



**Examining Alignment with UNCRC: Perceptions
of Educators and Children on the Children's
Rights in Primary Education in Saudi Arabia**

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الاتساق مع اتفاقية حقوق الطفل: تصورات المربين والأطفال حول حقوق الأطفال في التعليم الابتدائي بالمملكة العربية السعودية

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المستخلص:

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى استقصاء مدى توافق مع اتفاقية حقوق الطفل من خلال
استكشاف تصورات المربين والأطفال بشأن حقوق الأطفال في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية
السعودية، ولقد عمدت الدراسة إلى إجراء فحص شامل لتأثيرات العوامل الاجتماعية والثقافية
على تصورات المشاركين، مع التأكيد على أهمية مراعاة السياق الثقافي في استكشاف حقوق
الأطفال في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية، ولقد اعتمد البحث المنهج المختلط،
باستخدام المقابلات والاستبانات وجلسات المناقشة المركزة لاستكشاف توافق تصورات المربين
والأطفال مع اتفاقية حقوق الطفل في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية، تكون
المشاركين في البحث من خمسة مدراء، 635 معلمًا، و36 طفلاً، تم اختيارهم لتوفير رؤى متنوعة
حول حقوق الأطفال، ولقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن المربين في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية
السعودية يفتقرون إلى الوعي باتفاقية حقوق الطفل، حيث كانت نسبة الإلمام بها تبلغ 37,5%
فقط، ويوجد فهم خطأ بشأن تعريف "الطفل" وقبول العنف الأبوي، كما أظهر البحث وعياً
محدوداً باتفاقية حقوق الطفل، ولكنهم يعبرون عن اهتمام في حقوق مثل التعليم والحماية،
لتعزيز تنفيذ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل، أوصت الدراسة صانعي السياسات بضرورة التركيز على
التغييرات الثقافية، وفرض قوانين حماية الطفل، وتنفيذ برامج تعليمية شاملة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: توافق، تصورات، حقوق، اتفاقية حقوق الطفل.



Examining Alignment with UNCRC: Perceptions of Educators and Children on the Children's Rights in Primary Education in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to examine the alignment with the UNCRC by investigating the perceptions of educators and children regarding children's rights in primary education in Saudi Arabia. The study demonstrated a comprehensive examination of the sociocultural influences on participants' perspectives, emphasizing the importance of considering the cultural context in exploring children's rights in primary education in Saudi Arabia. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, utilizing interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups to investigate the alignment of educators' and children's perceptions with the UNCRC in Saudi Arabian primary education. Participants included five principals, 635 teachers, and 36 children, selected to provide diverse insights into the implementation of children's rights. The findings of the study revealed that educators in Saudi primary education lack awareness of the UNCRC, with only 37.5% familiar with it. Misunderstandings exist regarding the definition of 'a child' and acceptance of parental violence. Children show limited awareness of the UNCRC, but express interest in rights like education and protection. To enhance UNCRC implementation, policymakers should focus on cultural changes, enforce child protection laws, and implement comprehensive educational programs.

Keywords: Alignment, Perceptions, Rights, UNCRC.

Introduction:

To care for children, nurture them, secure their future, and protect them from any kind of neglect or abuse, there is a need for an internationally binding document to set a standard (Merey, 2014). Due to the importance of childhood and the necessity of protecting children from potential harm, item 2 of Article 25 of the International Declaration of Human Rights states that children must receive special care with no discrimination (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). This right was detailed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was established in 1989 and obligates countries that have signed it to implement these rights as a part of their legislation (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 1989). Merey (2014) mentioned that the UNCRC is the most critical advancement for children's rights.

A large number of researchers, such as Boushel (2014) and Mohammed and Ibrahim (2011), studied awareness about the UNCRC among professionals whose work with children, and they found a lack of awareness towards children's rights. Lack of awareness about the UNCRC might be a reason for the insufficient implementation of these rights. The concept of children's rights will not be made effective only by creating policies or improving laws but by transforming them into values, attitudes, and methods that make those rights workable.

Education is responsible for informing children about what rights they have and how to best demonstrate and utilise them. Furthermore, the education system should protect children and their rights (Maboe, 2013). Thus, the present study has identified concerns regarding the protection of children and their rights in the education system.

Regarding the population of Saudi Arabia, the latest census from 2017 shows that the Saudi population is at 32,552,336, with 10,301,136 from 0 to 19 years old, representing almost 33% of the population (GASTAT, 2017). Thus, protecting and implementing the rights of children is the implementation of the rights of 33% of the Saudi population.

Saudi society is a conservative society, and as such, it does not readily accept change but instead strives to protect its traditions. The source of Saudi culture and traditions is the religion of Islam. Alrweeta (2002) mentioned that the most powerful element in Saudi culture is



religion. Following the discovery of oil at the end of the 1930s, Saudi Arabia experienced a significant transformation from being isolated from the world to being one of the most significant oil producers in the world (Alsharkh, 2012). The rapid economic changes and improvements have greatly impacted people's life in terms of work, profitability, and lifestyle, which has required some changes in their attitudes...

In 1970, the Education Policy Document was issued, which was the foundation of the education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It includes the need to ensure that education is effective in meeting the social, religious, and economic needs of the country and eradicating illiteracy among adults in Saudi Arabia. These developments of Saudi's education system present concerns about providing access to all stages of education for boys and girls, based on the Saudi concepts of justice, consultation, and equality. The education system has conferred certain rights as well as responsibilities of the state when developing policies and providing funding for primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

Significance and Purpose of the Study

Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that adopted the UNCRC in 1996, with the exception of all articles that are inconsistent with Islam (National Society for Human Rights [NSHR], 2008). Furthermore, there are many regulations put in place to ensure the rights of every child in Saudi Arabia, such as the Child Protection Law, which was established in 2015. Almohaimeed (2009) mentioned that there are numerous laws in Saudi Arabia to protect children's rights. However, despite the existence of these laws, there are some shortcomings and inconsistencies in the implementation of children's rights, which require immediate intervention to resolve the problem, correct mistakes, and avoid deficiencies in these laws.

This research aimed to examine the extent to which children's rights, as stated in the UNCRC (1989), are perceived in primary education in Saudi Arabia. Meticulously, this research aims to assess the awareness of educators and children in Saudi Arabia regarding the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It seeks to identify gaps and challenges in the implementation of children's rights in primary education, considering the perspectives of

both educators and children. The study also aims to evaluate the perceptions and attitudes of educators and children towards children's rights within the educational context. Ultimately, the research intends to provide recommendations for policy and practice improvements to better align primary education in Saudi Arabia with the principles outlined in the UNCRC.

