

**Exploring Perspectives: Implementation of the
UNCRC in Primary Education in Saudi Arabia
from the Viewpoints of Principals, Teachers,
and Students**

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Exploring Perspectives: Implementation of the UNCRC in Primary Education in Saudi Arabia from the Viewpoints of Principals, Teachers, and Students

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ABSTRACT:

The study investigated the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia through the perspectives of principals, teachers, and students, with the aim of informing policies and practices that better upheld children's rights and promoted holistic development. Employing a mixed-methods approach, including interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups, the research examined the implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabian primary education. Principals, primary school teachers (both male and female), and children aged nine to 11 in Riyadh participated in the study, offering diverse perspectives on children's rights within the educational context. Through qualitative interviews, quantitative questionnaires, and participatory focus groups, the research comprehensively explored the challenges and opportunities associated with upholding children's rights in Saudi Arabian primary education. The results of the research revealed that teachers generally agreed on certain UNCRC principles, such as free primary education, prohibition of physical or emotional punishment, and respect for children regardless of background. However, uncertainties existed regarding the dissemination of the UNCRC in schools, cooperation between children's rights organizations and schools, and the active implementation of children's rights within educational settings. Children reported instances of teacher cruelty, harsh disciplinary actions, fear of retaliation for reporting violations, and discrimination based on various factors. Furthermore, inadequate facilities and safety concerns persisted, reflecting challenges in implementing UNCRC principles effectively. The research recommended exploring the professional development needs of Saudi educators to enhance their understanding and implementation of UNCRC-related principles.

Keywords: Perspectives, Implementation, UNCRC.

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استكشاف الآراء: تنفيذ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية
من وجهات نظر المديرين والمعلمين والطلاب

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الملخص:

تناولت الدراسة تنفيذ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية من وجهات نظر المديرين والمعلمين والطلاب، بهدف توجيه السياسات والممارسات التي تعزز حقوق الأطفال وتشجع على التنمية الشاملة. باستخدام المنهج الكمي اعتمداً على المقابلات والاستبيانات والمقابلات البورية، فحصت الدراسة تنفيذ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية، شارك في الدراسة مديرو المدارس الابتدائية والمعلمون (سواء الذكور أو الإناث) والأطفال الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين تسع سنوات وأحد عشر عاماً في الرياض، مما قدم وجهات نظر متنوعة حول حقوق الأطفال ضمن السياق التعليمي. من خلال المقابلات النوعية والاستبيانات الكمية ومجموعات التركيز المشاركة، استكشفت الدراسة بشمول التحديات والفرص المرتبطة بتعزيز حقوق الأطفال في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية. كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن المعلمين يتفقون بشكل عام على بعض مبادئ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل، مثل التعليم الابتدائي المجاني، ومنع العقاب الجسدي أو العاطفي، واحترام الأطفال بغض النظر عن الخلفية، ومع ذلك، كانت هناك أخبار متداولة بخصوص نشر اتفاقية حقوق الطفل في المدارس، والتعاون بين منظمات حقوق الطفل والمدارس، والتنفيذ الفعال لحقوق الأطفال ضمن العملية التعليمية، كما أفاد الأطفال بوجود حالات من قسوة المعلمين، والإجراءات التأديبية القاسية، والخوف من الانتقام عن الإبلاغ عن انتهاكات حقوقهم، والتمييز بناءً على عوامل متعددة. علاوة على ذلك، استمرت المخاوف المتعلقة بالمرافق غير الملائمة ومشاكل السلامة، مما يعكس التحديات في تنفيذ مبادئ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل بشكل فعال. أوصت الدراسة باستقصاء احتياجات التطوير المهني للمعلمين السعوديين لتعزيز فهمهم وتنفيذهم لمبادئ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل ذات الصلة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: وجهات النظر، التنفيذ، اتفاقية حقوق الطفل.

Introduction

Children's rights have been a subject of interest for many researchers, in light of the fact that rights give children the capability to make decisions for their own lives, as opposed to having their lives determined by others (Freeman, 2007). Freeman (2007) explained that rights give children the opportunity to act as an agent as they participate in decision-making and have freedom of speech, association, and information. He mentioned that 'the most fundamental of rights is the right to possess rights' (Freeman, 2007, p. 8).

Lundy (2012) explained that the UNCRC can possibly be a noteworthy driver of an education strategy change. She added that the UNCRC contains the most comprehensive universal articulation of rights regarding education and is the most widely adopted human rights convention worldwide; it has already induced changes in children's experiences at schools in the signatory countries. Covell (2009) explored the idea that children who are taught about their rights in school display positive changes in their behaviour, learn better, and become more responsible adult members of society.

Siaciwena and Lubinda (2008) mentioned that the UNCRC could be understood in differing ways, which have different consequences for children, parents, and educators. They argued that the focus should be on how these rights are understood and implemented instead of focusing on the rights themselves. Maboe (2013) said that since children spend most of their time at school, educators are the ones who spend the most time with children. Thus, parents and other members of society expect the education system and the educators to protect children and their rights. Devine and McGillicuddy (2016) emphasised the influence that education has on the implementation of the UNCRC, as the education affects the power and position of children in society, which has a profound impact on the implementation of the UNCRC. Therefore, as institutions of education are where children spend most of their time, these institutions are responsible for the development of children. Furthermore, since the implementation of the UNCRC is affected by people's interpretations of these rights, this study will examine the UNCRC implementation in the education system in Saudi Arabia.

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.

However, passing legislation on children's rights does not ensure its implementation. Mangamu (2013), Mohammed (2013), and Smith (2007) confirmed that

despite national policies to protect the UNCRC, these rights are still not practiced in Zambia, Iraq, and New Zealand, respectively. In addition, Mhaka-Mutepfa, Maree, and Chiganga (2014) found that children's rights were not implemented in Zimbabwe. Similarly, Vasabhai et al. (2014) found that children's rights are violated in India. This confirmed that there is a problematic issue with the implementation of the UNCRC worldwide.

The implementation of the UNCRC is affected by people's understanding of these rights, as they are influenced by people's culture and beliefs (Alshail, Hassan, Aldowais, & Kattan, 2011). Despite the availability of legislation and laws to protect children's rights, violence against children still takes place around the world (Freeman & Saunders, 2014). Maboe (2013) confirmed that despite legislation that protects children's rights, schools still breach the UNCRC. Maboe (2013) said that the practice of child abuse and neglect is still widespread in schools, as physical punishments, sexual abuse, and discrimination still take place in the hands of educators in South Africa.

The child protection rights in school have been studied by many researchers, including Ju and Lee (2010) and O'Leary et al. (2018), who have found that corporal punishment is the most common violent practice against children in South Korean and Afghani schools, respectively. Almahroos (2007) found that children living in the Arabian Peninsula experience every form of abuse and neglect, and Alanazi (2008) confirmed that physical punishment is especially common in Saudi Arabia.

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. Moreover, children will not realise their rights except through the intervention and support of adults. If adults do not have sufficient awareness regarding the rights of children, those rights will not be effectively applied. If children's rights are to become their lived experiences, then attention must be paid to how these rights are implemented in the social structures, processes, and values within any society.

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. A key focus of this study is to explore whether the education system in Saudi Arabia, as represented by schools, is implementing the rights of children in accordance with the UNCRC.

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. It is the key factor that affects any aspect of life-style, determines people's values and norms, and shapes people's demeanours.

Islam is the most influential factor on the education system in Saudi Arabia; the educational focus on religious subjects such as Islamic jurisprudence is essential in all stages of general schooling (Alsarhany, 2003). The economic situation is another factor that has an impact on education, especially in relation to oil exploration. The increasing of the state's income have resulted in the allocation of more funds to education.

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. General education in Saudi Arabia consists of four stages: kindergarten; six years of primary school, which is compulsory and prepares children for the next stage; intermediate school, which students enrol in for three years; and high school for three years. After that, the student is qualified to undergo and complete studies in higher education, where they receive a monthly salary until they graduate (Ministry of Education, 2003). Higher education began with King Saud University in Riyadh in 1957, and it was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education until 2015, when the Ministry of Education [MoE] took over its responsibilities and the number of universities around the country reached 26 (Ministry of Education, 2018).

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. In order to support these developments, policymakers have looked outwards towards the UNCRC on the provision of children's rights, and inwards towards Islamic Law and the Saudi Arabian system.

Questions of the Study

This research aims to examine the extent to which children's rights, as stated in the UNCRC (1989), are implemented in primary education in Saudi Arabia.

- How do principals, teachers, and students perceive the current implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia?
- How do children perceive the current implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia?

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to:

1. Investigate educators' understanding and perceptions of the UNCRC and its implementation within the context of primary education in Saudi Arabia.
2. Examine children's perspectives on the practical application of UNCRC principles in primary education settings in Saudi Arabia, including their experiences and perceptions of their rights within the school environment.
3. Compare and contrast the viewpoints of educators and children regarding the challenges, successes, and areas for improvement in implementing UNCRC principles in primary education in Saudi Arabia.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

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 multi-national 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)

The issues covered by the Geneva Declaration indicate that children are objects in need of protection, which is what the Geneva Declaration aims to provide for children (Pare, 2003). Pare (2003), however, argued that the Geneva Declaration does not embody children's rights entirely, as it only emphasises children's basic needs, such as nutrition, nursing, and protection.

On 20 November 1959, the UN General Assembly adopted a new Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which came into existence on 24 October 1945 (Beigbeder, 2001). The second declaration was built off the first, with a focus on extending the first declaration and shaping it to line up with the prevailing situation at that time (Pare, 2003). According to Beigbeder (2001), the reason for the issuance of the new declaration for children's rights was that children need special care and protection, including legal protection with their interests in mind. Ten principles for children's rights were laid out in the new declaration. The new declaration stated the rights of protection for children, such as non-discrimination and protection from negligence (Principles 1, 2, 8, 9, and 10); legal rights, such as the rights to name, nationality, and social security (Principles 3, 4, and 6); and the rights of survival and developments, such as healthcare and education (Principles 5 and 7) (United Nations [UN], 2003). Freeman (2000) argued that both the declarations from 1924 and 1959 were aspirational and emphasised parenthood, as there was no indication of the concept of empowerment or a child's autonomy in either declaration, nor the recognition of the importance of a child's views. Both declarations, however, served as the basis for the current children's rights convention, which was adopted in 1989 (UN, 2003).

