SAUDI CHILDREN’S VIEWS OF LEARNING CENTER ACTIVITIES IN THEIR KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY

by

NAZEEHA SAMIR KHOJA

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate: (1) Saudi kindergarten children’s views of learning center activities in their classroom, and the degree to which the children’s views were reflected in their everyday experiences; and (2) the children’s perceptions of themselves as learners within the classroom environment. This research is grounded in social constructivist theory, in particular, Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory of human development. The site of this qualitative case study was a kindergarten classroom in an urban city in Saudi Arabia; the study used three main data sources: digital photographs taken by the children, photo-elicited interviews, and children’s drawings. Children’s comments on their drawings were a secondary source of data. Participants were six children between the ages of five and six; their participation included taking photographs, discussing their photographs, participating in two drawing tasks, and commenting on their drawings. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method. Categories of analysis were combined across the data, resulting in nine categories representing the questions posed by the researcher and the topics raised by the children. These categories were then collapsed into five themes: preferences for open-ended activities and the outdoor environment; constructing gender identity and learner identity; experimenting with perspectives; negotiating and managing social relationships; and bridging home and school. The photographs taken by the participants showed the different perspectives through which children experiment and play in center time, and their interest in their social worlds. Moreover, the data reveal children’s assumptions about their gender and learner identities, which reflect beliefs held in the Saudi culture.
Preface

This research is an original and unpublished work by the author, Nazeeha Samir Khoja. The Behavioural Research Ethics Board of British Columbia gave full board approval to this research in June 6, 2012 under the UBC BREB Certificate number H12-00294.
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For the Unheard Voices
Chapter One

Introduction

I had a wonderful childhood growing up in a coastal city in the west region of Saudi Arabia. I was three months old when I had my first dip in the Red Sea. My siblings, cousins, and I would spend the afternoons building tents inside the house, catching crabs at the beach, or gathering around our grandmother, listening to her stories of the old days. Most of my childhood memories were in places other than the school. When I was a child, I viewed school as a place full of obligations; there was no time to play, wonder, or explore. The structured and individual-based school activities were irrelevant to my everyday experiences.

To this day, schools in Saudi Arabia pay less attention to children’s interests and the social construction of the learning process. The Saudi kindergarten educational curriculum has not gone through noticeable changes since the eighties (AlKhatib, 2008). However, children’s preferences and interests are always changing, especially in recent days, with the pace of change faster than before (Rogoff, 2003). According to Rogoff, human development is never static; rather, it is a combination of aspects, including culture and experiences, changing in the face of different circumstances.

In Carla Rinaldi’s (2012) speech at the Childhood Innovations Conference in Victoria, BC, she said, “The real listening means the courage of change, it is to be able to change and risk, it is a very active verb not passive.” In my research, I hope that listening to children’s views becomes an active verb, and contributes to the improvement of the current educational system in Saudi Arabia, particularly to a more child-centered approach to teaching and learning in the early years.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to listen to and address children’s views of learning center activities in their kindergarten classroom, and whether these school activities meet with their interests and are relevant to their everyday experiences. I also inquire into the children’s perceptions of themselves as learners within the classroom environment. The assumption underlying this research is that the practice of listening to and involving children in areas relevant to their lives may have a positive influence on how they view themselves and how others view their potential (Clark, & Statham, 2005; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). The research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the views and interests of participating Saudi kindergarten children about the learning center activities in their classroom?
2. What are the Saudi kindergarten children’s perceptions of their roles within the classroom setting?

Theoretical Framework

According to Merriam (1998), an interpretive research study cannot be viewed through a singular theoretical framework; rather, it is a complex work that includes different, yet interrelated perspectives. Moreover, the theoretical framework is what leads to the formulation of the research questions, the choice of data sources, data analysis, and interpretations. As Roulston (2010) asserts, every researcher has to know what motivates the research questions by understanding the beliefs behind the questions. The framework for the present research is a social constructivist perspective. In particular, the research is grounded in Vygotskian sociocultural theory (1978) and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system theory of human development.
Sociocultural theory

The current research views children as social actors and active learners, whose development and learning is constructed and motivated socially and historically (Vygotsky, 1979). Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), studied a range of subjects, including language and thought, learning and development, and play and development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). One of the basic principles in the Vygotskian framework is that development takes place within a social and cultural context and through mediating systems (Vygotsky, 1978). Of particular relevance to this research are social interaction, symbolic mediation, and identity construction, as seen through the lens of sociocultural theory.