Thus, this study sought to find an answer the following questions:

- To what extent do educators perceive children's rights in a way that accords with the UNCRC?
- To what extent do children perceive their rights in a way that accords with the UNCRC??

Review of Literature

The early idea of children's rights was established in 1924, when the League of Nations, which was established in 1919 to encourage international cooperation and assure peace and security worldwide, adopted the first multinational treaty concerning the rights of children: the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child (Pare, 2003). This declaration stated the following:

Men and women of all nations, recognising that mankind owes to the Child the best that it has to give, declare and accept it as their duty that, beyond and above all considerations of race, nationality or creed:

1. The child must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually;
2. The child that is hungry must be fed; the child that is sick must be nursed; the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphan and the waif must be sheltered and succoured;
3. The child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress;
4. The child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood, and must be protected against every form of exploitation;
5. The child must be brought up in the consciousness that its talents must be devoted to the service of fellow men (UNICEF, 2003, pp. 164-165)



A substantive international change began in 1979, the International Year of the Child, when the drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) began (Beigbeder, 2001; Pare, 2003). After ten years of negotiation between government delegations and governmental and non-governmental organisations, the UNCRC was adopted almost unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 1989 (Beigbeder, 2001; Freeman, 2000; Pare, 2003). No international convention prior to the UNCRC had received the support of so many countries. Only two countries have not ratified the UNCRC, and those are Somalia, due to its lack of government, and the United States (Freeman, 2000).

The UNCRC contributed to an emerging paradigm shift in the perception and treatment of children in all countries. It introduced a new definition of the child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen', which had not been adopted before by any other declarations (Beigbeder, 2001). Additionally, one of the main innovations of the UNCRC was its recognition of the importance of children's voices and their participation in all decisions that affect them (Beigbeder, 2001; Pare, 2003).

Roose and Bie (2007) argued that the UNCRC should not be considered as just an act for children's rights, as it is also an international agreement that determines the obligations of the states with respect to children and their parents alike. The UNCRC is, therefore, an instrument that formulates the responsibilities of governments towards their citizens. To ensure the implementation of this instrument, 'states Parties undertake to submit to the Committee, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and on the progress made on the enjoyment of those rights' (UNICEF, 1989, p 13).

Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are complementary because the UNCRC considers a child to be a human being with rights while the Charter recognises the importance of including African cultural values and experience when considering issues related to children's rights in Africa. Furthermore, these instruments highlight the importance of the UNCRC and reaffirm the need for countries to adhere to them (The Organisation of African Unity [OAU], 1990; OIC, 2004).

The implementation of the UNCRC.

Although numerous countries have signed the UNCRC, many have failed to successfully implement the treaty (Faiz & Kamer, 2017; Mhaka-Mutepfa et al., 2014; Vasabhai et al., 2014). Faiz and Kamer (2017) found that Turkey, for instance, has experienced issues with this implementation. The researchers questioned future teachers about children's rights in Turkey and collected data through pre-structured interviews with 30 university students from the Departments of Preschool Education, Primary School Education and Social Studies Education in one unspecified Turkish university. The study found that children's rights were generally not respected in schools, as inequality between children still exists in this environment. Additionally, children do not have freedom of speech. Also, children's rights are generally not respected by families, as families do not pay attention to these rights, and they do not allow their children to practice their rights, for example by not respecting children's views and opinions.

Mhaka-Mutepfa's et al. study (2014) found the same result, although there were variances in the study samples' categories between Faiz and Kamer (2017), which was comprised of Turkish university students, and Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014) study, which included Zimbabwean children aged 12 to 19 years. Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014) found that children's rights were not being respected in Zimbabwe in their quantitative study.

Some countries have tried to implement the UNCRC by passing legislation that enshrines the UNCRC as a national policy; however, these policies have been insufficient (Mangamu, 2013; Mohammed, 2013; Smith, 2009). In Saudi Arabia Said (2007) confirmed that there are some failures in the provision of children's rights in regards to the children of poor families. Said (2007) found that those children suffer uncleanliness in their environment, which may affect their health, and they also suffer from deprivation, as their families are not providing them with essential requirements such as food, which might affect their mental and physical development. She mentioned that the legislations and organisations that protect children do not resolve the issues of children in need, such as children living in poverty. She found that official authorities do not check the status and needs of those children. She therefore recommended that there should be an official department, which provides services to children in need. Said (2007) also found that the government provides good health care services and



education which are free for all children in Saudi Arabia. There is a need for more effort in providing the children of poorer families with their rights, as well as a need to research the situation of other children and their enjoyment of their rights in Saudi Arabia. Said's study focuses on providing children's rights to the children of poor families in all aspects of life. The current study, meanwhile, focuses on investigating the provision of children's rights in primary education for all children, regardless of their families' economic situation.

Awareness about the UNCRC.

The protection of children's rights cannot be achieved unless knowledge is spread across communities (Almannai, 2014). In his mixed methods study, Almannai found that Qatari children do not have awareness of their rights. He used a questionnaire and an interview to collect data from 1080 children who were enrolled in elementary, secondary and high school in Doha, Qatar. His findings confirmed that female children are more motivated to learn about their rights than males. This might be because the study found that females are more likely to be victims of child abuse at home or at school. As they are not aware of their rights, they are more likely to accept violence against them as a right of others, especially in traditional societies which value boys more than girls. Qatar has similar cultural norms to those of Saudi Arabia, so Almannai's study findings (2014) may imply that Saudi children have similar limitations regarding their awareness about the UNCRC, which will be examined more closely by the current study.

That general ignorance about the UNCRC has also inhibited its implementation. It is, therefore, important to educate people about children's rights (Boushel, 2014; Campbell & Covell, 2001; Kepenekci, 2006; Mohammed & Ibrahim, 2011). In fact, raising awareness about the rights of children is part of Article 42 of the UNCRC.

Boushel's mixed methods study (2014), which was carried out in the UK, found that in general childcare professionals were ignorant about the UNCRC. He found that childcare professionals understood children's rights differently from one another, which affected how they followed the UNCRC's guidelines. He suggested that these professionals should go through mandatory training courses which

could serve as a way to standardise how these professionals understand human rights, the UNCRC and the relationship between their work and children's rights. Similarly, Wyse (2001) found that from all the principals, teachers, and children he surveyed in his study, only one principal of one primary school knew about the UNCRC. Wyse's findings (2001) thus implied that in both primary and secondary schools in the UK, there is limited awareness regarding the UNCRC among principals, teachers, and children.

