in the UK and what schools wish to provide for their students and it is also what successive governments and industry want to see in the workforce (Alexander et al., 2010). In Saudi Arabia, the reality is somewhat different and creativity does not have the same value as it does elsewhere (Almoqbel, 2014). From the researcher's perspective, this could be due to the KSA's traditional ethos and methodology of teaching, in which there might be a reluctance to change, as well as the fact that creativity has not been given much attention. However, things are changing.

The Saudi Arabian government has a new focus and vision for the development of the country and its workforce and this is being achieved through a national transformation programme in Saudi Arabia called 'Vision 2030' (Vision 2030, 2016). Saudi Arabia is working on a future vision for the betterment of the country and some of the planned themes are for it to have an ambitious and vibrant society, as well as a thriving economy. For these ideas to be effective,

the government seeks to invest more heavily in its nationals and the younger generations, who are expected to be the forerunners in the country's future success. In order to produce better graduates, it is vital to invest in improving students' educational experiences and support their capabilities and creative potentials (Vision 2030, 2016).

A typical feature of the concept of creativity is its complexity, which is reflected in the variety of definitions presented in this section of the literature review. However, it is important to consider that creativity in this research is regarded as an everyday activity, which means that it is one of the powerful capacities all humans possess, affecting their health and well-being, offering richness and alternatives in what they do and helping individuals to move further in their creative and personal development (Richards, 2009).

### **Theories and Models of Creativity in Education**

In order to understand creativity as a concept, it is necessary to understand and give value to the theories and models of creativity. According to Owen (2010), models and theories help educators and interested individuals in the field of creativity in education to understand the actions of creativity, how to plan and promote it and how to create more suitable environments that would enrich experiences for children. A brief background concerning the development of creativity is addressed in the next part of the literature review. An initial focus is given to the most relevant theories for the purpose of this research.

Creativity theories are not all alike. Reasons vary as to why they are different: it could be that the topic is broad and rich and it may be because a number of individuals of varying forms of understanding have contributed towards them. Furthermore, the subject has a number of definitions and concepts and research may have been applied through different disciplines, as well as in different contexts. Hence, when such variations of perceptions exist, the need to consider common themes among them becomes important (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010).

Two of the most common theories of creativity are referred to as 'little c' and 'big c' creativity. However, despite their popularity of use, some mystery surrounds where the theories originated. Merrotsy (2013) found that whilst 'big c' and 'little c' creativity had been written about during the previous 15 years, authors were unable to quote their source. Further investigations by Merrotsy led him to contact people who were associated with the field of creativity and asked them about a possible source for the concepts. Of those who replied, a number of them simply stated that they had used the theories without really knowing who the originator/s were. However, several people seemed to be convinced that the originator of the theories was Csikszentmihalyi (1996).

Regardless of the origins of the theory, what is important here is how the concepts of 'little c' and 'big c' creativity focus on the scale of creativity. The 'little c' concept is concerned with subjective



creativity, whilst 'big c' is more concerned with objective creativity. Richards (2009) argued that when researchers focused on the genius of 'big c' creativity, it caused them to overlook the difference between the creative experience and the creative product. The creative experience characterises more personal forms of creativity. By overlooking these personal experiences and focusing more on the objective creative products, it can give a skewed view and we can be left with a partial result of creative occurrences.

When exploring theories concerning creativity, it becomes necessary to consider the differences between internal and external points of reference. When making such distinctions, Kaufman and Sternberg (2010) argued that it allows for an unblemished understanding of the nature, limitations and possibility of the theoretical approach being reflected upon. Creativity in the early years has less importance in terms of outcomes, which means that the 'little c' notion can be valuable for addressing perceptions related to creativity within the early years phase (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009).

As a way forward in addressing the limitations of 'little c' and 'big c' theory, Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) argued for the use of two additional categories: 'mini c' and 'pro c'. In their research, "Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity", the researchers put forward a 'four c' model of creativity. They introduced the idea of 'mini c' creativity, which is all about how individuals attach personal and meaningful interpretations to their experiences, actions or events. They considered 'mini c' creativity as being integral to the learning process and put forward a further notion of 'pro c', which is a progression from 'little c'. 'Pro c' signifies a professional level of expertise in any creative area. The researchers discussed the varying transitions and stages of the four c's in their creativity model and then continued to comment on their advantages (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009).

Mel Rhodes (1961) broke new ground with his approach to creativity in his model called The Four Ps of Creativity. This theory has continued to be popular with various researchers, such as Anderson (2013), Glăveanu (2013) and Vogel (2014) working in the area of creativity, and revolves around four elements that can affect creativity and represent the foundations required for research on creativity. The four Ps of the model are: Person, Process, Press and Product. It is important to reflect upon each of the four Ps in this part of the literature review because it reflects the difference in perceiving creativity according to the angle from which it is seen. This position is considered in the current research and, therefore, the four Ps are discussed in detail in the next paragraphs.

## **Creativity and the Person**

Starting with theories that focus on the creative person and the personality of creative people that began in the early 20th century, specialists at the time argued that an individual was either born creative or was not and research dominated around the perspectives of the creative person (Vogel, 2014).

Psychologists such as Torrance (1962) and Guilford (1967) studied the individual creativity articulated by those persons they considered as being creative. They took note of any unique characteristics which were apparent in the individuals under observation. For instance, Guilford (1967) is one of the theorists who believed that thinking is more complex than any of the other intelligence skills. He gave an explanation of creativity as being able to manipulate ideas in original, fluent, flexible and elaborate ways. In his model, the “structure of intellect”, Guilford talked for the first time about divergent thinking. The aim of this model was to identify and explain all the possible varieties of human thought. The model includes 120 different thinking skills in a three-dimensional taxonomy of cognitive skills. The key factors in his model are “divergent production skills”.

Guilford believed that these skills are important parts of creative thinking. Torrance’s earlier research (1962) is one of the most memorable because of his studies on how to support children's creativity and his tests to measure creativity, named the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT). These tests achieved widespread recognition over the years and are still used today (Prieto et al., 2006). Torrance (1962) identified characteristics of creative actions: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. Fluency refers to the number of different ideas that a person can produce, flexibility is the diversity of ideas that a person can produce, and originality means producing something unusual and of great value for the community. Originality is not expected to be the same for children as it is for adults, as the value should change to suit the child's age and stage of development (Sharp, 2004). Elaboration refers to the richness of detail in the ideas that a person produces.