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). The UNCRC contains 54 articles divided into three parts. The first part is the main section, which covers every child's rights, including the right of life, healthcare, education, freedom of expression, protection of a child's dignity, and assurance of a child's safety. In addition, it includes other rights that affect either the child or the guardian, such as the rights to live with a family and have a nationality (UNICEF, 1989).

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).

There are many regional children's rights instruments, such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam. Those instruments aim to address children's rights in the context of the community. Therefore, The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) stresses that the aim of implementing an Islamic instrument for children's rights is that Islamic values and principles are essential for Muslims, and they play an important role in the life of Muslims (OIC, 2004). Moreover, Olowu (2002) mentioned that the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the 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 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was adopted in 1990 by the OAU and it was enforced in 1999 (Olowu, 2002). The Charter has four chapters. The first chapter, which contains 31 articles, addresses a child's rights and welfare. It includes the definition of the child, which is the same definition used by the UNCRC; it also addresses children's rights for survival and equality, their rights to have their best interests taken into consideration, their legal rights, such as their right to their name and nationality, and rights related to freedom, protection and education, as well as many other rights. The second and third chapters focus on the Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and its obligations. The fourth chapter contains other provisions, such as the Charter's sources, the provisions of the states' signature and adherence to the Charters and the provisions of amendments of the Charter (OAU, 1990). Olowu (2002) mentioned that there is much similarity between the African Charter and the UNCRC; for many of its aspects, the Charter uses the same language found in the UNCRC and its provisions. These similarities are clear when one reads the Charter and its articles.

The other instrument is the Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam. It was adopted by the OIC in 2004, and was built on Islamic teachings and children's rights in Islam. It was ratified by Saudi Arabia in 2005 (Said, 2007). The most important objectives of this Covenant, as described in its second article, are caring for the family, strengthening its capabilities and providing necessary support, ensuring a safe and secure childhood, ensuring the development of generations of Muslim children who believe in their Lord and adhere to their faith, providing compulsory and free primary education for all children, regardless of their gender, colour, nationality, religion or any other consideration and developing education by improving curricula, strengthening the skills of teachers and providing vocational training opportunities (OIC, 2004). This Covenant contains 26 articles, beginning with the definition of the child, which is: "every human being who, according to the law applicable to him/her, has not attained maturity" (OIC, 2004, p. 2). This definition of a child is different from the one used by the UNCRC; this definition is one of the most important differences between children's rights in Islam and the UNCRC. In its third article, the Covenant emphasises the need to respect Sharia law and Islamic teachings, as well as the internal affairs of other states. The fourth article clarifies the state's obligations to this Covenant and its implementation. Articles 5 to 21 contain the main rights for children, such as the right to equality, life, identity, freedom, education and protection, as well as other rights. Articles 22 to 26 identify the provisions of states' signing and adopting the Covenant, and the provisions of amending and implementing it (OIC, 2004). Some of the aspects of the Covenant are similar to those found in the UNCRC, including children's right to life, education, non-discrimination, freedom, identity and protection; however, the Covenant takes into account the reality of the Muslim community and Islamic law, which guarantees the rights of a child (Alkaabi, 2012).

Those two instruments are examples of regional children's rights approaches that some organisations have adopted to support children's rights and improve their situation in some societies, taking into account social and cultural contexts. However, the UNCRC's importance is evidenced by the nearly unanimous agreement of the whole world, with the exception of two countries and it would lose its importance if its articles were not implemented. To ensure the effectiveness of the UNCRC, specifically in Saudi Arabia, current research will explore the implementation of this convention in primary education in this country. Since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country, and the Quran and Sunnah are its constitutions.

Children's rights policies in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has a significant interest in human rights. As such, it signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, with the exemption of two articles: Article 16, which gives people the freedom to choose their spouse regardless of any

differences of religion, and Article 18, which says that everyone has the right to change his or her religion or beliefs. The government of Saudi Arabia has rejected those two articles because they conflict with Islamic teachings and the legal system of Saudi Arabia (Saudi National Society for Human Rights [NSHR], 2008). The importance given to human rights by the Saudi Arabian government appears in its regime, however. For instance, Article 26 of the Main Ruling Regime of Saudi Arabia states that the government protects human rights in accordance with Islamic law. In addition, Article 8 of the same regime states that laws in Saudi Arabia are based on the concepts of justice, consultation, and equality (Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers [BECM], 1992).

On 11 September 1995, Saudi Arabia adopted the UNCRC with a reservation regarding all articles that were inconsistent with Islam (NSHR, 2008). To ensure the implementation of the UNCRC, the UNCRC was forwarded to every government agency that offered services for children, instructing them to make their plans pursuant to the UNCRC. The Saudi Arabian government thus gave the Saudi National Commission for Childhood, established in 1979 as a part of the MoE, the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the UNCRC and preparing the reports that must be periodically sent to the United Nations (NCC, 2000).

To ensure and protect children's rights, the Saudi Arabian government has established specific government organisations, such as the Human Rights Commission (HRC), established in 2004 (NSHR, n.d.). Also, the National Family Safety Program (NFSP), established in 2005, aims to protect victims of domestic violence, including children (NFSP, 2015).

Alfaryan (2014) studied the policies and legislation in Saudi Arabia that aim to protect children from abuse. He went on to study the implementation of protective policies and found that there are many policies in place, but his interviews with 30 child protection workers in two departments in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia revealed failure in the implementation of these protective policies. There is no specific authority that takes responsibility and makes decisions about child protection laws, as there are many ministries and departments responsible for producing and applying these laws, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Social Affairs. He also found that unclear guidance and workers' lack of knowledge all negatively affect the implementation of child protection laws. As in many other countries, an effective child protection system relies on good governance as well as effective strategic implementation across a variety of providers and organisations.

In the same year, the NFSP launched the Child Helping Hotline, which is a free-to-call phone number. It is 116111, and it was established in 2011 as a trial. The basic operational stage began in 2014. It aims to support children under the age of 18 by listening to children's, parents', and caregivers' problems and by helping to solve

their problems or by redirecting them to the appropriate authorities that can help them (NFSP, 2017).

Albaker (2013c) believed that the protection of children is not achieved by producing programs and systems, but by the understanding of these systems and the implementation of these within the cultural structure of a society, which would motivate people and administrative bodies to action. Albaker (2013a), (2013b) expressed doubts about the implementation of the Child Protection Law in Saudi Arabia, because the application of this law will interfere with the social and cultural structure of this society, which purports the belief that a child is the property of his or her parents. Albaker (2013b) added that the diversity of people in Saudi society affects the societal understanding of child abuse. She argued that both culture and people's values impact any reporting about child abuse because people view this as a kind of violation of a family's privacy. This raises the question of how authorities can be informed and interfere in family affairs. There will also be many other social and tribal obligations that executors will have to carefully consider when handling each case. The implementation of any child protection legislation, including the UNCRC, may face difficulties that could lead to failure. The scope of this current research aims to find out more about the reality of the implementation of the UNCRC, with a specific focus on the challenges facing its implementation in primary education in Saudi Arabia.

The third and fourth reports regarding the application of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia addressed problems in implementation. In these reports, the NCC admitted that the achievements in Saudi Arabia regarding children and their rights still fall short of their hopes and expectations and that there is a lack of proper care and attention (NCC, 2012). The annual report of the Saudi Human Rights Commission [HRC] (2017) also showed evidence of issues in the implementation of the UNCRC. According to the HRC report, after 245 visits to some social institutions such as social welfare centres, institutions for disabled children, hospitals, and schools in order to monitor the implementation of the human rights and the UNCRC, they discovered 333 human rights issues, 45 of which were related to violence and 35 of which were related to education. There are violations of rights within the education system in Saudi Arabia, which could also be a violation of the UNCRC. This study will investigate the implementation of child protection policies related to the UNCRC within the education system, which will be represented by a primary education in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in an effort to learn more about the types of violations occurring.

The implementation of the UNCRC.

Although numerous countries have signed the UNCRC, many have failed to successfully implement the treaty (Faiz & Kamer, 2017; Mhaka-Mutepefa 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.

In India, Vasabhai's et al. mixed methods study (2014) found that children's rights were being systemically violated. Their sample included 200 children aged 10–18, as well as their parents/guardians. The study found that a substantial portion of these children do not attend school, live in unsanitary environments, and were being abused by parents and teachers at the same time. The most serious breach was child labour, which leads to other children's rights violations, such as infringements on child protection and developmental rights.

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 New Zealand, for example, Smith (2009) investigated how the government's actions have been influenced by the UNCRC. She found that the influence of the UNCRC can be seen in the ban on corporal punishment for children, for example, as well as in the creation of the Agenda for Children, which aims to make New Zealand a better society for children, since this policy focuses on improving children's well-being (Smith, 2009). By analysing reports from NGOs regarding the UNCRC, as well as reports sent to the UN by New Zealand's Ministry of Affairs, the researcher found that, though progress has been made on the legislative level, the UNCRC has not been fully implemented, especially in the areas of child poverty and violence against children.

In Iraq, Mohammed (2013) found that even though children's rights legislation has been passed, it has not been implemented. In his study, he compared the implementation of the UNCRC in Kurdistan (Iraq) and the United Kingdom. He found that, though the Iraqi government had approved the UNCRC,

its policies have been poorly implemented. He suggested that the implementation of the UNCRC in Kurdistan should be focused on improving the children's standard of living and enshrining their rights in law, as was done for children in the U.K. He also suggested that the policies should be changed to spread awareness about children's rights throughout Iraq. In Zambia, the government has established many programmes and passed many policies to implement the UNCRC. These efforts were not successful, however, because they were not supported financially (Mangamu, 2013). Mangamu recommended that actions should be taken to broadcast information about children's rights throughout Zambia and to encourage efforts to implement these rights.

Similarly, 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.

•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, Jimer-son, & 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.

The right to protection against discrimination is codified in Article 2 of the UNCRC. Wyse (2001) found that children in primary and secondary schools in the

United Kingdom do not feel that teachers treat them fairly, because some of the teachers shout at the same children every time. Similarly, Cairns et al. (2018) found that schools in Scotland and England discriminated against children from less affluent backgrounds. In Saudi Arabia, teachers do not respect the children's right to fair and equal treatment (Alhelaly, 2008).