This appeared to also be the case in Egypt's Qalyubia Governorate. Mohammed and Ibrahim (2011) found that teachers were, for the most part, ignorant about the UNCRC and about children's rights generally. The researchers used a questionnaire to collect data. The study's sample consisted of 616 participants and these included both kindergarten teachers and school principals. The researchers suggested that a culture of children's rights should be promoted and that this should be done by educating the people who provide services for and who deal directly with children.

Studying rights could help improve the situation of rights in societies, as confirmed by Kepenekci (2006). Kepenekci's quantitative study (2006) found that the—unspecified—university in Turkey had no course that specifically focused on children's rights, though it had a course that focused on human rights. She also found that university students have a positive attitude regard the children's rights and that there are three groups of students who were more likely to be aware of children's rights and view them positively. The first group is women and, according to her interpretation, this is because females were found to be more sensitive to children and their issues than males. The second group is the students from the Department of Educational Science, as their area of study is focused on humans and children. The third group is those students who have studied human rights before, as they have experience with the principles of human rights. The researcher's study sample consisted of 283 university students from the Department of Educational Science and of 67 university students from the Department of Agriculture. The differentiation in the sample size between students from the Department of Educational Science and students from the Department of Agriculture might affect the credibility of the findings, which must be taken into account.

Kepenekci (2010) and Meray (2012, 2014) studied how Article 42 of the UNCRC was implemented in Turkey. They did this by



looking at how children's rights were included in the Ministry of National Education's school curricula for the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th grades. They considered that Article 42 was properly implemented provided that the children were able to learn about it in their textbooks. All of these studies used content analyses of the social studies curricula to gather data. Kepenekci (2010) examined social studies textbooks to see if they included content on children's social rights. Her study focused on three social rights: the right to health, social security and education. She found that the social studies textbooks adequately covered children's social rights; however, the rights to health and education rights were covered in more detail than the right to social security. According to Kepenekci, this might be because the health and education rights are the most essential rights for children and these are the ones that can lead to a better life for children within their society, while the social security rights were mentioned in relation to children with the highest need for protection and social services, such as poor children. Consequently, she suggested that more attention should be devoted to educating children regarding their right to social security.

Merey (2014) studied how the rights of children were addressed by Turkish social studies textbooks, but she focused on the right to participation. She found that social studies textbooks frequently covered the right to participation, and a child's right to participate in his or her school was the most commonly covered right. The textbooks were considerably less concerned with political participation, participation in the protection and sustainable development of the environment, and the ability to participate in a healthy environment. Participation in a judicial environment was completely neglected by the textbooks.

These findings were aligned with Merey's study (2012), which found that the right to participate was the right most commonly mentioned in Turkish social studies curricula. Merey (2012) conducted a comparative study of Turkey and the United States to see if children's rights were included in social studies curricula for the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th grades. She found that Turkey's social studies curricula covered the rights of children in more detail than the United States' social studies curricula, which is a striking finding. She also explained, however, that the United States has not signed the UNCRC, so it would

be unlikely to include the concepts of the UNCRC in its curricula. The most commonly discussed rights in Turkish curricula are the rights to participation, life, and physical and mental development. The child's right to protection was not mentioned in either country's social studies curricula.

In Saudi Arabia, Alkhlan (2016) studied the inclusion of children's rights in Sharia Sciences Textbooks in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd grades of primary education. He found that religious rights, such as the knowledge of Allah (God), and the names and attributes of Allah, the knowledge of prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—and learning about the Islamic teaching were included in these textbooks more than social and educational rights. In contrast, economic and participation rights, which are one of the Islamic principles, were not included in these textbooks at all. He justified this by pointing out that the children in the first three grades of primary education are still young and need to learn about the Islamic religion, which is the aim of these text-books, more than addressing other issues. This implies that there is a chasm between Islamic education and wider social issues when the Sharia Science text books are followed. This is because Sharia Science text books focus only on worship and religious rights.

In 2014, UNICEF published the Child Rights Education [CRE] Toolkit, which aims to assist in the implementation of the UNCRC by boosting its principles through a rights-based approach to education (UNICEF, 2014). It provides governments with a plan and resources to implement CRE in their schools. According to UNICEF (2014), CRE means:

Teaching and learning about the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the 'child rights approach' in order to empower both adults and children to take action to advocate for and apply these at the family, school, community, national and global levels. (UNICEF, 2014, p. 20)

CRE's core element is educating people about the UNCRC by including the treaty's principles in school curricula. The right-based education leads to a better society. This is what the Rights, Respect, and Responsibility initiative, a program of children's rights education implemented in the county of Hampshire in England. This program aims to improve schools by including the UNCRC in the curriculum and any other aspect of schoolwork. Affirmed four years after the program began, the evaluation of the 18 primary schools that



implemented this initiative revealed that the program had good effects on the students, teachers, environment, and society. It has improved children's behaviour and they have become more respectful of others, more responsible, and their attitude improved regarding respecting the rights of others and the environment. It confirmed that teaching children about their rights and raising them in an environment that protects their rights makes them more socially responsible (Covell, 2009). Dunhill (2018) emphasised that applying rights education program has a positive consequence on the primary education children. Dunhill implemented a research project with 17 children, age between five to 11, in the United Kingdom and found that the implementation of right-based education program produced children who practice their rights and respect the rights of others.

In 2015, the Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University, Belfast, researched how CRE is implemented in the countries that are part of the UN National Committee (Jerome et al., 2015). They distributed an online survey that reached 88 experts across 26 countries and implemented a case study in eight countries. They found that the curricula of 11 countries taught children about their rights, while CRE was implemented only in parts of seven countries. The curricula of many other countries, however, did not include material that taught children about their rights.

Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014) argued that society affects people's general awareness regarding the rights of children. They added that age and place of residence affect how aware people are of the rights of children. The study utilised an unstructured questionnaire, which was answered by 147 students aged between 12 to 19 years of age. They found that the children's awareness of their rights differs according to gender, age and place of residence. Older children and children who lived in urban areas were more likely to be aware of their rights when compared to younger children and children who lived in poorer neighbourhoods. Female children who lived in low-density areas were also more aware of their rights and less satisfied about the implementation of these rights and the reason cited for this was because of males having a higher station in patriarchal societies than females. They also found that children learned about their rights in school and, as such, as they became more educated, they were more knowledgeable about their rights. The researchers recommended

improving efforts to raise awareness about the UNCRC throughout Zimbabwe and Africa.

Educational Rights.

Schools around the world still engage in practices that prevent children from taking advantage of their right to education (Faiz & Kamer, 2017; Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014). There are many rights that are related to the right of education, however. These include rights within educational settings and infringing on any of these rights compromises the right to education (McCowan, 2012). Discrimination, violence against children, and the inability of children to participate at school all infringe the right to education.

Children's right to participation.