Duffy (2006) made a similar point when he reported that children should be raised into adults equipped with the ability to deal with unexpected situations. They should be able to connect different pieces of information together in one context, be flexible in their thinking, be able to collaborate with people, be positive towards others and apply their current knowledge to new situations, as well as being able to cope with changes.

## **Creativity and Process**

As well as the creative person, the aspect of ‘process’ warrants some attention when examining creativity (Rhodes, 1961). Kaufman and Sternberg (2010) argued that theories related to process are intended to understand the way in which mental mechanisms arise when an individual engages in creative thinking. Sharp (2004)



suggested that the creative process includes a number of features, which can be summarised as follows (in sequential order): imagination, originality (which is the skill of coming up with new and unusual ideas), productivity (which is the skill of generating a variety of different ideas), problem solving and, finally, the ability to produce a valuable outcome.

In a similar model, Cutler (2005), cited in Palaiologou (2010), adopted a new model called the Four Phase Stepped Progression Model of Creative Learning, in order to research how to encourage children's creative thinking. The model can be used as a hypothetical framework to understand the contextual factors of creativity. The four phases of the model are: input, doing, showing and reflecting. The first phase of the model is 'input', which includes all the elements introduced in the process of creativity. These elements consist of an idea, language, environment, resources, qualities and values. In the second, 'doing' phase, seven features have been listed:

- the ability to identify and/or make problems
- the ability to think divergently
- the ability to take risks
- being open to experiences
- the ability to use skills and stretch them
- the ability to play with an idea
- the ability to suggest

The third stage, called 'showing', reflects the actual time the action is demonstrated, such as through solving problems, generating new ideas, the capacity to learn, being engaged, being confident and using new skills. The last stage of this model is 'reflection', which refers to the changes for a school, its teachers and children in terms of input, doing and showing (Palaiologou, 2010).

The previous models were highlighted as examples of theories that exist that address process-level themes. However, when dealing with children, the focus should be on the process of working through a solution and not just on the final result. The greater the age of a child, the greater his or her ability to produce unique and valuable solutions (Mayesky, 2003). Craft (2005) argued that creativity of young children reflected the process of children's thinking and not the products they bring home.

Creativity may not always have a complete product to evaluate. Teachers should learn to value the process and pay more attention to the thinking that takes place, as well as giving attention to the way in which a child solves a problem (Craft et al., 2007). In the same context, Sharp (2004) emphasised that the 'creative process' is much

more important than the 'quality' of the final products, for the simple reason that the creativity of a product depends largely on the skills of the child, who, incidentally, may not have fully mastered the necessary skills.

### **Creativity and Product**

Possibly, the most objective approach to creativity focuses on the product. The result of a creative activity in any particular discipline or field is known as the product (Rhodes, 1961). In creativity research, vital notions are used to provide an explanation of what it means to identify whether a piece of work or a product is creative. For a product to be accepted as being creative, it should exhibit some essential characteristics. For example, the creative product is supposed to reflect creative thinking, exhibit aptitude, show problem solving, reflect imagination, be innovative, or reflect some element of originality (Vogel, 2014). Considering creativity as a product requires an assessment of some kind and involves a sound judgement from a qualified and/or specialised person, group or organisation according to the type of product. This method could be criticised because the creative aspect of a product or piece of work can be difficult to assess and does not have fixed standards. Creativity is also often subject to different educational and cultural norms. What is considered to be creative by one person might not be deemed to be so by another.

### **Creativity and Place**

By comparison, other researchers have examined a step beyond individual differences and creative processes by assessing the environment in which creativity takes place. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) asserted that it was not possible to research creativity without considering the cultural and social environment in which creativity takes place. He maintained that creativity is part of a system containing a creator and a domain. Research concerning places is invaluable when it comes to describing the relationship between individuals and their environments. More recently Kaufman and Sternberg (2010) have reconfirmed Csikszentmihalyi work by noting that the opportunity for creativity flourishes when independence or exploration is permitted in a suitable environment.

The four Ps theory has been explained above in order to give an overall understanding of creativity as a notion, which might justify the diversity of definitions about creativity because of the differences in the angles from which creativity is discussed. It is possible to state that when considering creativity in the context of a person, process, product or place, the concept will focus on the final result of creativity.



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## Purpose of the Research

The aim of this research is to explore the different perspectives of creativity held by a range of female teachers from a number of public and private preschool settings in the KSA.

On this basis, a research questions were formulated:

1. How do teachers in Saudi Arabian preschool settings perceive the concept of creativity?

In order to answer this questions, views on creativity as perceived by preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia were categorised and organised. For the general principles involved in explaining creativity and the creative practices in the school environment, the researcher based them on two concepts; ‘everyday’ creativity and ‘little c’ creativity (Craft, 2003; Craft, 2005; Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007; Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009; Richards, 2009). The researcher also looked to the work of many authors, including Cremin et al. (2006), Craft et al. (2012), Desailly (2012) and many others in the field of childhood education. All have been used to develop the researcher’s insight about the concept and underpinning the whole research.

In order to examine teachers’ perspectives on creativity in preschool settings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), it is worthwhile detailing the nature of the research context, as this will provide an insight into how these perspectives are formed and influenced. This section describes the educational system in the KSA, the most important features of the preschool stage in Saudi Arabia and contextual factors that might need to be taken into account when considering the notion of creativity in this environment. This part has been structured under three sequential and interdependent subheadings:

Education in Saudi Arabia.

Research Methodology

This research is based on an interpretive methodology as it is directed at understanding the phenomenon from an individual’s perspective, investigating interactions among individuals as well as looking at the historical and cultural contexts that people inhabit. This research is qualitative in nature and the purpose of conducting qualitative research is to provide a better understanding of a situation or a subject as confirmed by Denzin and Lincoln (2003).

### Research objective

The research intends to explore the different perspectives of creativity held by a range of female teachers from a number of public and private preschool settings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It seeks to gather the different opinions from preschool teachers to show creativity as a concept for the participants and how it could be

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promoted in children within the Saudi educational context.