Alrubiyea (2010) studied the situation regarding the rights of children with disabilities in Saudi Arabia. This included their right to education. He found that schools in Saudi Arabia frequently discriminate against children with special needs. In some cities, there are few educational facilities available for them. In contrast, in larger cities, such as Riyadh and Hail, children have equal opportunities for education, regardless of their physical needs. Alrubiyea (2010) confirmed that the children's right to education is being violated as disabled children who live in rural areas do not have equal access to educational opportunities. As argued by Alquraini (2011), there is a shortage of education services for disabled children in Saudi Arabia. Alquraini confirmed that there is a discrimination against disabled children in Saudi Arabia as they are ignored and prevented by society from practicing some of their rights, such as the right to education, as equally as other children. In this regard, Hodge (2014) emphasised the importance of recognition and protection of the rights of disabled pupils.

In Yemen, as in many other countries, though basic education is compulsory, this law is not complied with (Abdulwahab, 2002). Abdulwahab (2002) found that educational opportunities are available for children from high-status families because they are able to attend private schools. These schools provide them with a good education. Public schools, in contrast, suffer from deteriorating buildings and equipment. Children from economically impoverished backgrounds tend to go to these schools. In addition, schools' financial requirements prevent poorer families from enrolling their children in school. Exacerbating the issue is the fact that schools are not evenly distributed across the country. The distribution is biased toward urban areas and boys' schools (Abdulwahab, 2002). According to Abdulwahab (2002), in Yemen, boys' education is prioritised; there are fewer girls' schools than boys' schools. In some areas, there are no girls' schools at all. In addition, the dropout rate among girls is very high due to the fact that the social destiny of Yemeni women is to be married, not educated. Ultimately, gender affects whether children get to attend school (Abdulwahab, 2002).

It is of note that in Saudi Arabia, attendance rates at school do not exceed 85% (Humanium, 2011). These relatively low attendance rates exist despite the fact that, in 2010, the Saudi government made education compulsory for children aged 6–15 years old (Abu elsameh, 2013). Many Saudi children are deprived of the opportunity to attend school in rural cities (Alfawaz, 2011). According to the Saudi Organisation for

Human rights (as cited in Alfawaz, 2011), this occurs in rural areas because that population is comprised of travelling Bedouins who do not stay in one area. Also, Bedouins need their children to help them with grazing work rather than being enrolled in education. According to the Saudi Organisation for Human rights, this deprivation affects girls more than boys because, in some parts of Saudi Arabia, society believes that girls' sole responsibility is to become housewives and mothers. Alsaban, a consultant of Psychiatry at Umm Al Qura University, in her interview with Alwatan newspaper said that this phenomenon is rare and is limited to only a few areas, so it cannot be generalized, and she added that educational deprivation is a kind of violence against children (Alfawaz, 2011).

Poverty is another factor that prevents children from attending school. O'Leary et al. (2018), along with Chhetri (2011), found (in Afghanistan and Bhutan, respectively) that a significant number of children drop out or do not attend school because they must work to survive. Dropping out of or failing to enrol in school is a problem in the Western world as well. Poverty and the hidden costs of school prevent children from going to school in many EU states, such as Belgium, Ireland, and Latvia (Lundy, 2012). Children's social and economic backgrounds affect their opportunities to take advantage of their 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.

Avci and Yol (2016), along with Faiz and Kamer (2017), while examining the Turkish context, found that Turkish families do not listen to their children's opinions and as such do not respect their right to participation. In addition, Avci and Yol (2016) found that mothers do not account for their children's views and do not allow their children to freely choose what they want. Avci and Yol found that the children are forced to do activities they do not choose as a result of the mothers' desire to protect their children. Avci and Yol (2016) said that the mothers' behaviour, which is intended to protect their children, is a result of their attitude towards children. They believe them to be vulnerable and helpless. This leads to a lack of respect towards

children as individuals. Avci and Yol (2016), along with Faiz and Kamer (2017), confirmed violations of children's rights regarding participations within the families, which is a result of their beliefs regarding the child's vulnerability. This is not done, however, on the same level as the schools, which could also be affected by families' practices. Tobin(2015) said that the child's vulnerability requires that the adults to work to improve the children's capacity for self-protection from any kind of harm rather than simply providing the protection of adults themselves. This is what the UNCRC aims to promote.

In a comparative study between the USA and Italy, Woodhouse (2014) found that the Italians have exceeded the USA in the implementation of the child's participation rights. Woodhouse said that the process of the recognition of this right was slow in the USA and still needs more improvement, while Italy has made a significant improvement in this regard and this could be approved by the Italy ranking in regard to children's well-being and the strong relationship between children and their families and peers. Woodhouse (2014) said that Italy has succeeded in the implementation of child rights to participate because of that the cultural base of the Italian society enhances the children's participation in the family and society, which is a part of their religious tradition. Also, it has been influenced by a powerful committee of the Council of Europe in regard to child's participation rights. According to this commitment, this right has been integrated into all aspects of Italian life and into the laws of the country. While in the USA, there are many political and cultural issues that affect the child's rights to participate such as racism issues.

In the UK, Wyse (2001) said that that child's participation rights are not fully implemented. Wyse found that many children are not able to express their opinions in primary and secondary schools, which suggests that the right to participation has not been implemented. In addition, Wyse (2001) argued that, though these schools have school councils that allow children to participate (to a marginal extent) in the decision-making processes, these councils are insufficient because they are limited by poor communication and the inability to take meaningful action. The children in Wyse's study (2001) confirmed that the opinions and views they discussed in the student council are not being listened to by the teachers. Participation may thus be tokenistic rather than authentic.

Cassidy (2012), who also looked at school councils, wrote that though these councils allow children to be elected by their peers and to discuss issues that affect the school, these councils are ineffective. In general, those children are powerless, and the subjects that they are allowed to discuss are usually determined by their teachers. In addition, Cassidy (2012) argued that children have ideas, opinions, and views that deserve to be listened to by adults. Cassidy noted, however, that many children in the UK are excluded from participating in making decisions at schools and

that this substantially affects their lives. Lundy (2012) also found that the right to participation has not been implemented in the UK, along with 16 other EU states, including Estonia, Poland, and Slovakia.

Listening to children is not sufficient if their views are not taken into account (Cassidy, 2012; Lansdown et al., 2014; Lundy, 2007). Lundy (2007) argued that the specific concepts used to describe Article 12, e.g. 'child's voice' and 'child's participation', affect how the article is implemented, because this right is not fully explained. In response, Lundy (2007) recommended a model for understanding and implementing the right to participation, one which contains certain elements. These elements include *space*, where children can express their views; *voice*, which means that children feel comfortable to express their views; *audience*, which means that these views are respected; and *influence*, which occurs when these views affect how adults act. Lundy (2007) wrote that the UK has, however, failed to adhere to the dictates of Article 12. There is a gap between the government's obligations regarding the right to participation and actual practices in the field of education.

In Scotland and North England, Cairns et al. (2018) found that children's views are not respected by teachers and school administrators. The school system did not encourage children to express their opinion and participate in making decision processes. The children also felt that they were controlled by the adults. They said that they felt unable to express themselves as individuals due to the school's strict policies, especially due to the uniform policy (Cairns et al., 2018). This type of education system might lead to producing blindly obedient citizens who are ineffective in the society, which could lead to the fact that implementing the right to participation is necessary for the production of an effective citizen.

In Saudi Arabia, Alhelaly (2008) found that religious studies teachers do not allow children to freely express themselves. Alhelaly's study (2008) focused on religious studies teachers, but there is a need to investigate the implementation of this right by other teachers at school, regardless of their area. In contrast, children's right to freedom of expression was implemented well in New Zealand's educational system in all levels (Powell & Smith, 2009).

The previous studies show that in most countries, children have not been able to enjoy their right to participation, even though there are differences between these countries in culture, policies, systems, and development. The failure to fully and consistently implement this right implies that there are issues with translating the UNCRC from an international law to national level laws.

•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).

According to Imoh (2016), physical punishment against children is the most common type of child abuse worldwide. Rathore, Raj, Mandal, Meher and Girhotra (2006), while researching child abuse in India, found that every child in their study had experienced abuse of some kind. Agbenyega (2006) and Imoh (2013) also found that physical punishment is still commonly practised in Ghana. Maboe (2013) found that, although the corporal punishment is forbidden at school, it is still practised at school in South Africa on the hand of teachers. Maboe found also the verbal abuse, sexual relationships with female students, failure to attend classes by teachers and discrimination between children as other breaches for children's rights at school.

Corporal punishment was also the most common violent practice against South Korean and Afghani children, as found by Ju and Lee (2010) and O'Leary et al. (2018) respectively. Almahroos (2007) found that children living in the Arabian Peninsula experience every form of abuse and neglect and Alanazi (2008) confirmed that physical punishment is especially common in Saudi Arabia. Alghamdi, Horaib and Aldossari (2018) found that emotional abuse often accompanies physical abuse and is, overall, the most common form of violence against children in Saudi Arabia. These divergent results likely emerged because Alanazi's study (2008) focused on corporal punishment and physical abuse, while Alghamdi, Horaib and Aldossari's study (2018) looked at child abuse in general.

Aleissa et al. (2015) found that emotional abuse was the most common type of child abuse in Saudi Arabia, followed by physical abuse, exposure to violence, neglect and sexual abuse. The differences between the findings of these studies may be due to the different locations of their study; Alanazi (2008) and Alghamdi et al. (2018) conducted their research in Riyadh, while Aleissa et al. (2015) conducted their research in Kharj. The previous studies confirmed that corporal punishment is still practiced worldwide against children and is inflicted by adults both at home and school.