Article 12 of the UNCRC defines the right of participation as the ability of children to express their views on matters that affect them. Article 13 states that 'the child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds..' (UNICEF, 1989, p. 5). This right is beneficial for both children and the society they inhabit (Smith, 2007). According to Smith (2007), it guarantees that children are respected, which improves their confidence and well-being. It also improves society by creating active agents who can positively affect the general quality of life and education. Mulheron (2008) confirmed that children's rights are interrelated, intertwined, and interwoven. Mulheron thus said that the child's right to participation cannot exist without protection rights and provision rights.

Children's protection rights.

Protection rights include the protection of children from violence, neglect and exploitation, as stated in the UNCRC (UNICEF, 1989). Violence against children is common throughout the world (Freeman & Saunders, 2014). Freeman and Saunders (2014) suggested that because many cultures use violence to discipline children, it will continue to exist until laws are passed that prohibit all forms of violence against children. By 2017, this practice had been prohibited in 52 countries in all settings, including within the home (Schreiber, 2017).



Methodology

Creswell (2014) mentioned that research approaches are divided into three types: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

After the researcher decided to use the mixed-methods approach in the present study, the researcher designed my research methods. the researcher used interviews, a questionnaire and focus groups to gather the data needed to answer my research questions. The researcher chose these methods because the researcher aimed to explore the chosen participants' perceptions of the UNCRC and its implementation, and these methods are the most appropriate for this purpose. Furthermore, the research design is consistent with the objectives of the study. Therefore, these methods enabled me to explore the participants' perceptions, to understand how the culture influences their perceptions and to gain insights into their views and experiences of the culture.

The 'participants of the study' means the 'sample of the study', which refers to 'the smaller number of cases, units or sites selected from a much larger population. Some samples are assumed to be representative of the entire, i.e., generalisable from, but this can never be done with certainty' (Wellington, 2015, p. 345). A sample can be selected in accordance with the research aims and questions, research methodology, population size, and the requirements of confidence and accuracy (Cohen et al., 2011). However, the best research sample is the sample that represents the population considered by the study (Cohen et al., 2011).

As the present study aimed to explore the implementation of children's rights in Saudi Arabian primary education, its population included principals, teachers and primary education children aged nine to 11 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The researcher chose this population because these people know the most about the current situation regarding children's rights within education. The researcher chose three different samples from three different levels in education. The principals are the leaders who know about applicable legislations and laws and are responsible for monitoring the implementation of these legislations and protecting children within their schools. The teachers interact the most with children and are responsible for student development. The children are the intended beneficiaries of the

UNCRC, so as UNCRC implementation at their schools affects them, their voices and perceptions should be heard.

For the interviews with principals and the focus groups with children, The researcher chose five primary schools representative of the local area. Because the Education Department in Riyadh consists of five educational areas—divided into East, West, North, South and Central, with each area containing an education office—the sample included a school from each educational area. The intention was to explore the children's rights situation in those schools from the principals' points of view, simultaneously considering their attitudes regarding the UNCRC and factors that affect UNCRC implementation in Saudi Arabian primary education. To that end, semi-structured interviews were used as a method for gathering information from each of the five schools' principals.

In addition, to examine the children's awareness of their rights and their perceptions of the implementation of these rights, the researcher planned to conduct focus groups with 30 students. Each group would contain three students of the same age. One principal did not agree with this plan, however and there was no time to include another school, the researcher worked with children from the other four schools and increased the number of children to 36—three children from the fourth, fifth and sixth years in each school.

A non-probability sample style was used, which means 'targeting a particular group in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population' (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 155). There are many types of non-probability samples; the researcher used the convenience sample in my research. Its benefit is in the ease of reaching the sample categories (Berg, 2001). To collect data from the schools, the researcher was first required to obtain a permit from the Education Department before contacting the schools. According to the Education Department in Riyadh, the researcher does not have the right to choose the schools that could be part of the present study's sample, which might affect the representativeness of these schools to the local area. Thus, schools were chosen by the Education Department, and then they provided me with details about the schools. The Education Department provided me with the names and contact details (principals' phone numbers and emails) from the five primary education schools, each school representing one of the five education areas in Riyadh. Subsequently, the researcher contacted the principals,



inviting them to participate in the present study. the researcher also sent them the permission the researcher had obtained from the Educational Department, the information sheet and the consent form by email and via WhatsApp to ensure they received it. When they agreed to participate in the study, they returned their signed consent forms to me.

After selecting the principals' sample, the researcher selected the children's sample from each school via random sample probability, meaning that each member of the population (which included students who were nine, ten, and 11 years old in each school) had the same chance of being selected and included in the study sample (Berg, 2001; Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher accomplished this by making a list of all the children's numbers in each class. Then the researcher put each number in a small paper bag and randomly picked three children from each class. The researcher chose three children each from the fourth, fifth and sixth years at the four schools in the Central, East, North and West of Riyadh.

For quantitative data, and especially for the questionnaire, Cohen (2011) suggests that the researcher should opt for a large sample because that will increase the research reliability. Moreover, Berg (2001) clarifies that probability sampling is usually used to select samples for quantitative research. However, to ensure that a large number of teachers would answer the questionnaire, the electronic network was used to distribute and collect the questionnaires. This was done through the Survs.com website. The teachers' sample was also gathered via probability sampling, targeting all the public primary school teachers (both male and female) in Riyadh—25,359 teachers (Ministry of Education, 2016). The link to the online questionnaire's page on Survs.com was broadcasted (via social media applications, such as Twitter and WhatsApp) to as many teachers as possible to procure a large number of fully-answered questionnaires. It was also sent to the principals' sample so that they could dispatch it to the teachers in their schools. Consequently, the online page of the questionnaire was visited by 1079 people but there were only 635 submitted questionnaires. The questionnaire was answered by 635 teachers—421 females and 214 males which means that from the distributed questionnaire 59% of them were fully answered.

The teacher focus group was conducted at the end of data collection with the participation of five primary education teachers (all females). So, to ensure the possibility of reaching as many teachers as possible and choosing from a high population number, The researcher used the Twitter application to research participants. The researcher published a tweet asking for five participants who were female primary education teachers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This gave me the chance to reach some of the primary education teachers in Riyadh, ask them to participate in my research, and obtain their contact details.

Table 3.1: *Research Participants*

Participation Categories	Number of Participants	Methods
Principals	5	Interviews
Children	36	Focus groups
Teachers	635 (421 females and 214 males)	Questionnaire
	5	Focus group

Before choosing the participants, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Sheffield Ethics System for implementing the interviews with principals, focus groups with children, and questionnaires with teachers. Then, another ethical approval was obtained for implementing the teacher's focus group. The explanation of the study methods is discussed in the following sections.