### Research questions

The main research questions are:

1. How do teachers in Saudi Arabian preschool settings perceive the concept of creativity?

### Research Participants

The aim of the research is to explore creativity and given that this is a relatively new idea to the Saudi Arabian educational system, it is possible to say that all teachers working in public or private preschool settings can be regarded as the research population. Teachers are considered as invaluable sources from whom relevant information can be gathered and then be purposefully contributed to the research. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) confirmed that it is possible to learn something from almost any given case or situation. However, there needs to be a well thought out strategy for selecting the sample and this should be defined before implementing the research.

The focus of this research is on gaining a better understanding of teachers' views of creativity and its development more than it is in generalising the findings. According to Fusch, and Ness (2015) there is no agreement in the literature about how large or small the **sample** needs to be for qualitative research, as this is mainly dependent on the aim of the research. However, having a range in the sample size allows the researcher to ascertain if there are some common views about creativity. Therefore, the **sample** of the research was selected to match the purpose and the theoretical framework of the research, taking into account what was practical. To meet the adequacy of the sample it was important to consider the information saturation, which means looking at the richness of the information from the selected sample. It is argued that saturation is a subjective idea that can only be understood when it is linked to the purpose of the research and the theoretical framework (Shaker, 2002).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) when designing a research, nothing is more important than making the right decisions for the sample selection. In collating the data if only one school had been selected it would not have allowed for common views to be considered. From Shaker's point of view (2002) relying on only one institution or place could demonstrate a lack of consistency with a similar research framework. If too many schools were involved then the problem arises of data overload and difficulties in analysis. The researcher was keen to understand the differences between the public and private school views. The choice of schools was slightly out of the hands of the researcher as they had been offered by the Ministry of Education. The researcher wrote to all the schools and received positive interest from head teachers who were willing and interested to be involved in the research. Their willingness to take part suggested that they were likely to be frank and open about their views and based on their interest, the researcher was confident that they would be very



open about their practices. In the end the researcher felt that she had a reasonable range consisting of four schools, two of which were public and two private ones. There were twenty female teachers in total and this was broken down by taking five teachers from each of the schools. In view of this breakdown the researcher felt this selection would reflect a good representative sample.

#### Research methods

By choosing the interpretive paradigm, interpretivist knowledge is required to answer the research questions. This type of knowledge and information is believed to be acquired best through the use of interviews and observations (Scotland, 2012). It is worth noting that these two procedures were acceptable to the interviewees/schools and they were planned to enable the researcher to gain insight into what the preschool teachers thought and believed about creativity, as well as to look at the associated practices employed in classrooms across, both the public and private schools (Table 1).

**Table 1: Data collection methods of the research**

Method	Actions	Data and analysis
Interviews	Circulation and implementation of interviews with the twenty teachers from the four preschools.	Narrative data and some numerical data from the semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Data analysed using the Nvivo programme.
Observations	Carry out observations in the twenty classrooms, for each of the twenty teachers.	Narrative data and descriptions of the classroom environment and some of the activities being run at the time of observations. All integrated and analysed manually to answer the research questions.

According to Hamilton (2011) the use of interviews and observations allows for the triangulation of the data to reduce weaknesses that a single method would have given rise to. She also asserts that the use of more than one method of data collection is characteristic of a high quality research, providing more weight to the validity of the results. The choice of two procedures is supported by





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## Stage 2: Conducting the interviews

The interview questions were piloted in Saudi Arabia with a number of independent professionals not linked to the research sample. The professionals chosen were two preschool teachers, who were approached to examine the appropriateness, clarity and effectiveness of the questions. Most of the questions were approved to be suitable, except for two questions, which were amended slightly to make them clearer according to the recommendations made by the two independent professionals.

One interview was conducted with every teacher, making a total of twenty interviews. The researcher presented the questions as clearly as possible during interviews and also ensured that the interviews were carried out within a reasonable timeframe. Each interview took approximately an hour to complete, and the researcher was conscious of making sure that the teachers' time was respected and that any lesson disruptions were kept to an absolute minimum. In addition to that, the researcher allowed sufficient time to collect the data, making sure that nothing was rushed unnecessarily. This was done to minimise the potential risk of missing out on collecting vital information.

All of the interviews were recorded as audio files, then transcribed and later translated into the English language. The transcription for every interview took about four hours and the translation took approximately two to four days for each interview to be completed. It was a measure placed to ensure the accuracy of the original translations which were done by the researcher. All of the translations were anonymised before delegating the work to the independent reviewer for proof reading. The researcher wanted the translations reviewed, firstly, ensure the accuracy of the translations and secondly, to ensure that the translations were free from any unintentional misinterpretation made by the researcher.

## Stage 3: Organising and analysing the collected data

When utilising a method such as in interviews, it is expected that a large amount of data will be collected, which means that a well-planned system must be implemented and followed by the researcher to enable the organisation of the data and its preparation for analysis. The Nvivo software programme was used to structure and analyse the data. Several steps were taken, firstly the twenty interviews were added to the software. Next, each interview was carefully coded and this resulted in about seventy nodes to work from. Once the nodes were ready, the researcher moved onto another step of the data analysis, which was to search for and collate all of the common ideas that appeared in the data and these were grouped into specific categories. Every category fell under a certain theme and each of these themes was related to answering the research questions. Using the software helped the researcher to organise and structure the data

without missing any important information. The researcher continued to save the reports from the programme whilst developing the analysis. This stage took about a year to complete and the categories that emerged were gradually modified. All of the information was integrated into the final themes to enable answering the research questions.

### **Observations**

An unstructured observation was conducted in order to triangulate the information to answer the research questions. One observation was carried out for each of the participating teachers in their usual classroom locations. It is worth mentioning that the researcher has worked as a ‘supervisor of field training’ for four years in a childhood department, in the Faculty of Education at King Saud University. Field training is a compulsory requirement for any teaching undergraduate and this takes place in the fourth academic year of the teacher training courses. As an experienced observer of field training, the researcher has acquired certain essential skills, such as observing and recording events, providing constructive feedback to trainee teachers, as well as monitoring the behaviours and activities of children and adults.