Gender differences appear in two studies. Lee and Kim (2011), in their study on child abuse in South Korea, found that boys typically reported experiencing physical abuse, while girls typically reported experiencing sexual and emotional

abuse. In Canada, Trocme, Tourigny, MacLaurin and Fallon (2003) found that neglect was the most common form of child abuse, followed by physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. Boys were more likely to be victims of neglect and physical abuse, while girls were more likely to be victims of sexual abuse. Despite substantial differences between the Canadian and South Korean contexts, these findings were similar, which could be the result of the similar ways that the genders are treated in different societies. Most of the research found that parents were the group most likely to abuse children in Ghana (Imoh, 2013), Afghanistan (O'Leary et al., 2018), Saudi Arabia (Alanazi, 2008) and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole (Almahroos, 2007). Ju and Lee (2010) found that, in Korea, however, most child abusers were parents who were poor or who had problems with alcohol. In India (Rathore et al., 2006) and Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati (Smith & Haslett, 2017) teachers were the most likely group of people to abuse children. The differences between studies in determining the most likely groups of people to abuse children might be a result of the study aims. For instance, in the case of Smith and Haslett's study (2017), along with the study of Rathore et al., (2006) the focus was on child abuse at school. Agbenyega (2006) studied the use of corporal punishment at Ghanaian schools and found that it is not legally prohibited and is still practised by educators. The review of the literature regarding child abuse at the hands of educators is important for the purpose of my study, as I aim to focus on exploring how children's rights are implemented in Saudi primary education.

Children's peers were also found to be abusive to others. In this regard, Lee and Kim's study (2011) in Korea found that, in most cases, many abusers are not family members. Some abusers could be the children's own peers. The differences between Ju and Lee's (2010) and Lee and Kim's (2011) studies may be due to the differences between the samples. Ju and Lee's (2010) research dealt with children between nine and 12 years old who lived in protective care; most of these children lived in these homes because they had been physically abused by their families. In contrast, Lee and Kim's (2011) sample consisted of people between 19 and 24 years old who were willing to talk about being mistreated during childhood. Smith and Haslett (2017) also found that many children were bullied and physically abused by their peers.

The findings of Alghamdi et al.'s study (2018) in Saudi Arabia conflicts with Alanazi's (2008) findings. Alanazi found that parents were most likely to be the abusers, while Alghamdi et al. (2018) found that parents were the least likely to be the abusers (following strangers, drivers and home servants). This disparity could be the result of the time lapse between the studies. Many things, including the easy availability of home servants and drivers, changed during that decade.

A society's culture and beliefs might support the use of violence against children. Alghamdi et al. (2018) found that child abuse in Saudi Arabia was influenced by religion and explained that the physical punishment of children is supported by Islamic teachings. Almuneef et al. (2012) argued, however, that the physical punishment of children is not the result of Islamic teachings, but the result of misinterpretations of Islamic teachings by the society.

The perception of abuse as a way to discipline children has caused this practice to be accepted. Han (2011) found that seeking to discipline children leads to the use of corporal punishment with them. According to Han (2011), children of minorities and children with disabilities are often seen as aggressive children, whose need to be controlled. Therefore, Han mentioned that in the United States, the use of corporal punishment was often found in the schools which have a large number of those two groups of children.

O'Leary et al. (2018) found that parents in Afghanistan do not believe that violent punishment is abusive. They view it as a means to discipline children instead, even though many of their practices are cruel and include things such as slapping a child's face. Even though many parents believe that violence as a disciplinary measure is not more effective than non-violent strategies, violent punishment continues to be practised. This contradiction may be due to cultural beliefs, such as the belief that children are their parents' property. In addition, O'Leary et al. found that parents' education levels influence whether or not they physically punish their children, as educated parents physically punish their children less than less-educated parents.

Cappa and Khan (2011) studied 34 low- and middle-income countries. They found that parents and caregivers believed that physical punishment is necessary to discipline children in just two countries (Syria and Sierra Leone). They also reported that parents' education levels influenced whether they believe physical punishment is acceptable. In every country, however, there were contradictions between attitudes and practices; even if the parents did not believe that violent punishment was an effective disciplinary measure, they would have still used it. According to Cappa and Khan, this could be because the parents/caregivers are following social norms, unconsciously believing that violent punishment is necessary for discipline, or because they do not know of any other ways to discipline their children.

In Saudi Arabia, Alanazi (2008) found that the parents' education levels do not affect their attitudes about the use of violence as a disciplinary measure. There is, however, a direct relation between the parents' experiences with violence during their childhoods and their use of violent punishment later in life (Alanazi, 2008). Alanazi also found that many parents do not want to legally prohibit this practice because they believe that a law would unjustifiably interfere with their parental responsibilities. Almahroos (2007) confirmed that violent punishment is accepted throughout the Ara-

bian Peninsula, including Saudi Arabia, under the guise of discipline and, though there are laws that prohibit child abuse in these countries, parents are often not investigated even if they seriously injure their children. This immunity is due to the fact that a parent's rights are prioritised over a child's rights.

In Ghana, Agbenyega (2006) and Imoh (2013) found that violent punishment was the result of cultural beliefs, particularly regarding the importance of this practice for socialising children. Agbenyega (2006) added that this behaviour is a misuse of a parent's power. Since violent punishment is a consequence of the culture, and because children are products of their culture, the children themselves also frequently believe that violent punishment is an appropriate means for discipline and education, however (Imoh, 2013).

Children appear to accept this kind of abuse, not only in Ghana, but also in Korea (Ju & Lee, 2010). Ju and Lee found that abused children often feel guilty because they believe that their punishment is a normal reaction to their misbehaviour. Children often also believe that the abuse is the result of their family's misfortunes, and that they should accept it because they believe it to be a result of their family facing difficult circumstances. Smith and Haslett (2017) addressed how adults' psychological stresses affect how they treat their children. They found, additionally, that children and educators in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati supported the use of physical punishment by teachers and saw it as a part of the education and disciplinary processes. Choi (2017) found that the use of the corporal punishments in the name of discipline in Korea does not control the children's behaviour. Choi said that the use of this practice leads to more misbehaviour by children, which in turn leads to more use of corporal punishments by educators against children. It leads to the cycle of violence in schools.

In addition to physical injury to the abused child—which might be much more severe than expected, as physical abuse has caused brain death (Almahroos, 2007). Almuneef et al. (2012) found that abuse also has short and long term consequences, including depression, low self-esteem, personality disorder diagnosis in adulthood, and educational difficulties. Long-term consequences include the reproduction of violence, as abused children may become abusers in the future. However, statistics in the UK do not support the cycle of abuse across the board and actually they supported that abused children are more likely to be re-victimised than become perpetrators, particularly with sexual abuse (Office for National Statistics, 2016). Glasser et al. (2001) argued that the idea that the abused child is more likely to be violent or perpetrate abuse in future is not true particularly for female victims. They found that males are more likely to become perpetrators than females, especially if their abuser was female. Therefore, the biggest risk is re-victimisation and psychological health issues.

Lee and Kim (2011) found that children who accept the legitimacy of physical punishment by their parents or teachers are more likely to suffer psychological harm. The punishments are frequently greater than the child's ability to psychologically process them, especially if the child is unable to prevent the abuse. One of the most harmful consequences of child abuse is depression. Alghamdi et al. (2018) argued that child abuse often leads to the development of psychiatric illnesses and other issues which might affect a child's educational performance. This is supported by Smith and Haslett (2017), who wrote that, in addition to physical harm, child abuse leads to increased rates of school dropout.

When children are being abused, their situation should be reported to the authorities. Aleissa et al. (2015) found that issues were more likely to be reported if the victim suffered severe injuries that required medical intervention; however, many less severe issues remained hidden. Underreporting child's maltreatment is akin to punishing the victim rather than the abuser (Almahroos, 2007). Albuhairan, Inam, Aleissa, Noor and Almuneef (2011) found that most Saudi teachers do not report suspected child abuse and neglect to the authorities because they want to protect their relationship with the child's family, even if a family member is the abuser. This finding suggests that maintaining relationships takes priority over a child's safety. Albuhairan et al. (2011) also found that, in Saudi Arabia, there are no clear guidelines available to schools that dictate how they should report cases of abuse and protect children from maltreatment. The child's gender and the kind of abuse affect whether or not educators report mistreatment. This is because Saudi society believes that sexual abuse should be kept secret, especially if the abused child is a girl.

NFSP (2011) found that, due to this tendency, the number of reported cases of child maltreatment in Saudi Arabia is less than the actual number of cases. Alsaif et al. (2017) argued that Saudi Arabia's cultural norms affect teachers' attitudes when it comes to reporting sexual abuse. They often choose not to report cases of sexual abuse because they believe that they will embarrass the victim, and because they feel especially guilty for girls, since the stigma of sexual abuse would stay with them throughout their lives. Islam forbids premarital sexual relationships, and sexual abuse victims often feel guilty. Cases of abuse may also be unreported because people are generally unaware that there are organisations that can help deal with these cases (Alghamdi, Horaib & Aldossari, 2018; NFSP, 2011).

The review of the literature showed that the child's protection rights are being violated in many countries around the world despite the fact that there are differences between countries, both in their culture and values, and that physical punishment is still being practised even where it is legally prohibited. The survival of these practices is due to the strength of the social belief that physical punishment is necessary in order to discipline and socialise children. Many studies have found that children face

physical punishment in schools, which is beyond the scope of this study. This study aims to go into detail about the implementation of the protection rights of children in Saudi primary education and whether the situation of Saudi Arabia is similar to other countries mentioned in the previous literature review.

• **METHODOLOGY**

since I desired in-depth information about the phenomenon I was researching and to balance the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative methods, I adopted a mixed-methods combination - using interviews, a questionnaire and focus groups. These methods enabled me to obtain a deep exploration and understanding of the UNCRC implementation in Saudi Arabian primary education.

The questionnaire was chosen to gather data from the teachers because this method is not conducted in a face-to-face setting, so it is useful for reaching a large number of people and collecting a large amount of data (Wellington, 2000). Because teachers interact the most with children and are responsible for their learning and development, I aimed to obtain information from a high number of participants (regardless of their gender), and the questionnaire helped me achieve this goal.

The focus group method was used to gather data from the teachers and the children. Because children have the right to make their voices heard and their views respected, they were part of the sample, and the focus group was used to enable their participation and to gather data from them. The focus group was chosen because of its advantages: it tends to provide a comfortable environment for participants because they feel safer and more secure when they are with others, especially when a focus group involves children, teenagers or teachers (Wellington, 2015).

• **Study Location**

My study was conducted in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, because Riyadh includes a high diversity of cultures. It contains the country's important governmental departments, more than five universities, and a high number of companies and private institutions, which provide multiple career opportunities that increase the number and diversity of its population.