Research Methods

The interviews were used to achieve the research aims of exploring the perceptions of primary school principals regarding children's rights as defined in the UNCRC. The interviews were conducted in a face-toface setting.

According to Wellington (2015), there are many interview styles that could be used for gathering data, depending on the research aims. These styles include unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather data from principals because that style is more manageable than unstructured interviews, yet more flexible



than structured interviews. To obtain good qualitative data, The researcher could thus control the interviews using questions that helped uncover the needed information and gave the interviewee the opportunity to discuss and clarify each answer by providing more detail.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the interview questions should be formulated based on the purpose and the question of the research. Thus, the interviews were constructed based on my research purpose, questions and the literature review. It has been done in several stages. First, the researcher re-read the research questions to brainstorm a list of the areas the researcher needed to investigate. Afterwards, the researcher began converting the brainstormed collection of ideas into categories and selecting from them the most suitable ideas and questions. Next, the researcher carefully wrote the questions from the organised categories. The researcher took into account that the questions must be clear, understandable, and connect with the research aims. Wellington (2015) mentioned five types of questions to be avoided: double-barreled questions, two-in-one questions, restrictive questions, leading questions and loaded questions (Wellington, 2015, pp. 146-147). The researcher hence designed the guidance for the interviews according to the literature in the qualitative research area.

The questionnaire was used to explore the primary school teachers' awareness of children's rights as identified through the UNCRC, their perspectives regarding UNCRC implementation. Though similar to an interview, a questionnaire is not conducted in a face-to-face setting, and is therefore useful for reaching a large number of people and collecting a large amount of data (Wellington, 2000). The researcher designed the questionnaire to include both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The researcher chose to include closed-ended questions because they are more direct, more focused, and easier to answer, which helps reduce the number of non-responses and may be less time-consuming for busy teachers. The closed-ended questions were formulated in multiple-choice format with rating scale answers ('agree', 'disagree', 'I have no idea'). Open-ended questions help to 'yield fascinating qualitative data' (Wellington, 2015, p. 195).

Cohen et al. (2011) suggested that focusgroups are suitable for children because they feel as though they are being challenged, and that encourages them to give their best. It also helps the researcher to understand the children's language and interact with them. In general, focus groups help people of any age be more relaxed, warm up, and push each other's opinions forward (Wellington, 2015). Focus groups make participants more confident in stating their viewpoints, thinking out loud, and discussing those opinions openly. Therefore, the researcher deemed focus groups to be appropriate for collecting my research data.

The next step after constructing the focus group questions was choosing the participants. The researcher visited classes with either the principal's assistant or the student advisor, who introduced me to the children. Then, the researcher explained to the children what would be done, giving the entire class the information sheet formulated for children. Afterwards, the researcher chose my sample; the researcher asked them if they wanted to participate and then gave them the information sheet intended for their parents. Every morning, the researcher worked with the principal's assistant or student advisor to organise the time of each focus group, and usually the researcher worked with one group a day each group taking between 45 and 90 minutes. The researcher conducted 12 focus groups in four different schools. There were three groups in each school, each group from a different class year one from the fourth year, one from the fifth year, and one from the sixth year. All focus groups were audio recorded and two different recording devices were used to record the conversations.

The researcher planned the teachers' focus group after analysing the principal interviews, questionnaires and children's focus groups, from which many issues had emerged. The aim of the teachers' focus group was to discuss these issues at length, explain the questionnaire findings, and obtain in-depth information about important points regarding the research questions. Therefore, the focus group with teachers was the last phase of the data collection process.

First, the researcher wrote down the most important issues and divided them into themes for discussion. The researcher then chose the most important issues requiring clarification and discussed them with my supervisor. This led me to design the focus group scenario, which contained four sections. The first section concerned the school and its facilities, the second concerned issues about the people who work at



the school, the third was about some children's rights issues at school, and the fourth discussed the wider society.

The focus group scenario was first written in English. Then, after discussing it with my supervisor and improving it, the researcher translated it into Arabic. To ensure the clarity of the focus group scenario, the researcher tested it by implementing a discussion of some of its issues with my family members who work in the education system. The focus group lasted for approximately two hours, including a friendly conversation at the beginning. The discussion was audio recorded.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Guba's construction includes four concepts: 'credibility (in place of internal validity), transferability (in place of external validity), dependability (in place of reliability), and confirmability (in place of objectivity)' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219). To ensure the trustworthiness of the present study, the researcher has adhered to the following procedures.

In the first procedure, the researcher provided in-depth information about the methodology and the data collection process, including the number of participants, and the application of the methods, which gave a broad impression of the research and its process. According to Shenton (2004), in-depth information about the research process enhances the trustworthiness of the findings as it increases their credibility, dependability and confirmability. Furthermore, Shenton (2004) and Wellington (2015) argued for the use of triangulation as a way to enhance research credibility, confirmability and trustworthiness. The use of different methods helps in overcoming each method's limitations by combining their individual strengths. The triangulation in the present study involved both the methods of gathering data and the participants themselves, as the study sample included principals, teachers, and children.

Moreover, the assurance that participating in the study was voluntary and the participant could withdraw at any time also increased the trustworthiness of the data, as it ensured that data collection included only those who genuinely wanted to participate and planned to offer data openly (Shenton, 2004).

The various debriefing sittings between researchers and their supervisors is another way to promote a study's trustworthiness, according to Shenton (2004). Thus, the regular meetings with my supervisor enhanced the trustworthiness of my research. The researcher discussed with her each step of my research, the methods the researcher used to collect data, the construction of these methods, the participants, the analysis of the data and the findings. Shenton (2004) also asserted that discussing projects with peers and participating in conferences provides feedback and aids notetaking, which helps improve the findings and their trustworthiness. The researcher presented part of my findings at a conference and received feedback from experts and academic researchers in the education field. The researcher is also in the consistent habit of discussing this topic and my findings with my peers. This feedback, from experts and peers alike, helped me improve my findings.

Findings of the Study

Educators' awareness of children's rights.

The data yielded by this study provide strong evidence that educators in primary education have a limited awareness of the UNCRC, while they have an awareness of children's rights derives from an Islamic perspective.

The present study confirmed that educators have limited awareness of the UNCRC, with four of five principals having never previously heard of it. Furthermore, only 37.5% of teachers had heard of the UNCRC. This provides evidence to confirm that educators lack awareness of the UNCRC. This finding could be supported by Isaac (2010) who found that a high proportion of Saudi kindergarten teachers in Makkah Al-mukarram were unaware of the UNCRC. Similarly, Mohammed and Ibrahim (2011) found a lack of awareness about the UNCRC and children's rights in general among kindergarten teachers and school principals in Egypt's Qalyubia Governorate.