The researcher had three main aspects to concentrate on during observation, those are:

- the classroom layout and structure
- the type of activities that took place in the classes
- the interactions between teachers and children in the classroom

In addition, some general information was noted about the school environment, all in relation to creativity. The researcher believed that any additional information would help in providing a better understanding of the subject matter.

Observations also went through similar stages as that of the interviews, in order to be applied in this research:

Stage 1: Identifying the observation outline

Stage 2: Conducting the observations

Stage 3: Organising and analysing the observational notes

## **Results of the Research**

The data were analysed electronically, using the NVivo software program. NVivo was used to help organise the data in order to acquire the best possible understanding of the information available. During the analysis process, a number of codes were generated and further analysis revealed certain sub-categories. These sub-categories were further analysed and facilitated the forming of the themes of the data into the main categories, which represent the preschool teachers’

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perceptions of creativity in Saudi Arabia.

As stated earlier in the literature review, creativity is not easy to explain and can be defined in a number of ways. Many studies put forward definitions that are similar to one another but focus on different aspects of creativity. One such view relevant to the research is the notion of ‘everyday’ creativity, otherwise referred to as ‘little c’ creativity. ‘Little c’ moments occur constantly as actions are processed and new insights are discovered in everyday activities, whereas ‘big c’ creativity may only transpire within intellectuals of higher abilities (Craft, 2003). Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) stated that the ‘little c’ notion of creativity can be valuable for addressing perceptions related to creativity. The concept of ‘little c’ creativity has a significant role in schools and classrooms, as it enables recognition of creativity and highlights the value of nurturing it in everyday settings (Richards, 2009).

For instance, it might involve moments in which children discover a new way of doing a particular activity, such as building a structure in the building blocks area or creating their own town through imaginative play. Although the final result might not necessarily be anything novel, it is definitely a new experience which will add to the child’s educational, emotional and creative development. In this view, the concept of ‘little c’ could be considered as a key point for enhancing creativity, and the Saudi authorities hope to improve teaching practices across preschools as part of their educational reform. As a consequence of government backing, this will have implications for the structures of classrooms, in-service training and pedagogy in preschools.

This research is an attempt to establish where creativity stands within preschool teachers’ practice in Saudi Arabia. The researcher considered most of the ideas generated by the teachers as being important and most of their contributions have been presented as far as possible. Further discussion will serve to draw conclusions regarding the position of creativity: whether it is concerned with everyday creativity or whether it is tied to possessing a unique ability that only some children have. This might be an important first step for policy makers and educators who are dedicated to facilitating pedagogical changes in Saudi Arabia.

### **Teachers’ perceptions of creativity**

Whenever teachers are asked about how they perceive creativity, there is a strong likelihood that they will provide a variety of responses. Desailly (2012) confirmed that creativity means different things to different people depending on where they might come from. She also affirmed that, in early years settings, practitioners often struggle to encapsulate what creativity actually is (Desailly, 2012).

Analysis of the data from the 20 preschool teachers interviewed for this research resulted in three categories emerging with

respect to their perceptions about the concept of creativity, as follows:

Category 1 - Creativity is being artistic

Category 2 - Creativity is being intelligent

Category 3 - Creativity is being gifted/unique

This part, therefore, addresses the following research question:

How do teachers in Saudi Arabian preschool settings perceive the concept of creativity?

### **Category 1 - Creativity is being artistic**

Creativity is one of the beautiful arts like painting. Creativity is art, the way of making a painting, the right choice of colours, it is how the child would translate his/her ideas into a piece of painting or drawing (Pr A1).

The data showed that about half the teachers interviewed from both public and private preschools believed that creativity refers to the artistic ability a child possesses. They linked creativity to some forms of art, painting, drawing and producing an artistic piece of work.

Creativity is an artistic piece of work or an attractive design by a child (P N3).

Research confirms the necessity of distinguishing between creativity and artistic ability (Alexander, 2010; Fumoto et al., 2012). If teachers do not recognise or make a distinction between being creative and having artistic ability, they might run the risk of incorrectly judging children about their creativity.

From the data, some teachers associated the presence of creativity in children with artwork because they believed that art and craft is an easy skill in which children can demonstrate their creativity compared to any other area. This view was exemplified by one teacher, when she stated:

Children can show their abilities and their creative side in the art activities more than in other activities (Pr S5).

In other words, as a result of fewer restrictions being placed upon children in such an area compared with others, they can perform freely, using many different materials, and they have the opportunity to be able to choose between them. The teachers had noted that children were able to be as expressive as they wanted and this positivity and motivation was heightened further due to the mere fact that there were fewer rules to adhere to before they started art work. In contrast, when comparing this to mathematics skills, children are expected to acquire skills in number recognition and formation before they are able to perform simple sums. In art, the most they might have to master is how to coordinate holding artistic tools, such as pencils, brushes or crayons or any other implements. This is not to suggest that all children can master the use of such tools instantly but, with art, there seems to be more flexibility.



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In the early stages of education, the easiest thing for children is drawing rather than writing and counting. The children can be creative in the way they position their drawings and by their choice of colours. It is difficult for children to express themselves with writing as they are still young and their ability to write has not developed yet, but when they do painting or drawing their ideas becomes clearer (Pr S2).

The teacher above seems to be talking about how children tend to be able to express themselves better through art. The teachers felt that art seems to be a method through which children can express their ideas more fluently and with greater ease, compared to when they have to express themselves through language. Children find it harder to explain or convey their ideas through language because they have not yet been able to master it or use it to advantage themselves through speech.

From the data, it is clear that art is perceived as promoting creativity and in some cases is linked with productivity, in addition to teachers focusing on distinct outcomes produced by the children. The data also revealed that the teachers considered children to be creative when they produced a piece of art. One teacher stated,

In my opinion, the creative child is the one who produces and comes up with a piece of art, whether painting, colouring or modelling, that is different and unique from that of his/her peers (P N4).

Research confirms that focusing on outcomes or products when defining creativity is a deeply rooted practice (Craft, 2003). Observations carried out in the preschools under research revealed some interesting interactions and there was evidence to support the previous assertion, as some of the teachers had clearly placed a lot of emphasis on outcomes. This was especially evident in the public schools in the art and craft corner. However, Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) argued that, in the early years stage, there should be less stress placed on the importance of outcomes, in order to avoid categorising or labelling children as to whether they are creative or not.