As my 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. I chose this population because these people know the most about the current situation regarding children's rights within education. I 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.

Table `: *Participants in my research*

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

- **Research methods**

- **Interviews.**

The interviews were a qualitative method used in my research to collect data from primary education principals. Hammond and Wellington (2013) defined the interview as ‘a conversation between the researcher and those being researched, variously termed participants, subjects or simply ‘interviewees’ (p. 91). The most important feature of using interviews as a research method is that they allow the researcher to explore and prompt some areas that other methods cannot reach, such as the interviewees’ feelings, thoughts, perspectives and values, which other methods could not investigate (Hammond & Wellington, 2013; Wellington, 2015).

- **Interview construction.**

The interviews were used to explore the implementation of children’s rights in primary education in Saudi Arabian primary education from the principals’ perspectives. The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting.

The interview questions contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions usually need a specific answer. For example, the answer to ‘Have you heard about the UNCRC before?’ must be either ‘yes’ or ‘no’. In contrast, open-ended questions require more information, which may lead to more unprepared questions that emerge from the interviewee’s answers.

After preparing the interview questions, I sent them to my supervisor to get her advice on them. Based on her suggestions, I improved them and established an original set of questions to take into the interviews. Then, because the participants were all Arabic speakers, I translated the questions into the Arabic language.

- **Questionnaire.**

The questionnaire I used in my research targeted primary education teachers (both males and females). I decided to include males in this stage of my research because it was comparatively easy to get in touch with male teachers via the questionnaire because it was administered online, which allowed access to anyone, regardless of gender.

The questionnaire was used to explore the primary school teachers' 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 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). According to Wellington (2015), a questionnaire should begin with the closed-ended questions, leaving the open-ended questions for the end. This is the design I adopted for my questionnaire.

Electronic resources were used to distribute the questionnaire to teachers. Wellington (2015) clarified the advantages of using electronic networks, as they make distributing and collecting questionnaires easier and quicker. This was done through the Survs.com website. Consequently, the website page of the questionnaire was visited by 1074 people but there were only 635 submitted questionnaires. The questionnaire was answered by 635 teachers—421 females and 214 males. I developed the questions myself after extensively reviewing the related literature.

- **Focus group**

A focus group is an interview with small groups, which may each contain two or more participants, to discuss a topic provided by the researcher (Berg, 2001; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Focus groups were used in my study to gather the information I needed from children and teachers.

The focus groups with children were conducted after interviewing the principals and despatching the questionnaire for teachers. After choosing the focus group as a suitable method for my research, I planned and organised it while considering the related research.

First, I designed the main questions to be answered and added related sub-questions to encourage the children to talk. Also, to plumb the children's thoughts, I used some visual methods—such as stories and videos—to prompt the children's ideas, experiences and opinions. I searched YouTube for a video about children's rights that fit my research questions and was suitable for children to watch. I chose a video,

published by the Childhood Department at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University; as I am a lecturer there, it was not complicated to obtain permission from the video publisher to use this video in my research. The video, recorded in Arabic and titled 'It is of my right', featured a little child talking about children's rights and providing information about the UNCRC. I also visited the Human Rights Organisation in Riyadh and asked them, for the purpose of my research, to provide me with some books they had published for children regarding children's rights. They provided me with many books and stories, two of which I chose to use in the children's focus groups. The first book was entitled *Children's Rights*, and it contained a list of rights along with some pictures to be coloured.

The focus group scenario was first written in English. Then, after discussing it with my supervisor and improving it, I translated it into Arabic. To ensure the clarity of the focus group scenario, I tested it by implementing a discussion of some of its issues with my family members who work in the education system.

- **Ensuring Trustworthiness**

Quantitative research uses data validity and reliability to evaluate the study, but qualitative research evaluates the study through transferability and credibility concepts. Since I applied a mixed-methods approach, I used Guba's (1985) construction, which corresponds to the criteria applied to both qualitative and quantitative studies. 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 my study, I have adhered to the following procedures.

In the first procedure, I 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 my 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). I explained this to my participants in the information sheets and at the beginning of the interviews and focus groups. If they did not wish to provide honest answers, they could hence refuse to participate.

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. I discussed with her each step of my research, the methods I 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. I presented part of my findings at a conference and received feedback from experts and academic researchers in the education field. I am 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.

• Results of the Research:

– Teachers' Perspectives on the Implementation of the UNCRC in Primary Education

This dimension contains 20 points related to the UNCRC's articles, which concern the school's responsibility to help its children to enjoy their rights. Participants' responses on this dimension are provided in Table 2, followed by a comparison of their ratings.

Table 2: Teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the UNCRC in primary schools in Saudi Arabia

| No. | Items | | Agree | Have no idea | Do not agree |
|-----|---|---|-------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Primary education is free for all children in Saudi Arabia. | F | 576 | 26 | 33 |
| | | % | 90.7 | 4.1 | 5.2 |
| 2 | The use of physical or emotional punishment is prohibited in schools. | F | 514 | 24 | 97 |
| | | % | 80.9 | 3.8 | 15.3 |
| 3 | School staff respect all children, regardless of their ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds. | F | 487 | 49 | 99 |
| | | % | 76.7 | 7.7 | 15.6 |
| 4 | Students' problems are resolved carefully and privately by the school staff. | F | 475 | 66 | 94 |
| | | % | 74.8 | 10.4 | 14.8 |
| 5 | All children have the freedom of expression in school, | F | 422 | 65 | 148 |

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| No. | Items | | Agree | Have no idea | Do not agree |
|------------|--|---|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | where all students are given the opportunity to speak and express their views and feelings and are listened to with open arms. | % | 66.5 | 10.2 | 23.3 |
| 6 | The school, or one of its staff, reports to the authorities about any case of violence, neglect, or exploitation to which a child is exposed as soon as it is noticed, even if the violator is one of the child's parents. | F | 416 | 113 | 106 |
| | | % | 65.5 | 17.8 | 16.7 |
| 7 | Adequate legislation and sentences exist to protect children's rights and punish violators in Saudi Arabia. | F | 379 | 143 | 113 |
| | | % | 59.7 | 22.5 | 17.8 |
| 8 | The school works to improve children's awareness about their rights. | F | 379 | 85 | 171 |
| | | % | 59.7 | 13.4 | 26.9 |
| | | % | | | |
| 9 | There is a law in Saudi Arabia that includes penalties for parents if their children are absent from school without an acceptable excuse. | F | 115 | 175 | 345 |
| | | % | 18.1 | 27.6 | 54.3 |
| 10 | Students receive high-quality health care at their schools. | F | 332 | 69 | 234 |
| | | % | 52.3 | 10.9 | 36.9 |
| 11 | There is an appropriate place for students to enjoy their free time safely at school. | F | 323 | 45 | 267 |
| | | % | 50.9 | 7.1 | 42 |
| 12 | A copy of the UNCRC has been dispatched to primary schools in Saudi Arabia. | F | 109 | 312 | 214 |
| | | % | 17.2 | 49.1 | 33.7 |
| 13 | The school provides its students with the necessary knowledge about hotline 116111. | F | 310 | 125 | 200 |
| | | % | 48.8 | 19.7 | 31.5 |
| 14 | There are many organisations that protect children and their rights in Saudi Arabia. | F | 307 | 224 | 104 |
| | | % | 48.3 | 35.3 | 16.4 |
| 15 | The Child Protection Law has been dispatched to primary schools, and the educators know about it. | F | 271 | 230 | 134 |
| | | % | 42.7 | 36.2 | 21.1 |

| No. | Items | | Agree | Have no idea | Do not agree |
|-----|---|---|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 16 | The media contributes well to publicising and educating people about the UNCRC. | F | 213 | 163 | 259 |
| | | % | 33.5 | 25.7 | 40.8 |
| 17 | The schools and children's rights organisations work together to implement the UNCRC. | F | 185 | 250 | 200 |
| | | % | 29.1 | 39.4 | 31.5 |
| 18 | There is an annual monitoring and evaluating of the schools to examine how well the UNCRC has been implemented by the MoE or the children rights organisations. | F | 176 | 242 | 217 |
| | | % | 27.7 | 38.1 | 34.2 |
| 19 | There are periodic circulars for educators related to children's rights. | F | 234 | 192 | 209 |
| | | % | 36.9 | 30.2 | 32.9 |
| 20 | My school works hard to implement and protect children's rights. | F | 194 | 225 | 216 |
| | | % | 30.6 | 35.4 | 34 |

According to Table 3, respondents agreed with 16 items, did not agree with two items, and have no idea about four items. These items will be explained in the following order: items teachers agreed with, items teachers did not agree with, and finally, items that most of the teachers have no idea about.

Based on Table 3, it appears that the child's right to primary education, which should be free, is applied in primary education in Saudi Arabia, according to the participants' perspectives. This item was agreed with by 90.7% of the teachers, which is the highest percentage in this dimension.

To protect children, the use of any kind of violence or abuse or cruel punishments, either physical or emotional, are prohibited at school. For this item, 80.9% of the teachers stated that they agreed. This is related to what four of the principals mentioned before, that there is a directive from the MoE that prohibits the violence against children at school.

Directly after these was the item stating that school staff respect all children, regardless of their ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds. It was agreed with by

76.7% of the teachers. This means there is no discrimination between children at school from the participants' perspectives.

After that, teachers' responses placed the item 'students' problems are resolved carefully and privately by the school staff in the fourth position. This item was agreed with by 74.8% of the teachers, which relates to the finding from the principals' interviews that children's problems are heard and solved by the student advisor. Also, in the principals' interviews, they mentioned that they did their best to help students with their problems by themselves.

There is also freedom of expression in school; many principals mentioned before that they open their doors to their students. If students have any complaints, opinions, or views, they can therefore feel free to talk to their principals at any time. This relates to the item 'all children have freedom of expression in school, where all children are given the opportunity to speak and express their views and feelings', which came next. This item was agreed with by 66.5% of the respondents, which means a high number of teachers agreed that this item is applied in primary schools in Saudi Arabia. The item concerning reporting the violence, neglect, or exploitation issues that children might face in school to the authorities was agreed with by 65.5% of the teachers. That means they confirmed the implementation of this point, which is part of the children's right to be protected from any kind of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They agreed with principals in this regard, who confirmed that if they could not solve the child's issue by contacting the parents, they reported the issue to the Education Office of Guidance, a human rights organisation, or the Child Helping Hotline to get their advice to solve the issue.