My finding is supported also by the studies of Alakroush and Alzayoud (2011) and Alzabon, Almouadia and Almouajda (2016), Campbell and Covell (2001), and Homed (2009), who also found that educators lack awareness of the UNCRC and its articles in Jordan, Canada, and Arab Gulf countries. The UNCRC came with some obligations and responsibilities that adults should provide for children. The findings show that if educators are not aware of the UNCRC,



they will be unaware of their responsibilities and obligations towards children to ensure that their rights are realised.

According to Alakroush and Alzayoud (2011), and Alzabon et al. (2016), the lack of awareness of the UNCRC among educators in Jordan is due to university academic programmes that focus on preparing teachers academically without developing their social awareness, including awareness on the topic of children's rights. Khoury- Kassabri and Ben-Arieh (2009) agreed, finding that university studies in Jerusalem did not prepare educators with regards to the UNCRC. Similarly, the present study found that university study does not improve educators' awareness of the UNCRC, as five of five principals, 67.7% of teachers in the questionnaire and the five teachers in the focus group confirmed that they did not study the UNCRC at university.

Moreover, awareness of the UNCRC requires knowledge of its articles, which implies having read the convention. This study found that 71% of teachers, and four out of five principals, had not read the UNCRC before even though there are copies available in both Arabic and English. This finding supports Isaac's study (2010), which reported that kindergarten teachers in Saudi Arabia had never read the UNCRC. Based on the interviewees' opinions, the MoE and even children's rights organisations do not improve educators' awareness of the UNCRC because they do not dispatch a copy of it to schools. Alakroush and Alzayoud (2011) supported this finding, mentioning that the

Although principals lacked awareness of the UNCRC, they are aware of some aspects of children's rights as they were able to name two rights: the rights to education and protection. The right to education was mentioned by two out of five principals. In addition, the child's right to education obtained the highest percentages of endorsement by teachers in the questionnaire. The principals' and teachers' belief in the right of every child to education may reflect the popularity of education in Saudi society; statistics show that 96.45% of children in Saudi Arabia were enrolled in primary school in 2016, with a drop-out rate not exceeding 6% (Ministry of Education, 2016).

The high proportion of children enrolled in primary education in Saudi Arabia reveals that education has become part of the country's culture. This was confirmed by Alsaban in her interview in the *Al*

Watan newspaper with Alfawaz (2011), in which she said that education in Saudi Arabia is not merely accepted today, it has become a requirement in life and something in which the society believes. This point of view was supported by Lundy (2012), who stated that education is widely accepted as a fundamental right in a large number of societies around the world. In Saudi Arabia, this right was acknowledged by the government through the establishment of the Compulsory Education Law, which emphasises that education is compulsory for all children aged 6 to 15 years old in Saudi Arabia (Abuelsameh, 2013).

The educators' awareness of the right to education may have been influenced by this law, which represents an important improvement in education in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, cultural endorsement of the importance of education may be a factor in awareness of this right. This has the result that denying the right to education is rare in Saudi Arabia, with Alfawaz (2011), noting that it occurs only in rural areas that are far from cities. As the present study was conducted in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, it is not surprising that a high number of principals and teachers in the sample believed in the child's right to education. The right of education is not just about access to education, however; it is about the provision of high-quality education. The previous discussion confirmed that there is a structural inequality in Saudi Arabia against children in rural areas who may not have access to education, despite the Islamic beliefs that support the educational rights for children and the Saudi policy that says that children must attend school.

The other right mentioned by principals was the child's right to protection, which involves keeping children safe and treating them in an appropriate manner. The child's right to protection was mentioned by three out of five of principals. Kepenekci (2006), in her study about university students' attitudes towards children's rights in Turkey, found that female students have a more positive attitude towards children's rights than the male students; in her view this was because of the maternal instinct. The principals in the present study sample were all women. According to Kepenekci, the innate female desire to protect children, which may have led female principals in the present study to believe that protection is one of the children's rights, may be an innate desire. Furthermore, women in Saudi Arabia have maternal roles and a need for greater sensitivity and a desire to protect children forced upon them due to Saudi culture, beliefs and history, which



believes that bringing children up is of the women's responsibility alone. This is caused by the interpretation of the importance that is given to the mother by Islam, which they believe confirms that the mother has more obligations toward her children than the father. This finding reveals a problem; if Saudi Arabia is going to move forward and it is an ambition to implement the UNCRC then there should be equal obligations for male and female adults towards children.

However, 98.6% of the questionnaire respondents confirmed that bringing up children is the responsibility of both parents and a high percentage of participants agreed with the child's protection rights.

Misunderstanding of children's rights by educators.

The study's findings show that teachers are aware of some principles of children's rights but that they misunderstand some of these rights, including the definition of 'a child' according to the UNCRC and the matter of parental violence toward children. This misunderstanding of children's rights reveals tensions around the educators' perspectives of these rights, and how these rights should be implemented in the local cultural context, as discussed below.

The society's culture appeared to influence the principals' and teachers' perspectives on the UNCRC definition of a child. The findings indicate that male teachers disagreed with the assertion that a child is any human being under 18 years old, while female teachers agreed with it. This confirms that there is diversity in the understanding of children's rights, a conclusion supported by Boushel's study (2014), which found dissimilarities in the understanding of children's rights among its sample of professionals who work with children in the UK. In the present case, this dissimilarity may be due to a Saudi culture that encourages dealing with a boy as with a man in order to instil 'masculine' qualities. This is a result of Saudi understandings of childhood, which are culturally determined. If they are treating male children as a full man, then it constitutes a denial of childhood and of the child's rights to a childhood. According to Vygotskiï (1987) humans inherit cultural concepts passed on from the old generation to the new one. The concept of the male child as a man is thus an inherited cultural concept.

Although teachers learned about children's rights in Islam and had a positive attitude toward the UNCRC, they believed in parental use of physical punishment. Minor punishments which do not cause injury are not considered to be violence in some societies (Freeman & Saunders, 2014). Saudi society is one of these; it tolerates corporal chastisement of children, especially by their parents, on the grounds that children should be submissive to parents. According to Imoh (2016), the main reason for the acceptance of this practice in many societies is that people consider it the best way to socialise children. This is reflected in the high value given to parents in Saudi culture. This may confirm that, although they did not say it directly, teachers believed that a child is the property of his or her parents. Campbell and Covell (2001) argued that this belief can be detected in human behaviours. Additionally, the teachers agreed that parents have a right to rear their children as they see fit, which may be evidence of the teachers' endorsement of the prevailing view of children as the property of parents. Albaker (2013b) agreed with this idea, as she said that Saudi cultural beliefs support the idea that a child is the property of his or her parents. This is an important issue about the misuse of power. Helping children to achieve their rights is not about having power over them. The awareness of children's rights is affected by the culture of Saudi society. Such cultural influence, as Vygotskiĭ and Luria (1993) suggested, participates in the creation process of human thinking. On the one hand, we have the children's rights culture that comes from Islamic teachings and the UNCRC, which is fixed, but on the other hand, there are other external influences penetrating this culture and affecting it in many different ways.