Social interaction

Vygotsky (1978) believed that children’s development and learning occurs within a social context. Moreover, he viewed children’s development as an active construction of understanding (Lyle, 2000). Children do not passively absorb knowledge, but rather, they are actively engaged in constructing their knowledge. This construction is always socially mediated (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Vygotsky was interested in the relationship between children and others, including parents, teachers, and peers. He emphasized that children cannot be seen in isolation from their cultural, historical and social context (Lyle, 2000). Thus, sociocultural theory looks at learning as a relationship between the individual and the environment. Its prominent focus is on the learner’s experiences, social participation, and semiotic mediation in context.

Following Vygotsky (1978), sociocultural theorists argue that mental processes exist first within the social plane, and then move to the individual plane through a process of internalization. Development within the social plane is not limited to child-adult interactions, but
also occurs through child-child interactions between participants, who could have more, less, or equal knowledge (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Vygotsky posited what he called the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) through which children, assisted by individuals more skilled than themselves, perform a task they could not have performed on their own. In other words, the ZPD suggests that a child can reach his or her maximum potential with an adult’s assistance or a peer’s collaboration. Through engaging with others in complex thinking using cultural tools, children eventually become capable of performing a task independently, a task for which they once needed assistance (Rogoff, 2003).

Nevertheless, children in the process of learning in their ZPDs do not passively inherit skills and knowledge; instead, they play active roles by appropriating them (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). This active role in the learning process is referred to as appropriation of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Children appropriate available cultural sources or materials for social interaction and affiliation (Dyson, 1997). Moreover, this social interaction is established and managed through cultural tools acquired from others (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Semiotic mediation**

From the Vygotskian perspective (1978), semiotic mediation connects the individual and the social. Semiotic mediators can be verbal, physical, or visual, such as language, algebra, artwork, diagrams, and drawings and so forth. According to Vygotsky, this mediator facilitates the child’s development by making it easier for the child to perform certain behaviours, ideas, or emotions (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Vygotsky asserted that the utilization of external mediators in a learning setting assists children in areas of attention, perception, memory, thinking, and self-regulation. Thus, mediators are essential for learning and development; something becomes a mental tool when a child includes it in an activity. According to Vygotsky, children first use
mediators in shared activity and then become capable of appropriating them. Moreover, children often use mediators to regulate social interactions (Bodrova & Leong, 1996).

**Identity formation**

As noted earlier, the relation between the individual and the social world is inseparable. Through social interactions we learn how and where to situate ourselves in the group (Ahn, 2011; Rogoff, 2003). We also learn how to use cultural tools, how to think, and what to value (Rogoff, 2003). All these practices contribute to constructing an individual’s early sense of identity (Gee, 2000). Although Vygotsky did not use the term identity in his writing, he provided methodological tools that contribute to our understanding of how sociocultural and sociohistorical processes influence the construction of identity (Penuel, & Wertsch, 1995). A sociocultural view acknowledges the significant role of cultural tools in identity formation (Rogoff, 2004). Sociocultural theories view identity as an ongoing process that requires not only self-judgment about being, but also the influence of others (Ahn, 2011; Compton- Lilly, 2006).

Thus, one’s identity shifts in relation to others who engage in different discourses (Ahn, 2011; Dyson, 1997). An individuals’ role in the construction of identity is not static; rather, it is flexible and dynamic (Rogoff, 2003). Children receive multiple messages from different cultural resources, and they actively engage in making decisions about who they are and who they should be (MacNaughton, 2000). However, even when children are engaged actively in constructing their identity, their choices are limited to what is available to them (MacNaughton, 2000). They receive multiple messages from different environments; yet, some of these messages are more available, powerful, desirable or recognizable than others (MacNaughton, 2000). In this way, their choices are limited to the different environments they live in, and the multiple experiences they go through (Rogoff, 2003; MacNaughton, 2000). Children adopt culturally accepted and
desirable roles in their community that, in turn, play a key role in constructing their identities (Rogoff, 2003).

Through dialogues and narratives with their social worlds, children construct their identities (Ahn, 2011; MacNaughton, 2000). The stories children create or tell are interwoven with their experiences that, in turn, influence their identity construction (Aasen, Grindheim, & Waters, 2009; MacNaughton, 2000). Thus, children’s narratives intertwine with their social, cultural, and historical context, influencing their development and constructing their identities (Ahn, 2011).