In the seventh place came the item 'adequate legislation and sentences exist to protect children's rights and punish violators in Saudi Arabia'. 59.7% of the teachers agreed with this item.

The item about schools' efforts to improve their students' awareness of children's rights came next, with the same percentage (59.7%). This is related to the principals' answers about their efforts to increase their pupils' awareness relating to children's rights, such as what the principals said about designing a complete and diverse program to increase children's knowledge of the Child Helping Hotline, organising a program to educate students about child abuse, and posting videos on the school's YouTube account to increase children's awareness of their rights.

There were 52.3% of the teachers who agreed that students received high-quality health services at school. They agreed with the view of one of the principals, who mentioned that students receive health services at schools.

Almost half of the teachers (50.9%) agreed that there were appropriate places for students to enjoy their free time at school, while 42% did not agree.

Regarding the Child Helping Hotline, 48.8% of the teachers agreed that the school provides its students with the necessary knowledge about the hotline (116111), which is used to receive reports on cases of violence against children, while 31.5% did not agree with this item. This correlates with what four of the five principals said regarding informing students and increasing their knowledge of this hotline and its importance, aims, and uses.

Very closely and directly after that came the item about child protection organisations in Saudi Arabia; 48.3% of the teachers agreed that there are many agencies and organisations that protect children and their rights in Saudi Arabia. However, 35.3% of the responses rated this item as 'have no idea', which corresponds to the answers of four of the principals, who mentioned before that they did not know about children's rights organisations.

The item about the dispatching of the 'Child Protection Law', to primary schools in Saudi Arabia was rated as 'agree' by 42.7% of the teachers. This corresponds with one of the five principals, who confirmed that this law had been dispatched to schools.

Then came the item 'There are periodic circulations for educators related to children's rights'. This item was agreed by 36.9% of the teachers, while 32.9% did not agree with it. This is related to the principals' views that were mentioned before, that there are some directives concerning children's rights in schools, such as the prohibiting of hurting students and others.

These were the items that participants agreed with, but there were some items that the participants did not agree with. The first is the item about a law in Saudi Arabia that includes penalties for parents if their children are absent from school without an acceptable excuse. Of the teachers, 54.3% did not agree, which means they confirmed that parents are not accountable if their children do not attend their school for no acceptable reason.

The second item that teachers did not agree with is the item stating that the media contributes to improve people's awareness about the UNCRC. There were 40.8% of teachers who did not agree with that statement, while 33.5% agreed with it. This is related to what Mrs. Sara, one of the principals, said in her interview, that the media does not help to improve people's awareness about the UNCRC.

Four items were rated as 'have no idea' by the respondents. The item that got the highest percentage of 'have no idea' responses was the item stating that a copy of the UNCRC has been dispatched to primary schools in Saudi Arabia. For this item, 49.1% of teachers responded, 'I do not know'. 33.7% agreed with principals that schools did not receive anything about the UNCRC, however, including a copy of it.

In addition, 39.4% of the teachers did not know if there was any cooperation between children's rights organisations and schools to implement the UNCRC. This was supported by the principals, as they proved that there was no cooperation between schools and those organisations.

The annual monitoring and evaluation processes that the official authorities should conduct at schools came in next. The principals had already confirmed that the children's rights organisations do not visit schools or take any action related to these processes. This item was answered 'have no idea' by 38.1% of the teachers, while 34.2% of the teachers agreed with it.

The last item is 'my school works hard to implement and protect children's rights. 35.4% of the teachers did not know if that happened at their schools. Furthermore, 34% of the teachers did not agree with this.

- The Children's Perspectives About the Implementation of the UNCRC in Primary Education In the focus groups with children, they talked about their experiences relating to their rights in their schools, which revealed many issues with regards the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education.
- Children suffer from teachers' cruelty.

First of all, Deem believed that their rights are not implemented in their schools. She said: *My school does not apply the UNCRC and the ways that teachers use to deal with us prove this.*

Children believe that their rights are not implemented at their schools because teachers treat them poorly. They confirmed that some teachers treat children badly by shouting at them, using bad words, and hitting the students. It has been noted that 82.2% of teachers in the questionnaire agreed that no one was allowed to punish children in cruel or harmful ways, 80.9% of the teachers agreed that physical and emotional punishments are prohibited in schools, and the principal confirmed that a directive had been circulated prohibiting these kinds of practices in school. However, principals confirmed in their interviews that teachers violated children's rights by using cruel ways to deal with children. The evidence from the children proved that teachers violated children's rights. In this regard, Halah said: *Some teachers yell at us in front of others so that it embarrasses us and some of them take us out of class to stand next to the class door as a kind of punishment so everyone can see that we are being punished.*

This confirmed that children suffer from the ways that teachers use to punish them. Six more of the children complained that teachers yelled at them loudly.

It is not only about teachers behaving cruelly towards children, but also the results of this cruelty. There are emotional and psychological effects from teachers dealing harshly with children. As Halah mentioned, for example, these behaviours

embarrassed them in front of their friends and others in the school. Mrs Sara (one of the principal sample) agreed, as she said that punishing children in front of others affects them badly. This raises the question of whether children need love and care instead of this type of harsh punishment. Jury said: *I am afraid of my teacher when she yells at my classmates.*

This comment suggests that schools are not always a safe place for children; school might be a scary place if the educators are harsh with them.

Using physical punishment was also confirmed by 16 children during the focus groups. Students reported that some teachers had hit them and the same teacher was mentioned by many students from different grades in relation to hitting students.

Hend said: *One of my teachers noticed me talking to my friend at her class then the teacher brushed my desk, hit me on my shoulder, and punished me by standing at the back of the class.*

Nada also said: *There was a child in my class wrote a wrong answer on the white board then the teacher slapped her. It was scary.*

This action does not just affect the child who was punished, but also other children who then feel scared in class.

▪The culture of power.

Some children tried to make an excuse for their teachers in terms of them having the right to physically punish their students. Banah said:

Teachers just punish the students who did not do their homework and sometimes they hit them for this reason.

Also, Yara said: *When the teacher hits a student because the student made a mistake, it does not mean the teacher is tough.*

The previous quotes reveal a culture of power in which the person who has the power has the right to do whatever he or she wants. This culture begins at home, as some children reported that they faced violence at home at the hands of their parents, which children accepted as a way to teach them. Nada said: *Parents hit us to teach us and to help us to learn from our mistakes.*

This confirmed what was mentioned previously by the principals and teachers, that Saudi society believes that children belong to their parents and children themselves also believe in that. Children learn to subject themselves to the most powerful person in the home and excuse parental violence towards their children. Because this culture extends to schools, the students also accept violence from their teachers as teachers have power over them.

The use of power by teachers over children could be also seen as disrespecting the class and the children's time. For example, Rawan reported how one teacher used her phone during class instead of teaching children:

One of our teachers used her phone in class. She browsed Snapchat and watched the snaps of others. Once, our classmate made a mistake while she was reading but the teacher did not notice because she was busy with her phone. We told her the student had made a mistake.

This is a neglect of duty by the teacher and if the teacher does not understand her duties she will not uphold hers and others' rights. It is neglect of children, responsibilities, and the educational process.

▪ **Children do not complain.**

Students feared objecting to violations of their rights. The bad experience following Saja's complaint taught children to be silent: *I complained about the teacher who hit me on the head with a book because I did not know the answer to a question. I talked to the principal, but unfortunately, the teacher came to the class and shouted at me because I had complained about her behaviour with us.*

Children will not complain about educators at school because of the fear that their complaint will reach the person about whom they complained, as Ayah reported: *Sometimes when we complain about the school staff, the educator who listens to our complaint will be angry towards us. Also, the listener might tell the person who is being complained about.*

This could stop students from asking for their rights to be upheld. They will accept cruel punishments to avoid worse, based on their fear of adults, as noted by Solaf: *We are afraid of complaining about the educators at school. They will know and punish us because of our complaints.*

Maya agreed with Solaf and confirmed that she prefers to ignore the teachers' violence towards her because she is afraid to complain.

Furthermore, friendships between school staff stopped children from reporting the violence that they faced because there is no balance between personal relationships and children's protection and privacy at school. If there was a balance between these matters, the students might feel more confident to talk about their concerns knowing their privacy would be upheld. Lura said: *We could not tell the student advisor about our teacher and her behaviour in class because they are friends and the principal does not listen to our problems. The principal usually says 'this is the student advisor's responsibility, go to her'.*

This confirmed what the principals mentioned before about the student advisor's responsibility to listen and resolve children's issues. If approaching the student advisor will further complicate the issue for children, however, then this raises a question about who can help students in school if the student advisor cannot.

▪No action to solve children's issues.

Principals mentioned before that their doors are open for students to listen to their problems. Listening to the students is not enough if there is no action, however, as Rama's quote confirmed: *I have complained to the principal about one of my teachers but she did not do anything.*

The absence of a reaction from the principal meant that she does not listen to the children. Ignoring children appeared in the conversations with the children, although the principals themselves stated that they listened to and solved children's issues at their schools.

Furthermore, the children said that principals stopped children from talking about their problems with teachers as they believe that it is not polite to complain about educators. Budoor said: *I have complained about a teacher who took our lunch time as a part of her class time which affected us because we could not eat our lunch. When we told the principal, she said this is rude, you should respect your teacher and do not complain about her.*

This could be seen as a violation of students' time. The teacher does not respect the students, their time, and their need to eat. Furthermore, the principal asked children to respect the teacher, but she did not defend the children and their rights. This further exemplifies the culture of subjection and silence, which is in contrast with the freedom of speech and opinions that is promoted within the culture of children's rights. As Ghala confirmed: *If I complain about the educators, they will say that I am a troublemaker.*

It was apparent that the children had learnt the culture of silence and rationalised violence against them as a normal thing that they should accept.

▪Fear of adults.