In summary, the study's findings revealed that, although there is a limited awareness of the UNCRC among educators, they are aware of some aspects of children's rights, but their understanding of these rights is affected by the cultural context of Saudi society. According to Vygotskiĭ and Luria (1993), the culture and its social elements determine how the people think and act. Thinking with and through the tools of the culture embodies people's understanding and interpretation of cultural knowledge, including the knowledge of children's rights. Thus, the educators' understanding of children's rights in Saudi Arabia is affected by the Saudi cultural context. With regards to the culture of children's rights in Saudi Arabia, we can see that there are two different sources that affect awareness of children's rights. These are the Islamic culture and the international culture of children's rights that is



portrayed in the UNCR. Those different cultures create a space between them that needs to be filled. The space that is created is where social and cultural conventions of Saudi society seem to fail to respect and understand children's rights in Islam and to be willing to accept different international perspectives such as the UNCR. Vygotskiï (1869-1934) and Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) emphasised the cultural role in the acquisition of knowledge. If the children's rights culture is absent, and conflicts in some parts with society, it will not be easy to disseminate the knowledge of the UNCR. It is no wonder that the study shows a gap between the educators' awareness of children's rights from the Islamic perspective and the UNCR.

Children's awareness of children's rights.

The findings of the focus group with children revealed that although they have a limited awareness of the UNCR they were aware of some concepts of children's rights in general, because they mentioned some of these, and they talked clearly about the violation of their rights. They also have an intuitive understanding of what is right and wrong, and how they experience any violations in their everyday lives.

The rights that children most frequently mentioned were their rights to education, to live with their parents, to nutrition, to be protected from violence, to healthcare, and to play.

The study indicated that children lacked awareness of the UNCR. This is evident from the fact that, of the 36 children in the study sample, not one knew of the UNCR. This finding is supported by Ejieh and Akinola's study (2009), which found that children's awareness of their rights as stated in the UNCR was very limited in Nigeria. It is sometimes argued that if educators have no awareness of the UNCR, children's knowledge of the UNCR will be limited (Lundy, 2007).

After discussion in the focus group, however, the children showed a significant interest in these rights and their implementation. In a similar manner, the Zimbabwean children in Mutepfa's et al. study (2014) showed interest in the implementation of these rights. In contrast, Ejieh and Akinola (2009) found that children believed there is no need for children's rights. This difference may reflect the different areas in which the data were gathered, as the present study

was in the KSA while Mutepfa et al. (2014) was in Zimbabwe and Ejieh and Akinola (2009) was in Nigeria. The diversity of the children's attitudes may be due to the effects of their experiences and cultures. According to Vygotskij (1993) the individual's core reflects the environmental conditions that include the culture, people and history. People are therefore diverse in opinion depending on the environment surrounding them.

The children were asked to give a definition of their rights and their answers confirmed their lack of awareness of them. Only four of 36 children gave a meaningful definition of children's rights and the responsibilities of adults to children. Those children recognised adults' responsibilities to make children's rights practicable, which indicates that they have some knowledge regarding their rights.

Similar to Wyse's study (2001), although children were not aware of the UNCRC, when asked to give examples of their rights, they mentioned some significant principles of the children's rights. The number of children who mentioned these rights was less than 50%—16 of 36 children—which confirmed the limitations of their awareness of their rights. This finding is supported by Roscoe (2011), who found that in Canada, children have misunderstanding of their rights. Moreover, Khoury-Kassabri and Ben-Arieh (2009) found that children from traditional societies, such as Arab societies, were unlikely to understand their rights. Based on their findings, Saudi children, because they also belong to a traditional society, would be expected to have a limited awareness of their rights. According to Khoury-Kassabri and Ben-Arieh (2009), this is because traditional societies lack awareness of children's rights, suggesting that children cannot expect the support of their society in improving their knowledge in this regard. That might be because those traditional societies are afraid of changes that might affect their identity. As they do not have the awareness about the UNCRC, and the UNCRC is an international culture that might cause change in their societies, they therefore prefer to not learn about it or even support it.

The discussion with the children revealed that children have some knowledge about their rights but there are some conflicts between their awareness of their rights and their understanding of these rights. This may be due to children's lack of agency in Saudi families. The view of children as the property of parents means that they have a lack of agency, and that may cause them to misinterpret



their rights. The lack of agency implies a subjective and subordinate positioning of children in families, schools and society, which prevents them from enjoying their rights; this is an important issue. It is a significant barrier, preventing children from achieving their rights in Saudi Arabia. According to sociocultural theory, individuals are formed within their social and cultural environments, which influences their perceptions, skills and intellectual capabilities (Vygotskiĭ & Luria, 1993). Vygotskiĭ stated that culture precedes the existence of a child; therefore, children accept the culture they are immersed in when they are born (Van der Veer, 1991). Once children become part of their specific environment, they are subject to rapid changes in order to adapt using means that were generated historically by adults within the same environment (Vygotskiĭ & Luria, 1993). Therefore, children accept the culture's norms even if these norms deny them their rights, due to them being in a less powerful position than adults.

Due to the influence of society on children's awareness of their rights, some children in the present study believed in parents' and teachers' rights to punish children by beating them. This is because disciplining children by beating them is traditional in some parts of Saudi society. Furthermore, these children grow up in a culture of obedience to those in authority, such as parents and teachers, therefore they do not consider the use of physical punishment by parents and teachers to be child abuse. Al-baker (2013a) noted that the understanding of 'child abuse' is affected by culture, as what is considered abuse in some cultures is an acceptable method of childrearing in others. This indicates that in Saudi Arabia there are some areas for debate, as there are certain voices offering different interpretations about acceptable and unacceptable practices against children. However, in the context of Saudi Arabia, religious influences on the interactions between people with each other and between people with the community are significant and beating children is encouraged by the religion. The experience of the use of physical punishment is normalized because it is reinforced by the social environment and, according to Vygotskiĭ (1997), the social environment determines the individual's experiences.