**Ecological system theory of human development**

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory of human development focuses on the ways multiple contexts influence a child’s development. Bronfenbrenner views children’s development as an active and dynamic process and that children’s development cannot be understood without looking into the interplay between the multiple embedded contexts in a child’s life. Children do not live in isolation; rather, they live within multiple levels of social environments that, in turn, influence their development and learning. This theory is appropriate for framing this research because it encourages the researcher to examine different social environments in the participant’s lives. In the present research, it is essential to draw attention to the different discourses that influence children’s lives such as those of parents, siblings, educators, peers, media, and culture.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed a model that illustrates the multiple levels of social environments impacting human development. He defined these levels as nested within one another. The first and closest level to the child is the *microsystem* system, followed by the *mesosystem*, then the *exosystem* system, and last is the *macrosystem* system. It is crucial to note
that these immediate settings are changeable, and may change throughout the day or over the years.

The *microsystem* is the layer that represents the immediate community context that is in direct contact with the child. It is the first influence on children’s development, and consists of the everyday experiences of a child within the primary context, whether at home or school. The second level is the *mesosystem*, which represents the interrelations among the microsystems. This level contains the relationship between the different settings in the developing person’s life, for example, between a child’s teacher and his or her parents. The third level is the *exosystem*, consisting of people and institutions that have an indirect influence on a child’s life, such as local organizations. The final level in the model is the *macrosystem*, which is comprised of the cultural context such as government, laws, ideologies and religious institutions.

Bronfenbrenner highlighted the importance of different social worlds upon a child’s life. This research looks into the classroom as a microsystem. It focuses on the influence of the parents, teachers, siblings and peers, on the child participant within the classroom context.

*The classroom as a microsystem context*

In this research, the classroom is viewed as a discourse community that is directly connected to the children. Therefore, the classroom is seen as a microsystem context that directly impacts the children’s lives (Rowe, Fitch & Bass, 2001). Children and teachers all bring their understandings of school, gender, race, religion, and learning into the classroom (Rowe, Fitch & Bass, 2001), as well as their past and present experiences (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). There are differences between what children and educators bring to the classroom even when the teacher and the children are from the same ethnic background (Rowe, Fitch & Bass, 2001). In this way, the classroom becomes a space that portrays the cultural assumptions and beliefs of a society,
including beliefs toward gendered identity and the learner’s identity. It also represents the nature of the relationship between child-adult and child-child within the classroom context (Rogoff, 2003). In addition, within the classroom discourses, children experience multiple worlds, including the official world, unofficial worlds, imaginary worlds, and real world (Dyson, 1997).

*Official and unofficial worlds*

As noted earlier, children and teachers are members of different communities; their participation and affiliation influence the classroom culture (Dyson, 1997). Anne Haas Dyson (1989, 1991, 1997, 2003) discussed the different worlds children experience in the classroom in relation to children’s development and learning. Children often engage in their unofficial worlds on the playground or during open-ended activities. The unofficial worlds of children offer them opportunities to declare themselves as members of the childhood society (Dyson, 1997). In the classroom, children seek social belonging through singing, playing, and telling stories that are appropriated from their culture (Dyson, 1989, 1997). According to Gee (2000), young children bring to their classroom many of their previous experiences and culture, including their peer-based-culture.

Besides the unofficial worlds of children, the official school world or the planned activities can become a central setting for unofficial social lives (Dyson, 1997). The classroom setting, with all of its regulations and rules, offers a space for children to establish and manage social connections. Children use cultural materials to orient themselves to each other within the school environment.

*Imaginary worlds*

Imagination is essential for children’s thinking processes (Fredriksen, 2010). Moreover, imagination makes it possible for a child to link different experiences, thoughts, and feelings
that, in turn, facilitate learning and the construction of meanings. According to Vygotsky (1978),
the brain does not only store and retrieve earlier experiences, but also combines and reworks
these previous experiences to create new ideas or behaviours. This fantasy and reality integration
is important in children’s play and learning (Fredriksen, 2010). Children borrow elements from
their experiences and reframe them to compose a new reality, one that fulfills their needs and
desires (Vygotsky, 2004). When children play, they appropriate symbols to create imagined
worlds that help them to socialize with others (Dyson, 1979). Thus, imagination enriches
children’s social and intellectual lives (Vygotsky, 2004).

**Context of the Study**

The formation of a curriculum reflects the human cultural values, beliefs, assumptions,
and the language of the developers (Edwards, 2003). In this section, I present briefly the major
philosophies that have influenced the early childhood educational system. Following, I describe
the current kindergarten educational system in Saudi Arabia. Psychological theories have
contributed greatly to the formation of early childhood education (Edwards, 2003). In particular,
the work of Jean Piaget (1896-1990) on child development has influenced what has become
known as Development Appropriate Practices (DAP) (National Association for the Education of
Young Children [NAEYC], 2009), which means instruction that is appropriate for a child’s level
of development or growth (Edwards, 2003).