Creativity is the child's productivity in which he/she shows his/her creativity and it can be in any form when they produce some unique pieces (P N2).

In research carried out by Fumoto et al. (2012), it was argued that it is far more challenging to identify creativity in younger children and that it is easier to recognise it among those of older ages. This assertion about the age at which creativity is more identifiable is made because children lack the ability and range with regard to language and are not, therefore, able to express themselves well. Craft (2003) held similar views to this and asserted that young children may not have developed all the skills they need in order to achieve a successful creative outcome. One teacher shared this view, stating:

I have noticed the changes in children as they grow older. The older they get the better listeners they become in terms of following the sequences concerning events and linking and relating information, which means being more creative (Pr S1).

In a similar context, the data showed that teachers perceived the creative child to be the one who would be able to create his/her own work without copying or imitating the teacher's work. For example,

The child who copies his/her teacher is not creative (P N4).

Another teacher held the same beliefs towards copying and imitating when she stated,

This belief is contradictory to views held by Hopper (2010), who argued that it is natural when acquiring new skills that people often gain these by copying or imitating others in their social environments. She claimed that imitating can be considered as a form of 'social learning' and imitation as a skill is crucial in maintaining and preserving certain cultural conventions or practices which are deeply embedded within societies. The researcher agrees with the views of Hopper (2010) and also believes that imitation has a place in relation to creativity too. By imitating, children learn how to copy and acquire new skills and learn new ways of doing things. If it was not for imitation, children would perhaps struggle in all sorts of ways. The use and encouragement of imitating at certain stages of a child's development can be very beneficial, such as for support in speech, in mirroring social etiquettes, it can support literacy skills, and aid in the acquisition of physical skills such as with dance or different types of sports etc. If imitation did not exist, society as a whole would not be able to acquire an innumerate amount of skills, which can be learnt in this manner.

From the observations, the two public schools had clearly established the arts and craft area as one of the main activity corners in every classroom. The areas were filled with a variety of materials and children showed a keen interest in this area during every observation. The children were unrestricted and were able to work independently. In contrast to the public schools, observations of the two private schools revealed that one school only had provision for one activity corner classroom where arts and crafts activities were facilitated. The lessons observed typically focused on academic subjects, such as mathematics, science and phonics lessons, where the children had to follow and learn the rules before they could apply that knowledge to produce any work. The children had closer guidance and monitoring and were given many instructions to aid their skills acquisition in the academic-led subjects. It could be argued that the imposition of having too many rules for children could lead to inhibiting their ability to act creatively.



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## Category 2 - Creativity is being intelligent

Creativity is when the child shows his/her own intellectual abilities (P H5).

The second view of creativity that emerged from the data is that creativity is intelligence. Evidence suggests that intelligence reflects a student's capacity and is defined by schools as the cognitive abilities that are measured by an IQ test (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010). The data indicated that six teachers from both sectors considered creativeness to be part of the intellectual ability of the child. For example,

I think creativity is an important element in the intellectual development of a child and it helps the teacher to get an idea about the brightness of a child (P N2).

There are still many unanswered questions in the literature surrounding the significance of creativity and where it fits with regard to intelligence, reflection and one's mental capabilities, as confirmed by Banaji et al. (2010). However, from the data, some practitioners have presumed that there is a relationship between creativity and intelligence, in the sense that creativity affects children's intelligence and improves their intellectual development.

Creativity develops intelligence in children. When we notice the child's abilities and hobbies, we try our best to invest in that and support it (Pr S3).

Kim (2005) found that the relationship between creativity and intelligence among younger children was weaker than for any other age group, which might be because of the influence of education over the use of their cognitive abilities. In contrast, in a more recent research by Benedek et al. (2014) concerning intelligence in creative thinking, their research explored connections between the two aspects and concluded that intelligence and creativity have an association with one another, which signifies that they have a shared cognitive root. Benedek et al.'s findings seem to support the teachers' insights about the association between intelligence and creativity. Research by Banaji et al. (2010) indicated that it might be possible to suppose that people who show a higher level of creativity may well have a higher level of intelligence.

In a similar context, the data revealed that some teachers believed that creative children are more likely to perform better academically. This was predominantly the case in the private preschools. This result seems consistent with the curriculum in these preschools, which are interested mainly in academic learning. For example,

I believe that creative children are more likely to be good at education in the later stages (Pr S2).

Namia et al. (2014) support this view in their research into the relationship between creativity and academic achievement. They found that there were notable links between creativity and achievement, whereby students had been identified as possessing greater creative ability and were deemed to have greater potential for attaining better academic results (Namia et al., 2014).

It could be said that, regardless of the relationship between creativity and intelligence, teachers' views in this matter are important, as they might affect the way they promote children's creativity and the manner in which they provide equal opportunities for all children to enhance their creative potential to the maximum possible level. It could also be argued that considering creativity as intelligence challenges the everyday creativity idea, since it might confine creativity to a particular group of children who possess higher intellectual abilities.

### **Category 3 - Creativity is being gifted/unique**

Creativity is a gift, in the sense that some children have got it and are very creative, whereas some haven't and we cannot create it in children. We can still try, but we will not make the child creative (Pr A1).

The data highlighted that the third concept among preschool teachers is that children who showed creativity were viewed as being gifted. This view was represented by approximately one-third of the teachers who participated in this research, across both sectors, and held the belief that creativity is having an exceptional talent or natural ability.

Creativity is a gift that God has given some people and the only thing we can do is to explore it and bring it out (P H2).

This perception of creativity is criticised by many studies, in which it has been argued that creativity can exist in all children and every child can be considered to have creative potential (Craft, 2003; Sharp, 2004; Craft, 2009). Therefore, creativity is not necessarily restricted to a select few who may be deemed gifted.

The data demonstrated that the word 'unique' is used by teachers as a synonym for the word 'creative' in order to describe a creative child. Meaning that the creative child is a unique child who is different from his/her peers:

Creativity is the skills that one can have and that makes him/her unique and special (Pr S1).