Ejeh and Akinola (2009) and Khoury-Kassabri and Ben-Arieh (2009) supported Albaker's view, confirming that children's awareness of their rights is affected by their backgrounds and cultural

norms. This could be explained by Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) and (2005), a child's behaviour and beliefs are affected by interactions with many factors surrounding him or her, and the factors that are closer to the child have greater influence. The family is the closest factor to the child, and its influence affects the child for all her or his life. Consequently, a child's beliefs and behaviours derive from their family's input at the beginning, then other factors from the society will contribute to the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The danger, therefore, is that children are powerless to change their circumstances when adults do not convey their obligations and responsibilities toward children, which may lead them to reproduce what happens to them by applying it to others such as their peers, siblings, or even their own children in the future. According to Vygotskiĭ (1997), the individual's collection of experiences is transmitted from previous generations and creates his or her behaviour. He added that the individual's reaction towards others influences their behaviour.

Education was the right most mentioned, being cited by eight students. This confirmed that children agreed with educators about the importance of education as a right for all children, and, as shown previously, this reflects their society's belief in the importance of education. According to Beiter (2006), education is the most accepted

right in the world. This is supported by Mangamu's study (2013), which found that education is the right that children more commonly know about. Children in his study were also aware of healthcare and nutrition rights, which supports the present study's findings, with the difference that in the present study these rights were not as well known, with only three students mentioning the right to nutrition and one the right to healthcare. The rights to life, to live with parents, to play, and to protection from violence were also mentioned by the children in the present study, but no more than four students mentioned them.

The preceding discussion answers the second part of the first question of the present study: do children have an awareness of the UNCRC? The findings indicate that children have limited awareness of the UNCRC, but they are aware of some aspects of children's rights in general. The most commonly known among children was the right



to education. The children's understanding of their rights is influenced by their cultural context.

Implications of the Findings

The present study identified many problems regarding children's rights in primary education that do not have quick and easy solutions. With this research, the researcher is seeking to improve future plans to implement the UNCRC, which should begin with social changes. Since the researcher assumes that such changes should be driven primarily by policymakers and secondarily by society, the present study has a number of policy implications.

First, the study found that, even though policies such as the Child Protection Law seek to protect children from harm, child abuse and neglect are, to some extent, still rampant in the primary education in the Saudi Arabi. This indicates the necessity of activating this law in the primary education. This could be achieved by spreading knowledge about this law through the use of mass media or any other means and monitoring the implementation of this law. Policymakers should enforce this law and the UNCRC by imposing sanctions on violators. Since child abuse is addressed in Islamic teaching and in the UNCRC there would be no cultural inconsistencies in this recommendation

The literature review found that there are many government ministries in Saudi Arabia that, to varying extents, are responsible for children. Efforts to implement the UNCRC will thus be hindered if these ministries do not cooperate and know exactly what their responsibilities are. Authorities that are responsible for children, such as ministries and human rights organisations, should therefore cooperate and develop institutional connections before seeking to implement the UNCRC.

Raising public awareness about the UNCRC is a critical factor in its success. This requires several cultural changes that would be more complex and would take time. For example, the social status of children would have to be improved. It would also require the reformation of cultural beliefs that affect how people treat children, such as the use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure. Before child protection laws can become meaningful and enforceable, the cultural roots of societal attitudes must be changed. This change

should be driven by the reality of a society and its beliefs and could be accomplished by relating the UNCRC to this reality. We must hence work towards making the UNCRC a cultural norm, in spite of the complexities that this might entail.

In Saudi Arabia, Islamic teachings shape society and culture. Those who are seeking to implement the UNCRC should thus build it on the foundation of Islamic teachings to ensure that people will engage with its principles and goals. For this reason, it is important to find a middle ground between the UNCRC and these Islamic teachings and improve people's awareness of children's rights in accordance with this compromise position.

Even though the implementation of the UNCRC should be primarily driven by the culture, societal institutions should also participate. It is important to expand institutional responsibilities related to the UNCRC. Since mosques are the most important institution in Saudi society, they should therefore take part in advocating for children's rights, especially during Friday sermons.

Education should be used to change social attitudes regarding childhood and children's rights; this is critical for ensuring that people understand why these rights are necessary. Adults and children should be educated about these rights and encouraged to act upon them in their daily lives. Curricula about children's rights should be created and taught at several educational levels to embed the conceptual basis of these rights in primary education. Furthermore, education about children's rights should take place throughout the school within the 'hidden curriculum', in which these rights would serve as a framework for the school's policies and practices. If successful, these values would become embedded in all aspects of life at the school.

Implementing the UNCRC in primary education would also require pre-service and in-service education for educators. Current educators should take part in compulsory in-service training sessions to improve their ability to implement these rights. In addition, it is recommended that training be provided to everybody in the country. However, if training of this magnitude is not possible, it should be, at minimum, compulsory for educators, government employees, and children, as well as anyone else who deals with children.

The study identified the potential of using the media to raise awareness of the UNCRC. Since mass media, with its wide reach and



diversity, can reach everybody in the country, it could be used to improve society's awareness about children's rights. Mass media are accessible to everyone, regardless of his or her educational background. Public television and newspapers, for example, could be used to create a culture that values children's rights.

Official authorities such as the MoE and human rights organisations could provide Arabic and English copies of the UNCRC in every school to raise awareness about it. They can also work closely with schools and parents to support the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education. This cooperation could take the form of workshops and meetings where the cooperating parties have the opportunity to share ideas about ensuring the success of the UNCRC. The MoE and human rights organisations could also monitor how well schools are following the regulations of the UNCRC. These initiatives, if undertaken over time, could ensure that schools work towards meeting their obligations under the UNCRC and help to create a high quality education system in Saudi Arabia.

Limitations of the Research

Due to our cultural demands, contact between women and men who are not known to each other is difficult and unacceptable. Saudi Arabian policy prohibits women from accessing male schools, and vice versa. The researcher thus preferred to focus on females in the interviews and focus groups.

Recommendations for Further Research

My recommendations for further research are based on the literature on children's rights and the findings of the present study. My findings revealed that there are many areas that still need to be explored before it is possible to form a complete picture of the state of children's rights in Saudi Arabia and ultimately to develop more effective approaches for implementing the UNCRC.

First, the implementation of the UNCRC in male primary education in Riyadh should be investigated so that it is possible to draw comparisons between the findings of a study with boys and men and this study. Second, since children's rights in Saudi Arabia are driven by two approaches (the Islamic approach and the international approach), there is controversy in some areas and agreement in others.

This suggests that there is a need to develop an alternative that combines these approaches and creates a compromise position between the UNCRC and children's rights in Islam.

Moreover, research should explore the professional development needs of Saudi educators to improve their UNCRC-related knowledge and practices. Lastly, to implement the UNCRC in education, a rights-based education programme should be designed. Studies should investigate which educational design is most suitable for Saudi society while still meeting the requirements of the UNCRC.



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