However, implementing the NAEYC DAP guidelines in early childhood settings has
been questioned for many reasons. Edwards (2003) criticized DAP for several reasons. First, the
views of the developmental approach were formed when Piaget investigated a limited population
– mainly white, middle-class, and male. Second, the developmental approach has not given
adequate attention to the social factors and their impact on children’s learning and development.
In contrast, Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), highlighted the significance of social factors on human development by proposing that children acquire knowledge primarily from social interactions within their communities. Vygotsky (1978) viewed social dynamics as central to development and learning process.

**Kindergarten curriculum in Saudi Arabia**

In this section, I briefly present a background on the educational system in the country of Saudi Arabia. I then provide a description of the newest edition of the Saudi kindergarten curriculum document. Lastly, I present the routine of a school day in a Saudi kindergarten classroom.

Education, in its broadest sense, has been taking place in the Arabian Peninsula since the seventh century CE, providing schools in or near mosques for boys and girls (Rugh, 2002). In these schools, students study and memorize the Quran and other religious texts. However, many parents showed their dissatisfaction with the limited subjects provided by the *Kuttab* schools. In the ninth century, a group of merchants from the *Hijaz* region established private schools, offering a variety of subjects taught in Arabic (Rugh, 2002). In 1932, after Abdulaziz Al-Saud unified many regions of the Arabian Peninsula, a Directorate of Education was established to control all educational matters. In 1953, the Directorate became the Ministry of Education, offering six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, and three years of secondary school. The Ministry of Education offers formal education for both boys and girls, but in separate locations, and using a different curriculum.

In the early 1980s, a group of educators from the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) developed the first kindergarten curriculum in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, 2004). The last reformation of the
kindergarten curriculum, the 7th edition, was published in 2004 (Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, 2004). Children enroll in kindergarten one (KG1) at age three, followed by kindergarten two (KG2) at age four, and then kindergarten three (KG3) between the age of five and six (UNESCO, 2011). Unlike the formal education in primary schools to secondary schools, Saudi kindergarten schools offer education for both genders in the same location and based on the same curriculum (Alkhatib, 2008). Yet, the cultural assumptions and beliefs toward gender are embedded within the document, and are reflected in its language, images, stories, and materials. Moreover, in Saudi kindergarten schools, educators, supervisors, and staff can only be females (UNESCO, 2011). These schools are girls-only schools (Rugh, 2002). Boys leave girls-only schools at age seven to enroll in boys-only schools (Rugh, 2002), where educators and staff are only males.

Kindergarten in Saudi Arabia is independent education and is not part of the education ladder, since enrolment in primary school does not require previous formal education (UNESCO, 2011). However, the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia supervises all kind of education in the region, including kindergarten schools (AlKhatib, 2008; Rugh, 2002). The Saudi kindergarten curriculum is described in the document as a child-centered curriculum, and consists of multiple themes, including family, friends, libraries and books, and health and safety (Ministry of Education, 2004). The Ministry of Education of Saudi provides a guidebook for kindergarten teachers. This guidebook suggests themes, activities, worksheets, songs, and lessons. In order to demonstrate accountability, teachers are required to plan lessons ahead of time, and evaluate the lessons afterwards. For each theme, teachers are required to provide activities that promote children’s reading and writing skills, social and emotional development, physical development, intellectual development, and spiritual development (Ministry of
Education of Saudi Arabia, 2004). One of the fundamental concepts in the Saudi kindergarten curriculum is teaching children traditional and cultural practices such as respecting elders and greeting others (UNESCO, 2011).

The kindergarten curriculum document is organized into chapters, each of which elaborates on a theme. Each chapter begins with an introduction that provides the rationale behind a particular topic as a theme. Then, the chapter presents concepts which classroom teachers are expected to deliver to children. There is also a list of the milestones that children are expected to reach by the end of the theme. Following is a table provides an example of concepts and expected learning outcomes within the theme of family.

Table 1. Saudi Kindergarten Curriculum: Family Theme

| Family Theme |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Example of major concepts within the theme: |
| - Each person has a family; |
| - Each family member has a role; |
| - Each family has a family tree; |
| - Some children live with their parents; others live with their grandparents, aunts, or uncles. |
| Example of suggested learning outcomes within the theme: |
| It is expected that students will: |
| - Name family members (people live with the child at the same place); |
| - Describe pictures that illustrate different family roles played by different family members; |
| - Understand manners used when greeting a family member; |
| - Identify alphabetic letters that start words; |
| - Copy some alphabetic letters. |
| Example of activities: |
| 1- Circle time |
| - Teacher presents pictures or videos that show families within different cultures. |
| - Teacher invites a mother with her baby to talk about a newborn family member. |
| - Teacher presents slides or pictures of family members performing different roles (for example, a picture of a grandmother baking a traditional bread, mother feeding her... |
Family Theme

1. baby, or father fixing a car).