Some respondents spoke about creativity in relation to specific skills, such as thinking skills, whether that was in terms of originality, usefulness or the newness of the ideas. All of these notions were reflected in the teachers' responses. For example:

Creativity means to think freely beyond the existence. It is to look beyond what is in front of you. Creativity is to transfer what is around into something new, beneficial and useful. It is all about how to think differently (Pr A4).



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Creativity is what is beyond expectation. It is the unexpected way of thinking, especially from a child (P N5).

In one of the private classrooms, one teacher stated:

I do encourage children to think outside the box (Pr A2).

During the observation, the above teacher (Pr A2) picked up a toy car and asked the children to imagine that it was something else, asking them, what could it be? She also picked a tissue box and asked the children what other uses the tissue box could have. The children produced many ideas for using the box differently and they started laughing at some of their unusual ideas.

The data revealed that the meaning of the word 'uniqueness', as described by the teachers, is a child's action or invention/production of something that has been demonstrated beyond his/her age expectations, which might also reflect the intellectual ability in this case:

Creativity is when the child comes up with things that are not expected at his/her age. For every age range, there are certain things that you expect from the child to be able to do or say and when the child shows that he/she is quite advanced for his/her age, then you consider him/her to be creative and innovative (Pr S4).

In addition, the meaning of being unique as derived from the data is a child's action and/or outcome that is different from that of other children. Krausz et al. (2009) confirmed that each outcome can be considered as unique and may well differ to some extent but this is what makes children likely candidates for being creative.

In my opinion, the creative child is the one who produces and comes up with pieces of art, whether painting, colouring or modelling, that are different and unique from his/her peers (P N4).

The data demonstrated that creativity was perceived as possessing a special ability, such as having an artistic/intellectual ability, or being gifted or unique. These aspects are what narrowed and defined the teachers' judgements concerning those being capable of being creative to a restricted few.

Not every child is creative (Pr A1).

Creativity is important for the children. However, not all children I come across are creative (Pr S5).

Some of the teachers held the belief that only some children were creative, whilst others were not as capable. Those identified as possessing creative ability might be supported and challenged better in order to extend their potential, simply because they were perceived as having a greater artistic ability, were considered talented or gifted in

some skill or were perceived to have demonstrated higher levels of intelligence than others. This is excellent for the children who have been identified as such and could enhance their progress and development. However, if other children who are deemed less capable are not offered extra support or nurturing to that of their peers, it could make them feel less adequate or less valued. On the other hand, they may not necessarily be affected that drastically and may well carry on through their course of learning as if nothing were different between them and their peers.

In contrast, the data showed that some of the other practitioners held an opposing view, that most children are in fact creative:

Most of the children are creative (Pr A4).

Children are creative everywhere (P H5).

Another respondent supposed that

Every child is creative (P N3).

In some ways, it can be either limiting or progressive, based on the teacher's own outlook about creativity. This suggests that there are varying views about creativity among teachers and leads to the second theme of the results, in which the teachers' views as creative practitioners are discussed in more detail.

## Discussion

Creativity seems to hold different meanings and expectations for the different practitioners in this research. This was confirmed clearly by the data, showing that teachers across the four preschools held a range of views towards creativity and what it stands for. The three most common concepts which emerged from the data were that creativity is about being artistic, being intelligent, or being gifted and unique. It is normal for practitioners to differ in their perceptions of creativity as, by nature, human beings have variations in their views across many issues and creativity is considered to be a complex and debatable subject, also because of its nature. Desailly (2012) claimed that a shared practice for creativity does not exist and this could also be applied to perceptions.

From the researcher's point of view, perceiving creativity by one of the three concepts which emerged from the data is challenging and, therefore, needs to be discussed critically. It is important in this part to discuss each of those highlighted concepts separately, then to add to the debate some general points concerning the three concepts together in order to gain a clear idea about teachers' thoughts of creativity and to find a possible explanation behind why certain views were held.

The first perception, held by almost half the participants of the research and including teachers in both public and private sector preschools, was that creativity is about being artistic. In the researcher's opinion, creativity is not limited to just the arts or to any other subject. However, the most commonly held perception among



teachers in the research was that they considered creativity to be an artistic ability that a child possesses. It is significantly important to reflect upon this perception because it reveals the way in which the teachers have perceived creativity to be present in children. There is no doubt that arts activities in preschool classrooms play an important role in enhancing creativity in children. From the researcher's experience, having worked with children for twelve years, she believes that the use of an arts and crafts corner gives children the chance to express or reveal any hidden creative potential. However, the question is: What if the child does not have an interest in these types of activities? The risk then lies in excluding those children from being given the opportunity to express their creativeness according to this classification, even though the positive impact of arts and crafts activities in the development of creativity is known to be present only in some children. Various researchers have confirmed the positive impact such activities can have on children's ability to be creative (Clark et al., 2002; Prentice et al., 2007; Glăveanu, 2011; Riga & Chronopoulou, 2012; Dower, 2013). According to Fumoto et al. (2012), perceiving creativity as having an artistic ability needs to be carefully analysed, as this idea appears to be a common belief. Alexander (2010) asserted that the belief that both creativity and artistic ability are irrefutably intertwined results in a general confusion regarding the matter. Being creative is not the same as being artistic.

The observations conducted for this research revealed the way in which classrooms were arranged. All public classrooms comprised an arts and crafts activity corner, equipped with lots of materials for the children to use, but not all private classrooms had the same arrangement. The data also confirmed that some of the teachers from the public preschools believed that copying and imitating worked against improving creativity in children. One of the teachers described the negative impact of copying and imitating by stating that 'it kills creativity in children' (P H3).

Certain practices noted during observations in some of the classrooms appeared to go against creativity. For example, one teacher (P N5) showed her class an arts and craft object as a sample. She then proceeded by explaining how to make the item and gave a demonstration to the class about how it should be reproduced. The teacher then asked the children to make an identical copy using the materials she had provided. In this situation, the researcher noted that the task was somewhat limiting: all that the children were expected to do was to copy and produce an identical item based on the teacher's ideas and they were not given any real freedom to produce something independently. Rather, the purpose of having an arts activity corner in the classroom is to give children an opportunity to express themselves in their own way, allowing them the freedom to choose between a variety of materials and tools in order to produce a unique piece of work. The researcher believes that there are few benefits to be gained by such practices (as described in the example) and that they are

limiting for children, as they are based on activities and associated skills directed by the teacher; the teacher perceives them to be creativity enhancing (perhaps) and does not necessarily take into account any ideas or individual skills children may have or be able to express in producing an independent piece of work.