Fear of adults extended not just to educators, but also other workers at school that children dealt with daily. Children mentioned the school guard, for example, who stands outside of the school near the gate to protect it. Haya, Reef, and Tala confirmed that the school security guard yells at them and uses bad words. Also, Tala reported that he hit children: *The school security guard hit me once on my hand with a wooden stick. It hurts.*

Moreover, children also complained about the school bus driver being abusive toward them. Halah said: *The school bus driver is usually annoying us. He is rude and dreadful. Once he said to me you are beautiful look at me, but I ran away.*

Ghala said: *When the bus stopped at the traffic lights, the driver turned his face to us and said with a hard look, 'You are beautiful'.*

These words proved that the girls were afraid of the school bus driver and they considered his compliments a kind of abuse. Children are clever and they can differentiate between compliments and rudeness or abuse.

Children mentioned that they tried to report the driver's behaviour towards them, but no one listened. Halah said: *I went to the teacher who is responsible for the bus and complained about the bus driver's behaviour but she said, 'I have nothing to do'. I talked to my friend to complain as a group about the driver but again the teacher said she could not talk to him so there is nothing to be done. We were crying and asking her to help but nothing happened.*

The previous quote confirmed that no one listens to students in school. There was no one to help children and solve their issues with the bus driver. They might not take children's fear seriously and leave children to face their fears by themselves with no help, even though the principals mentioned that there is a teacher who is responsible for the school bus and the children can use them for protection and safety. The children believed that this was not enough, however, as Ayah mentioned: *The teacher just stands near the school gate to observe the students in the queue and make sure that students line up in a queue to get on the bus. But there is no one to oversee the students while on their way from the school in the bus.*

Children wanted protection from strange men such as bus drivers by having an adult woman with them on the bus. They asked for their right to protection, as Ghala said: *We asked our principal to have a teacher who will accompany us on the bus, but she said, 'I cannot afford that'. It is the MoE's job to pay for this worker in schools.*

This response from the principal puts the responsibility of child protection on others. Children talked about their problem and gave a solution, but they were neglected and the principal did not care about their opinion; likewise their safety.

▪ **Bullying at school.**

The fear of bullies is problematic at schools. The children's responses indicated that they need to be protected from bullying. 12 of the children confirmed that there are children who yell at others and hit them. They also said that those children cause trouble in school by pouring water on students' books, stealing from others, and

writing bad words on the walls and desks. Children also mentioned the reasons for bullying in school, as appeared in Mashal's quotes:

Bullying at school happens because some students are more popular than others so they feel special.

Najd added: *They act as if they are the leaders and they want to control us by being bullies.* The previous quotes show that a child's popularity at school can lead to bullying.

Children also confirmed that the schools do not take any action to protect them from bullying. Raghad said: *I complained to our students' advisor about the students who hit me many times, but she did not do anything about my complaints. I decided to defend myself and hit them back. There was fighting between me and them, then the students' advisor punished me with them. I told her it was too late to intervene, I told you many times about them but you took no action.*

Again, as mentioned previously, students were left to face their fears alone and no one listened to them. In addition, student' complaints were not listened to. The fear of adults with power over children affected children's safety at school; as mentioned before, students' safety at school is affected by educators as well as staff such as the school bus driver, school security guard, and bullying students.

▪No freedom of expression.

The children felt that freedom of expression was absent in schools. Although 66.5% of teachers in the questionnaire agreed that children had freedom of expression with regard to respecting their opinions and views, children did not agree with that, as mentioned by Maya:

We cannot tell our opinion to our teachers because they do not ask us about our opinion at all.

Lana added: *We are afraid of telling teachers or workers at school our views and opinions.*

These comments reinforced the fear of adults. Abrar clarified this fear when she said: *If we ask the teacher about something we did not understand, she says you did not understand because you are stupid.*

If children could not even ask about more clarification of the information teachers gave to them, how could they express their opinions?

Raghad added that they do not learn to express their views at home, which affects their ability to practice this right. She said: *I do not express my feelings or tell my views or opinions to my mother because I know she will not listen to me or at least take them into account.*

▪No freedom of choice.

Children also confirmed that freedom of choice is absent in school, which diverged from the principals' perspectives. For example, there is a student leaders' group in each school, but students confirmed that those leaders are chosen by the teachers, as noted by Jury: *There are some conditions to be a student leader. Those leaders must be from the sixth grade and the teachers decide who can be a student leader.*

Teachers rather than students, therefore, controlled who could be accepted as a leader. As mentioned by the children, however, the student leaders' responsibilities are just to control the children at the school and observe them. That means those leaders do not represent children or get their voices heard by the educators at school.

Furthermore, children mentioned that there are some extracurricular activities that the school organises for students, but these activities are not chosen by the children. Although these activities are a kind of implementation of the UNCRC for children to enjoy their time, they are chosen and planned by the educators. Lana said:

In general, the school just informs us about what they decided to do as activities and the dates.

Loura added: *Sometimes they ask us if we want to participate in the activity to record our name as a participant. But we do not choose or suggest what activities we want.*

This confirmed the absence of the freedom of choice at school and the absence of listening to children about the matters that affect them, activities in school being one of these matters.

▪Activities do not achieve their aims.

In each school in Saudi Arabia, there are two hours of activity classes weekly as a part of the education system. These classes aim to improve students' abilities and talents and include a variety of classes such as art, social studies, and language classes. Children confirmed that they can choose the activity class they want, as Nouf said: *In the activity classes, you have the chance to choose the activity you like then attend its class.* Children have the right to choose from these classes but those classes are often just for talking or doing homework, as Jury said: *The activity class is just for talking. We do not do anything in this class.* The aims of these activity classes are thus not achieved.

During times when a teacher is absent and their classes are cancelled, children confirmed that this 'leisure time' is wasted with no benefit to it. Haya said: *If one of our teachers is absent, we stay in our class to do whatever we want, like talking or*

doing homework, but we should be quiet and there will be an alternative teacher to observe us and ensure that we do not disturb others.

From the previous quotes, it could be clearly seen that the activity classes and leisure time were not really what they are assumed to be. They were just for talking and doing homework. Also, there were no real choices, such as choice of activities, for children in school.

Improving children's skills is one of the schools' goals as a right of the child and diction is one of these skills. The school morning assembly that happens every morning in all schools is one of the ways to improve this skill. Children who participate in the school assembly are chosen beforehand by teachers, however. Bana said: *There is a group of students whose organise and participate in the school assembly. This group is determined and chosen by teachers. The school assembly is not for anyone.*

Ghala added: *My friend likes to sing and she dreams of singing in the school assembly. But the school assembly group do not like her so they do not let her participate by singing in the assembly.* The school assembly thus does not help to improve all children's talent, as it is not open to all children. This is a kind of discrimination in school which students accept as normal.

▪ **Discrimination in school.**

Children confirmed that there is discrimination in school and educators do not treat them equally. Najd said, 'There is no equality at school'. Najd, Mashal, Nouf, Ghala, Halah, and Deem mentioned that if the student's mother works at school, if the student is clever, or if the teacher loves the student for no apparent reason, the educators treat the child differently. Abrar added the child's nationality as a reason for inequality:

Last year school organised a trip which was the first and last trip at school. This trip was only for Saudi students. Discrimination between children at school may thus depend on their background.

Students were also aware of discrimination between children outside of school. They mentioned that gender discrimination is widespread at home and in society. Manar and Lamia said that boys and girls are not the same. Areej believed that boys are special. Areej answered my question 'Why do you think that boys are special?' by saying: *I learnt that from what I see around me. I learnt from the people in society. People treat boys differently and they prefer boys to girls.*

'Society' includes parents who teach girls that boys are different and persuade children to accept this discrimination, as Lina said: *I do not care about the discrimination*

between boys and girls. They learnt to accept this discrimination wherever it took place.

Some children felt their rights and the violation of these rights, but if they do not have the right of freedom of expression, it is difficult to see how they could discuss these sensitive issues, especially equality issues.

▪ **Unsuitable environment for children.**

Unsuitable places for children at school is another violation of the UNCRC, for example, unsuitable place for celebrations. Mashal said: *Last year the school celebrated the Saudi national day. When we came to the celebration place, there were no chairs to sit on. So, we sat on the floor and that would have been OK if the floor was clean, but it was not. We sat on the dusty and dirty floor in a small hall with a large number of students. It was hot and we felt like we could not breathe.*

This is an important celebration and children should be able to enjoy this day. If the venue is not suitable and students feel uncomfortable, the celebration is rendered meaningless. This confirmed that children understood the problem and disliked it, but no one listened to them.

Children also mentioned that the toilets at school were not clean. They said that the toilet situation in general at school was 'horrible', as Najla said: *Toilets are not clean. They are not suitable for human use.*

Abrar agreed with Najla and she added: *The toilets are not clean. I think there is no one who cleans it at all. It is not for human use. We could not go to the toilet because of the smell and dirtiness.*

The previous quote shows neglect of the children and their needs, as having no worker responsible for cleaning bathrooms and leaving them dirty is a way of disrespecting children as human beings.

Principals blamed the children for the toilet situation, as mentioned by Halah: *The principal was so angry with us and she talked in the school assembly about the toilets being so dirty and the students being responsible for that. Toilets are dirty because there is no one to clean the toilets, not because of us.*

Children again felt the problem and gave the solution, that there should be a worker to observe students in the toilets and keep the toilets clean. Furthermore, Deem said that toilets walls and doors contained some unacceptable drawings and words that had been drawn and written by other students. This is a moral issue for students who are too young to understand those kinds of words and drawings. This would be an unsuitable environment for children under 11 years old.

▪Healthcare.

Regarding the healthcare in schools, there is a health advisor in each school to be responsible for the children's health and take care of children with illnesses, as mentioned by the principals. Children mentioned, however, that the health advisor did not help them if they had a health issue. Najd said:

If we are sick, the health advisor does not do anything. She just asks if you brought your medication to take or gives you a painkiller. If you are sick she will contact your parents.

Students agreed with principals that the health advisors at schools are not really qualified to take on this responsibility. If a student had a life-threatening health issue at school, there would be inadequate support or help.

Finally, it was evident from the children's perspectives that the provision of appropriate environments for children's learning and well-being was absent at school. The appropriate environments for children require feeling loved and cared for in the classroom, that no one hits or threatens them, and no one discriminates between them. The students felt safe if others listened to them, believed them, and respected them. In terms of hygiene, 'safe' meant that students live in a place that respects them and its facilities are suitable for human use and do not adversely affect their health, both physically and morally. All this means appropriate environments for children in the context of the responses in the focus group. The focus group with children confirmed several kinds of violation of UNCRC in primary schools.