2- Reading and Writing lessons:
- Teacher presents a lesson on alphabetic knowledge right after circle time.
- Teacher invites children to complete worksheets (see appendix B)

3- Center Time
- Library center: teacher invites children to tell stories about self and family,
- Science and discoveries center: teacher places several objects in a sack and children use their sense of touch to name the objects.
- Cognitive center: sorting objects and tracing cards.
- House center: Teacher includes clothes and fabrics for role-play such as scarves, purses, sunglasses, and traditional Saudi outfits for boys and girls.
- Art center: children create a photo collage representing the concept of family.
- Construction center: include plastic objects or toys that represent family members.

The government curriculum discusses the classroom environment and suggests different classroom layouts. Kindergarten classrooms are supposed to include centers such as a construction center, dramatic play center, literacy and numeracy center, science and discovery center, art center, house center, and theme center. The guidebook invites teachers to make changes to the classroom environment based on the theme of the month. In the Saudi culture, parental involvement is limited to attending parents’ evenings and school events. In kindergarten, the classroom teacher communicates with parents by sending home a weekly report.

The kindergarten school day often starts with circle time that follows a routine, starting with the calendar, Quran recitation, songs, and then a teacher-planned lesson (Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, 2004). The lessons are to encourage interaction between the teacher and the children. However, since the early period of the Saudi schooling system, memorization continues to be a main feature in the Saudi educational system (Rugh, 2002). This indicates the major influence of cultural assumptions and beliefs on the implementation of the curriculum (Rogoff, 2003).
Significance of the Study

There is a lack of research studies in the Arab world within the field of social science (Badran & Zou’bi, 2010), especially including the practice of listening to children’s views about school and involving them in the research process, which is a relatively new direction in social science (Birbeck, & Drummond, 2005; Burke & Grosvenor, 2003). The previous description of the Saudi kindergarten context reveals the extent to which the child’s voice is not heard. The kindergarten Saudi curriculum is developed and implemented from adults’ points of view without considering children’s interests and views as classroom teachers initiate most of the kindergarten activities. Researchers using methodologies that include listening to and involving children’s voices within schools have discussed the positive influence of such practices on children’s development and learning (Clark, 2001, 2005; Clark, & Moss, 2005; Cremin & Slatter 2004; Dockett, & Perry, 2005; Eide & Winger, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2010). For these reasons, the present study has the potential to make a significant contribution to the research literature on Saudi Arabian education, which in turn, may have a positive impact on Saudi children’s learning and development. This is especially important because the young Saudi generation comprises close to thirty percent of the country’s total population (Central Department of Statistics and Information of Saudi Arabia, 2007).

According to the United Nations (1989/1990) Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to express themselves using any form of representation while receiving protection from adults. According to Clark and Statham (2005), the literature on young children participating in research is often focused on their opinions of services provided by adults. This means that children are seldom asked to share their views of their worlds and what matters to them. In this study, the children were invited to share their views of their classroom world and
things that interest them. In this way, learning about young Saudi kindergarten children’s views about their everyday experiences at school, may expand the knowledge of cross-cultural perspectives on early childhood education.

**Overview of the Chapters**

In the second chapter, I present a review of the literature, starting with a presentation of the beliefs underlying the practice of listening to children’s voices in schools. Then, I present findings of interpretive research that paid attention to children’s views, highlighting the essential impact on children’s learning and development. Finally, I review interpretive research studies that examined children’s views within a school context through multimodal methods.

In the third chapter, I describe the research design, discussing the reasons behind selecting a case study as a methodology. Next, I present the criteria of the chosen site and participants, the data sources, and methodological considerations. In the fourth chapter, I describe the data collection process in three stages: (1) introducing the data collection process, (2) collecting the data, and (3) concluding the data collection process. I also provide information about the data analysis process, organized in two phases: (1) preliminary analysis, and (2) secondary analysis. In the fifth chapter, I propose five themes emerging from the data. In the sixth chapter, I discuss the results by viewing them within the theoretical framework. Finally, I present limitations and strengths of the research, and ideas for further research, followed by possible implications for practice and research, and conclusions.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the motivations behind choosing this topic for my research. I also explained the purpose of the study, and listed the research questions. Then, I presented the theories that frame the current research: Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory and
Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory of human development. I provided a description of the Saudi kindergarten classroom’s curriculum and context. Next, I addressed the significance of the research locally and nationally. Afterward, I presented an overview of the next five chapters. Following, I provide definitions for terms that are used across the research.