Imitation can be considered a valuable teaching tool for teachers as a way of enhancing the learning experience for youngsters. This type of copying is important, as it supports and enriches behaviours or customs among people that are also easily transmitted through generations (Hopper, 2010). Craft (2009) affirmed that teaching creatively can impact positively on children's learning, as they could very well pick up creativity simply by imitating. However, what the researcher noted painted a different picture, in which the teacher's authority left no room for the children to divert away from how she wanted the outcome of the task to be. This could be seen in how the children simply followed the teacher's orders and showed no readiness to adapt what they had been instructed to produce. Almost all the children conformed to what the teacher wanted. One or two children asked if they could add other materials but the teacher was reluctant to accept their ideas, indicating that they had to produce an exact copy of the demonstrated object. The teacher did not introduce any new materials, nor did she ask if the children wanted to choose any additional materials themselves. The researcher felt that self-expression could have been encouraged more by asking the children if they wanted to modify their model in any way or by asking them questions to draw out further ideas about how the object could be adapted or finished and then have allowed those changes to take place. In the researcher's opinion, the task was very controlled and limited the possibility for new and exciting ideas to flourish from the children. Bartel (2014) argued against imitating in education. He asserted that it does not help children to think critically and does not help them to be creative.

The second key concept that emerged from the data was that creativity is about being intelligent. Six teachers from both sectors shared their views concerning creativity in children and felt that it was about the child's intellectual ability. The researcher believes that intelligence is a more inclusive concept than that of the traditional IQ rating. However, it is still essentially distinct from creativity, which may be considered as being representative of a more generic set of abilities, applicable to a range of domains. The researcher is of the view that when creativity is perceived as being equivalent to intelligence, it could possibly lead to creativity being linked with academic achievement. A statement made by one of the teachers was that 'I believe that creative children are more likely to be good at education in the later stages' (Pr S2). This is problematic from the researcher's view, because it may not necessarily be the case that every creative child performs well academically and the two concepts should not be tied to each other. Although some researchers found a link between the two concepts of intelligence and creativity (Banaji et al., 2010; Benedek et al., 2014), others argue that creativity is



something different, and distinctly different from intelligence (Robinson, 2001; Sharp, 2004). For instance, Sharp (2004) claimed that creativity should not be another way of talking about intelligence or talent. The notion of multiple intelligences suggests that people may have a particular intelligence or potential in relation to a given field of endeavour (Robinson, 2001).

The third concept of creativity held by the group of teachers was that it is about being gifted or unique. Approximately one-quarter of the teachers from both public and private preschools described creativity as a 'gift' and the creative child as being 'unique and special'. The researcher believes that having a talent or being gifted is usually referred to as the possession of a high degree of aptitude and skill in a given area, such as in mathematics or art, but this would not necessarily imply that an ability to exhibit creativity was not possible outside that specific area. From the researcher's point of view, to some extent, this perspective of creativity lacks clarity. Although the words and phrases used by the teachers to describe a creative child felt somewhat positive, they did not exactly explain what creativity is. For instance, one of the teachers described a creative child as 'The child who shows his/her unique ability in something that is not usual', and later expressed, 'but I don't know how or why' (P H1).

Another teacher described a creative child as being different from his/her peers but did not specify in what sense the child was different. According to Krausz et al. (2009), if being unique is regarded as being different, then this in itself does not increase our understanding of the meaning of creativity. They pointed out that just because one is unique, it does not necessarily explain what being more extraordinary or outstanding is. There is something positive about being unique and the term itself suggests there is value in being different. However, it is not enough to validate valuable and different outcomes (Krausz et al., 2009). Some teachers explained such a distinctive ability of a child as being his/her ability to think differently and to produce new and useful ideas or items 'Creativity is the unexpected way of thinking, especially from a child' (P N5). This idea would need to be more specific than just describing a child as being different. There was no elaboration by the teacher in terms of what exactly made a child different and what the possible reasons could be.

From the researcher's point of view, the three key concepts of creativity, as perceived by the preschool teachers, face two main challenges, which are discussed below.

The first challenge is that the three suggested ideas of creativity seem to limit the notion of anyone affirmed as being creative to a certain group of children who have a specific set of skills, whether that concerns the arts, intelligence or any other special talent. This could also lead to the assumption that children come to school carrying a characteristic or trait of being creative and it is not, therefore, the teacher's responsibility to deal with or improve it. As a result, if

teachers do not take this responsibility, there is a risk that children may lose the opportunities to learn how to be creative or it may hinder them from learning how to solve problems they face in positive ways. For example, 'Not every child is creative' (Pr A1) is a statement which was expressed by a number of teachers from both public and private preschools. It could be argued that, by holding this view, those teachers potentially disregarded a group of children as not being creative, and this may limit their general potential just because a teacher deemed them not to be as capable as the others. Those singled out for additional support include those who have been recognised as possessing a certain creative ability and to extend their potential they were given extra help or attention based on the perception that they had a greater artistic ability or were considered talented or gifted in one or more skills. For instance, one teacher stated, 'Not all children are the same, I noticed some of the children in my class this year are creative, to whom I try to provide extra materials and colouring so they can use them' (P N4).

In a similar context, during a classroom observation in one of the private preschools, the researcher noticed that the teacher engaged more with children who spoke more and with those who asked more questions than the quieter ones. This might be a normal occurrence with teachers for a certain amount of time but it would not be acceptable to carry on giving attention to a selected few for almost the whole lesson. In this case, it might be seen as ignoring those considered less active. Additional teacher support may well be beneficial for any child in this situation and can be excellent for his/her progress and development. However, this would inevitably have a negative impact on those who are excluded from receiving any additional attention or support. If others are not offered additional support or nurturing, they may question why the teachers did not prefer them and consequently this could negatively affect their self-esteem or future creative performance across school. The examples discussed appear to be in contrast with the idea that all children are creative, which is supported by research (Craft, 2003; Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007). It is important for educators and practitioners to know that all children are creative and every child has distinct abilities, which children are capable of improving if they receive the right support at the right time, not only from their teachers, but also from other significant adults around them.