▪Implementation of the UNCRC in Primary Education

The discussion of the teachers' perspectives on the implementation of UNCRC in Saudi primary education focuses on the following four: covers school activities, discusses discrimination at school, takes a closer look at freedom of expression, thought, and religion at school, and analyses children's safety at school.

▪School activities.

The activities in which children engage at school are diverse. There are activity classes, which are two hours on a weekly basis, celebrations, and other varied activities. There is also leisure time, which is unsupervised by the class teacher.

Mrs. Reem described the activities classes as follows:

Activity classes consist of groups of students with one or two teachers to manage the groups. Each group engages in a specialised activity, such as arts or cooking. The teacher supervises the activities at school and is responsible for distributing the tasks to each group.

Mrs. Mariam added:

Every week, the activities supervisor determines the work that should be done during the allotted activity time and provides groups with the equipment that they need to complete their assigned tasks. For example, one week she may visit the activity groups' teachers and tells them that the theme of the week's activities should be the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. All the groups are therefore expected to produce work about this subject.

Mrs. Hanan added:

The teachers in each activity group are periodically required to provide the activities supervisor with a file of the completed work.

The activities at school have aims that should be achieved. The themes of the activity classes are predetermined by the MoE and are the same in all Saudi schools, as mentioned by Mrs. Latifah and Mrs. Hanan. The fact that the MoE pre-plans school activities and requires someone to supervise them confirms the Ministry's belief that such activities are important. The teachers agreed that these plans are not implemented, which was also mentioned by the students. Mrs. Sultanah said: *I have worked in three different schools, and the activity plans have never been implemented in any of them.*

Mrs. Mariam said: *There are those who manage the activities' supervisors in the Education Office of Guidance and Supervision, and they are required to visit schools to ensure the implementation of the activities plan. However, some of them do not visit the schools; rather, they just ask the activities' supervisor to send pictures of the work that has been done in activities classes at school—so, some might send fake pictures.*

There is dereliction of duty in following up the implementation of the school activities plan by the schools' teachers and principals, as well as by the Educational Office of Guidance and Supervision.

▪ **Discrimination at school.**

Discrimination against children begins within society, because as mentioned by some of the children, there is inequality between boys and girls in some Saudi families. Mrs.

Latifah agreed with this. She said: *Discrimination against children appears in our society, as some families prefer boys over girls. They justify this preference by stating that the boys retain the family name forever.*

Mrs. Reem agreed with Mrs. Latifa's claim that the discrimination against children appears first in the Saudi society. Mrs. Reem, Mrs. Latifa, and Mrs. Mariam, however,

agreed with the children, who pointed out that there is discrimination against children at school.

Children mentioned that this discrimination might stem from the students' parents or from the students themselves. Mrs. Reem agreed with that and said: *A student might be treated differently because her mother works at the school or in the Educational Office of Guidance and Supervision or because her father is a senior official. Students with likeable personali-ties also might be treated better than students who are less likeable.*

Mrs. Reem affirmed that the position of the child's parents determined the way in which they were treated by the school's employees. Mrs. Mariam also agreed with this.

Mrs. Latifa said that the children themselves influence the ways in which they are treated. She said that smart children tend to be treated better than other children: *I cannot stop myself from liking a student because of her personality. I am inclined to like her because of her good manners and intelligence.*

▪ **Children's freedom of expression, thought, and religion at school.**

Children are not given the right to choose the activities that they feel best meet their needs. That conflicts with the principals' perspectives, who maintained that children have the freedom to choose the activities they want, while the children argued that they do not have such freedom. The children also mentioned that there are student leaders at school who are given the responsibility of supervising other students. The children stated that

these leaders are chosen by teachers and are not elected by students, and the teachers confirmed this. Mrs. Reem said: *The student leaders are chosen by the school's administration or by teachers.*

Children do not choose those who represent them as student leaders; rather, the student leaders are imposed upon them by the school staff. This finding further confirms that children lack freedom of choice at school. Regarding the freedom of expression and speech, the teachers indicated that they listen to children, regardless of whether the children expressed their views, opinions, or even complaints. Mrs. Hanan said: *We are very kind to our students. We talk to them and listen to what they say. Even if they want to complain, we listen to them carefully and with interest.*

The teachers also confirmed that the principals' office doors are open to children, who pass up their student advisor in favour of the principal. Mrs. Latifa said: *The principal in my school opens her doors to students. She talks and listens to the students. They go to her before their advisors because she welcomes them.*

Mrs. Reem and Mrs. Hanan agreed. The children, however, claimed that although the principals listen to them, they take no actions to resolve their problems. It is not

enough for principals to open their doors and listen to children when there is no sincere interest in what children are saying, or when no action is taken in order to address their concerns.

Mrs. Sultana said that such disinterest is rare and that, if the principals ignore the students' complaints, it is because their complaints are not serious or that the students are frequent complainers. By 'not serious' she meant, for example, that if the teacher simply touches the child's shoulder as a warning, the child considers it the same as hitting and complains about it. She thus did not consider threatening children as a kind of violence. This is prohibited in schools. Mrs. Reem agreed with Mrs. Latifa's assertion that principals rarely ignore children's complaints and added: *In general, the child's complaint should be taken seriously and investigated to determine whether or not it is valid. The child might need our help, so we cannot ignore her or any complaints she makes.*

▪Children's safety at school.

The first issue related to children's safety at school pertains to the uncleanliness of the school toilets, which might affect children's health. Children stated that the school toilets are not suitable for use. In this regard Mrs. Sultana said: *I think the uncleanliness of the school facilities is because of the careless way students use them and the students' failure to practise cleanliness.*

Mrs. Reem agreed with Mrs. Sultana about the children's carelessness. They also mentioned that children do not take their rubbish to the bin, but leave it anywhere. Mrs. Reem explained: *Students leave their rubbish behind after using the school facilities. Their leftovers of food, papers, and anything else remain after they have left the place, although rubbish bins are available throughout the school. Unfortunately, children in our society have learned that they can leave their rubbish anywhere, and the maid will clean up after them. Children bring their home cultures with them to school, so it is not easy to change them. We cannot teach them to be responsible. The principles of cleanliness should be learned at home from early childhood.*

Mrs. Reem agreed that it is normal in some cultures to have someone assume another's responsibilities. Children thus grow up with no responsibility, which makes it difficult to teach them about the culture of rights and duties. Mrs. Hanan argued that they are young children and that they could not clean up after themselves even if they tried. Mrs. Mariam agreed:

I agree that little children should learn to be responsible for their use of the facilities and for their cleanliness, but we're talking about primary school students who cannot perfectly clean up after themselves. There should be a worker at school to clean up after them.

Mrs. Reem, Mrs. Latifa, Mrs. Hanan, and Mrs. Sultanah agreed about the importance of providing workers at school for cleaning. Mrs. Reem said:

We need a worker to clean the school toilets daily. There are almost 300 students who use just 10 toilets. These toilets need to be cleaned many times a day. Unfortunately, there is no one to clean them.

The children have confirmed before that there is no one to clean toilets at their schools. There is, however, a janitor at each school, but as Mrs. Sultana mentioned, this person is viewed as an office worker, so she does not clean any of the school's facilities.

Principals have a contract with a cleaning company and pay for its services from the school budget. Some principals have a contract for simple cleaning on a daily basis and a deep clean at the end of the week. Others prefer to have a contract for deep cleaning once a week with no daily cleaning. Mrs. Reem said:

The company that our school has a contract with comes daily to sweep the school with no cleaning solutions or even water. At the end of the week, they used water, with no cleaning solutions, to clean the school.

▪The Study's Limitations

The study's primary limitation is its lack of generalisability. It took place in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, which raises some reservations about the ability to generalise to other locations. The data were collected from five teachers in the focus group and five principals, 36 children, and 635 teachers (male and female) who answered the questionnaire. Furthermore, the sample of schools and principals was chosen by the Education Department in Riyadh which affected the probability of generalisation of the result and its representative of the local area of Riyadh. Since the primary education system is standardised throughout Saudi Arabia, however, it is possible that many of the study's findings could appear in different contexts. Nonetheless, this study provides useful data concerning the implementation of the UNCRC in similar academic systems in analogous cultures.

Another limitation is cultural. The data collection focused on female educators and children, while male educators were included only in the questionnaire responses. Though it would be valuable to examine the differences (if any) in how male and female primary school teachers implemented the UNCRC, I was unable to conduct face-to-face interviews, focus groups, or even phone calls with male teachers due to cultural norms that prevent communication between men and women, which I wanted to respect. Nonetheless, examining how the UNCRC was implemented in girls-only primary schools enabled me to collect valuable data about the state of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia.

The last limitation is that the study focused only on rights related to education, such as the right to spread knowledge about the UNCRC, to freedom of expression, to participate in making decisions, to protection, and to healthcare. It did not, therefore, cover every aspect of the UNCRC. Nonetheless, the study's findings offer valuable insights into the perspectives of educators and children about improving the implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi primary education.

■ Implications of the Findings

My study identified many problems regarding children's rights in primary education that do not have quick and easy solutions. With this research, I am seeking to improve future plans to implement the UNCRC, which should begin with social changes. Since I assume that such changes should be driven primarily by policymakers and secondarily by society, my 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 still rampant in Saudi Arabia. This indicates the necessity of activating this law in society. 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.

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. 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 encour-

aged 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 preservice 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.

Official authorities such as the MoE and human rights organisations could provide Arabic and English copies of the UNCRC in every school. 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.

To sum up, the findings indicate that the change is required but there is no easy solution for the current situation. The findings brought up many questions about these changes such as who is responsible for driving these changes, and how this change will be done. Knowledge about children's rights in Saudi Arabia comes from two different sources that are the Islamic source and the international source, which create a gap between them that needs to be filled, but what the knowledge that is needed to fill this gap and how that could be done needs to be explored further. In accordance with the rapid changes in Saudi Arabia these days and Saudi vision 2030, which includes its goals to provide a high-quality education for every child in Saudi and every Saudi child - wherever he or she is (Vision 2030, n.d.). Therefore, I can say that there is a glimmer of hope that changes will take place in the future.

▪ Recommendations for Further Research

My recommendations for further research are based on the literature on children's rights and the findings of my 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 results 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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