**Definitions**

Within the context of this study, there are a number of terms defined as follows:

- *Semiotic mediation* is a key term used in Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory. Semiotic mediators could be language, works of art, writing, or mathematics (Rogoff, 2003; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). From the Vygotskian perspective, semiotic mediation means the appropriation of semiotic means to mediate the functioning between social and the individual (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

- *Cultural tools* are appropriated or developed within human cultures and through shared experiences (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). They facilitate an individual’s development and learning; for example, language is a tool used in all human cultures (Bodrova & Leong, 1996).

- *Saudi Arabia* - the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - is located in the Middle East. Arabic is the official language, and Islam is the official religion. The Holy book of Islam is called the Quran. The two Islamic Holy mosques are located in the Cities of Mecca and Medina in, *Hijaz*, the western region of Saudi Arabia.

- *Quran*, the holy book for Muslims, is composed of verses. Muslims believe that Quran is the word of God.

- *Arabic* is a language spoken widely across the Middle East and North Africa. There are many Arabic dialects spoken in different areas. Arabic is read and written from right to left.
• *Interviews* the term interview used to refer to photo-elicitation interviews, refers to children’s discussions of their photographs.

• *Drawing comments* this term is used to refer to what children said about their drawings.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Seeking children’s views of their education is a relatively new direction in social science (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003). However, the literature involving children’s voices in research and practice has been growing noticeably over the past few years (Barnes & Harris, 2009; Hill, 2006). Many recent research projects have paid more attention to children’s voices by involving them as main participants in the research process (Clark, & Moss, 2005; Einarsdottier, 2010; Moss, 2010). In this chapter, I start by presenting the beliefs underlying the current image of the child in research and practice. I then present a review of research that demonstrates the importance of listening to children’s voices in schools and its influence on children’s learning and development. Finally, I present interpretive research studies that investigate children’s views using multimodal methods within a school context.

Images of the Child and the Child’s Voice

The position of the child within the culture of research and school has been changing over the past few decades (Fraser, 2006; Moss, 2010). I present two primary beliefs that underline the current image of children in research practices and schools. These beliefs have contributed to providing children more space and different avenues for participation and involvement in areas relevant to their lives. First, the social constructivist perspective of children has contributed to reconstructing the current rich image of the child. Children are viewed as competent, active learners and service users who have views and preferences (Clark, & Statham, 2005). Second, the Convention for the Right of the Child (United Nations, 1989/1990) has challenged traditional assumptions about children. It posed the notion that children have the right
to express their views through various forms of representations, including written text, verbal expression or art, while receiving protection from adults (United Nations, 1989/1990).

One’s image of the child, or the child’s potential, influences the way individuals interact with children, respect their rights, and listen to their voices (Rinaldi, 2006). The philosophy of Reggio Emilia recognizes the interconnection between the image of the child and the culture (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006). The Reggio Emilia philosophy holds that an individual’s image of the child can be changed to one that values and appreciates children’s competencies and potential (Fraser, 2006). The example provided by Fraser (2006) about the implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach in China provides a model of the shift in many teachers’ beliefs toward children’s potential. The traditional Chinese view of education expected children to absorb the teacher’s ideas. Children were seen as containers waiting to be filled. Teachers were the authority in the classroom; they decide what and how children should learn and then implemented their lesson plans in the classroom. In contrast, many Chinese educators, especially among the younger generation, agree with the Reggio Emilia image of the child. These teachers view children as rich and competent; they give children more opportunities and avenues to express themselves and their ideas. Although the traditional Chinese teaching methods are more popular in educational settings, many educators have started to view children’s capabilities differently (Fraser, 2006).

The Importance of Listening to Children’s Voices in Schools

Listening to young children contributes positively to their lives and development, benefitting children, groups, and institutions (Einarsdottie, 2010). According to Einarisdottie, children often see themselves as powerless in schools because they do not participate in decisions related time and space. Moreover, children’s participation has been seen to enhance
self-esteem, and increase in their social development and academic achievement (Einarsdottir, 2010; Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). In addition, children learn democratic principles when they practice their rights and when adults listen to them and involve them in decisions relevant to their lives (Einarsdottir, 2010). Listening to children in school settings is essential because schools play a key role in exposing children to experiences through which they can learn and practice democratic concepts (Hart, Cohen, Erickson, & Flekkoy, 2001).