The second challenge concerning the three key ideas about creativity held by the preschool teachers is that focus is often placed on the final product, more so than on the process of creativity. From the researcher's point of view, when perceiving creativity as being artistic, the focus then falls on the children's abilities in producing a piece of art. Whether it is a painting or an arts and crafts piece of work, it is considered a product or a final result of a creative action. One teacher stated, 'The creative child is the one who produces and comes up with pieces of art whether painting, colouring or modelling' (P N4). Likewise, perceiving creativity in children as possessing intelligence emphasises having a high IQ or any other intellectual



ability which is also considered as a final result of creativity by a creative child. Another teacher felt that 'Creativity can be seen in maths when a child shows an ability to carry out a calculation at first sight in seconds' (Pr S4).

The same can apply when perceiving creative children as being gifted and/or unique; they are considered as being able to produce something beyond their age and beyond the expectations of their peers. Again, this also focuses on an end product. The researcher believes that by focusing on the process of creativity instead of the final results, children can learn skills in how to be creative. These very skills can be used throughout their entire lives and not just whilst they are still at school. Many studies have stressed that when dealing with children's creativity, the emphasis should be put on the process rather than the product (Sharp, 2004; Craft et al., 2007; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009).

The three main ideas also seem to be in contrast with the view of everyday creativity. The concept of everyday creativity requires one to believe that every child is creative, along with the belief that creativity is not limited to a subject, place or time (Richards, 2009). In the researcher's opinion, perceiving creativity as an everyday activity opens the doors to all children being creative in their own way, on the grounds that every moment a child learns something new and is given the opportunity to solve a problem, the child is learning how to be creative. This could be the most appropriate way to deal with children's creativity in order to enhance their performance during the school day and this is the type of creativity educators should be concerned with for the benefit of children. According to Richards (2009), everyday creativity is one of the most powerful capabilities people possess. It helps individuals come alive at every moment. It affects their health and well-being, it provides richness and possibilities in whatever they do, as well as helping them to move forward in their personal and creative development.

The last point to be considered in this part of the discussion concerns the terminology used in the expression of the concept of creativity among teachers. A general note which caught the researcher's attention during the analysis of the data was that two associated terms appeared to be missing or were hardly mentioned by the teachers when explaining their own perceptions of creativity. These terms are 'imagination' and 'problem solving'. The researcher found that these two ideas are considered to be highly important and are frequently mentioned in the literature concerning creativity in children.

Jeffrey and Craft (2003) asserted that imagination in preschool education is one of the very significant factors that trigger creativity at this particular age. Only two of the teachers from the twenty practitioners involved in the research mentioned imagination as a concept related to creativity. One teacher commented that 'for me, creativity reflects the rich imagination the child has' (P N5). Another

teacher explained that, in her view, ‘The creative child imagines beautiful things that he wants to apply and bring to life’ (P N3). Whilst imagination was mentioned twice, no mention was made by the teachers regarding problem solving as an idea related to creativity.

In the researcher’s opinion, the curriculum structure in preschools in Saudi Arabia is possibly one of the factors influencing the perception of creativity among teachers. For instance, the national curriculum, the SLC, suggests the provision of many activities in a free learning space in the educational activity corners, as this is expected to contribute positively to the growth of young children. However, the word ‘creativity’ only appears in one place in the Self Learning Curriculum document and that is in the section concerning the ‘arts corner’ (Ministry of Education, 2005). Thus, it could be argued that the teachers’ judgements are influenced and directed by this and may explain why they follow it rigorously, leading half of the research sample to believe that arts activities are the most important way to reveal creativity in children and that creativity is the artistic ability a child holds.

Interestingly, having considered the latest document of Preschool Standards, which was developed as a result of a new project to improve the preschool curriculum in Saudi Arabia called the ‘Preschool Development Programme’ (Tatweer, 2017), it is disappointing to see that the content in relation to creativity has not been changed when comparing it with the previous document. The new Standards document appears to have had only cosmetic changes made to it, in terms of the colour, structure and layout. Furthermore, what is more concerning is that creativity is still referred to and connected with art as its related subject. This position has to be prioritised for review if creativity is to be promoted successfully in Saudi preschool settings. In a similar context, the heavy emphasis on cognitive skills and academic subjects in the structure of the International Curriculum may have the same impact in directing teachers to believe that creativity is the intelligent skill a child possesses.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered for educators in the field of preschool education. The results of this research highlighted some important aspects in relation to creativity in preschool settings in Saudi Arabia, which leads to a number of recommendations in this area.

The first point is the variety of perceptions held by practitioners, which did not reflect the idea of ‘everyday’ creativity or ‘little c’ creativity. Therefore, clarity about the concept of children’s creativity among preschool teachers is required and this could be achieved through training and therefore training in this area is recommended. A research by Alzoubi et al. (2016) showed that training teachers on creative thinking enhanced their creative skills and abilities, creating a positive mindset in teachers could enable them to



be responsive to creativity and recognise its impact on the future of children's development. This awareness of creativity could be achieved either directly or indirectly whilst trainee teachers are on the university course programmes. It could be taught to them directly by teaching them about creativity as an educational concept and it could also be taught indirectly through enhancing their learning experiences with creative teaching methods and by motivating their own creative abilities during their training. For teachers who are already in-service, it is important to ensure that they too are made aware of how everyday creativity can have a positive impact on children's learning experiences through the provision of continuous professional development. Therefore, shorter workshops or seminars could be offered for those who are already working as qualified teachers. In-service training courses could be exploited positively in order to enrich the teachers' own creativity and this could be more effective if it is planned in carefully to provide teachers with rich examples of the most powerful pedagogical practices available, so that they can implement them in their classrooms once they return to their work places. Training could be beneficial for the teachers of tomorrow to develop their creative awareness and equip them with the necessary theory and practical skills, so as to enable them to foster creativity better in young children. It might provide practitioners with the necessary theoretical and practical tools, which could be useful for successful creative teaching.

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