In a study by Zygmunt-Fillwalk and Staley (2007), the researchers stated that when the participating children were given the lead to contribute in a project, their participation had a positive influence on their behaviours and skills. The researchers found an increase in children’s self-esteem, and enhancement of identity development. The findings of this project indicate that children who were involved in the research felt more competent and developed life skills such as empathy, leadership, public speaking, and academic achievement. These findings align with some of the results of a project named *Joined up design for schools* (Flutter, 2006), which involved children in the design process of their school environment. Children were viewed as consumers or clients of the schools’ services. Participating students were given an active role in this project by connecting them with professionals and listening to their thoughts and ideas. The findings indicated that throughout the process, participating children developed numerous life skills such as problem solving, team work, confidence, and communication.

Listening to young children in schools has an impact on the children and also improves several groups or institutions within the mesosystem or exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It inspires adults to improve the school culture because children have the honesty to analyze their experiences that, in turn, make adults rethink some of their taken-for-granted habits (Burke &
By listening to children’s views, adults learn more about children’s worlds, which, in turn, encourage them to rethink teaching strategies (Eide & Winger, 2005; Cremin & Slatter 2004). Education and learning processes have the potential to be more meaningful for the children if they are connected to children’s experiences and preferences (Clark, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2010).

**Research Investigating Children’s Views in School Settings**

According to Birbeck and Drummond (2005), children are willing to express their thoughts as long the methods or tools utilized are clear to children and match their interest. Thus, it is the researchers’ responsibility to consider methods that meet with children’s preferences (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). Utilizing visual methods and hands-on tasks allow and encourage children to communicate and express their views (Clark, 2005).

In the project, *Spaces to Play* (Clark & Moss, 2005), the researchers adopt the Mosaic approach to examine the views of a group of preschoolers. The study’s objective was to involve children in reconstructing the outdoor play area. The project emphasized the importance of considering multiple research methods when conducting research with children. Results suggested that the ways in which children’s expressed their preferences varied. While some children enjoyed collecting data using cameras, others preferred expressing their thoughts in drawings or discussions.

Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, and Shapiro, (2007) used hands-on book selection tasks to examine grade-one children’s preferences for narrative and/or information books. The findings showed that children, whether boys or girls, have similar interests towards the choices of books, and the differences were based to a degree on their reading competencies. However, when children were asked to give reasons for their peers’ choices (what they thought other boys
or girls might like to read), their reasons revealed gendered stereotypes. The study discussed the importance of using hands-on tasks when investigating children’s views, allowing participants to respond in authentic ways when they were offered to choose between books rather than to answer abstract questions.

In a study by Mirkhil, (2010), six children who attended full-time kindergarten, participated in the study through discussions, facilitated by a picture storybook and drawings. Children shared their expectations and wishes for school activities. Mirkhil concluded that participating children’s views of the school was connected to friendship, play, and physical environment. In contrast, they did not show interest in learning to read and write in school. These findings align with those of a research study conducted by Einarsdottir (2010) in which children, between six- and seven-years-old, were invited to share their thoughts of the first grade curriculum in Iceland. Data collection included group interviews, children’s photographs, and children’s drawings. Many of the participants referred to playing with other children as the most enjoyable time at school, while math and language were seen as less preferred subjects. The study also showed that there are differences between what participating children liked and disliked in their school. In addition, the findings revealed that participating children did not feel involved in planning lessons or curriculum. Participants viewed the teacher’s role in a traditional way, which was, teaching academic skills such as reading, writing and math.

These views towards the role of teachers inside classroom settings in the Einarsdottir (2010) study corroborate with those in a study by Harris and Barnes (2009). Harris and Barnes investigated children’s perceptions of the roles of their kindergarten teachers; participating children shared their understandings of the role of female and male kindergarten teachers through drawings and conversational interviews. The researchers also interviewed the teachers,
marking the differences between teachers’ views of their roles and children’s views of their teachers’ roles in the classroom.

In another study, Pearcea and Baileyb (2011) inquired into children’s views on playing at the school playground. The data were collected through drawings and focus group conversations. The themes that emerged indicated that children viewed the playground as a place to initiate friendship. However, some children associated playground time with loneliness and fear of injury.

Singal and Swann (2011) conducted a study with eleven children participants who shared their understandings of themselves as learners inside and outside the school. Their thoughts were examined through semi-structured interviews and imaged-based data. The findings show that children’s perceptions of the notion of learning are different from those of educators and parents. The researchers stressed the importance of listening to young children’s views of their learning experiences. This, in turn, may offer valuable insights on learning and teaching practices in the classroom.

The research studies discussed here suggest that children hold different views toward the world of the school and that listening to children’s voices through multimodal methods allows adults to understand children’s worlds and concerns (Eide & Winger, 2005). They show how children and adults view the culture of school differently, and have different expectations and preferences (Pearcea & Bailey, 2011). The researchers provide strong evidence that it is almost impossible to understand children’s preferences and thoughts without listening to them, arguing that through listening to children’s voices, schools can promote its facilities and strategies based on children’s interest and preferences.
Many of the research projects on children’s views within school settings have focused on school services, physical environments, and transitions (Clark, 2005, 2010; Clark, & Moss, 2001, 2005; Dockett, & Perry, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2010; Flutter, 2006; Ghaziani, 2008; Pearcea & Baileyb, 2011), revealing the importance of more research on children’s views on school activities and curriculum. Moreover, there is a dearth of research literature on children’s voices within school settings within the Arab world, where children’s voices are unheard or unvalued, demonstrating a need for more research projects involving young children and utilizing different means of communications and data sources.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the relationship between the image of the child and the practice of listening to the children’s voices. Next, I presented results of research studies that highlighted the importance of listening to children and its impact on their development and learning. This was followed by a review of interpretive research studies that utilized multimodal methods when listening to children’s voices in school contexts. Finally, I commented on the gap in the literature related to children’s voices in school contexts.
Chapter Three

Research Design

This chapter is organized into four sections. In the first section, I describe the methodology chosen and a rationale. In the second section, I provide information about the site, participants, and the procedures for obtaining consents and assents. The third section presents the data sources and the reasons behind choosing these data sources for the current research. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of methodological considerations.

Methodology

The chosen methodology for the current research is a qualitative case study design. According to Yin (2009), a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its natural settings, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the settings are not visible or distinguishable. Merriam (1998) states that the main feature of a case study is the “case,” which has to be specific and functioning. Qualitative case studies design offers an intense description and analysis of a phenomenon, such as a person or a program (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the case study design should be carried out through an in-depth investigation that involves multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007).

The rationale for choosing a case study for the present research project is multifaceted. First, the lack of research studies investigating the Saudi Arabian educational system makes a case study more appropriate, since conducting a study should aim to discover and build knowledge rather than confirm or evaluate (Merriam, 1998). Second, the purpose of the present research aligns with one of the main criteria of any case study design, that is, providing rich insights and interpretations within a particular context (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Third, a case study design was chosen because it is a method that focuses on the process
and the meaning within a particular context (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009), which will be addressed throughout the presentation of the data collection process. In the present study, I investigate children’s views of the activities while they are engaging in their daily routines, without controlling the settings or time. According to Yin (2009), when the researcher has less control of variables and conducts the research in its natural settings, a case study is an appropriate design. Furthermore, case study is not a standardized design; but rather, it is a design that provides more flexibility with the choice of data methods and analysis. In other words, it enables the researcher to use different data collection methods, providing rich information in a particular context (Merriam, 1998). Several case studies by Clark and colleagues, using multiple methods to investigate children’s worlds include: Listening to Young Children (Clark & Moss, 2001), Spaces to Play (Clark & Moss 2005), and Living spaces (Clark, 2008, 2010). The characteristics of those studies are consistent with the purpose and research questions of the present research.

The case for the present study is a kindergarten classroom in an urban city in the west region of Saudi Arabia. It is a single case study of one kindergarten classroom (Creswell, 2007). It is limited to one case because the purpose of the research does not aim to generalize findings, but rather to provide information that addresses the views of children in a kindergarten classroom.

**Site and Participants**

In order to investigate the children’s perspectives of learning center activities in their kindergarten classroom, this research site had to be a classroom selected according to specific criteria. Therefore, a purposeful sampling method was chosen to select the site (Merriam, 1998). Four characteristics were considered essential. First, the site had to be implementing the seventh edition of the Saudi kindergarten curriculum and include most of the learning centers and a wide
range of activities. Second, the site had to include children of both genders. Third, the school needed to give permission to allow cameras into the classroom. Finally, the classroom needed to enroll at least some children with previous experience in any childcare setting because data collection took place early in the school year, which, in turn, made it important to consider participants who were familiar with learning activities and the school environments.

**Research site**

During the application process of the Behaviour Research Ethics Board (BREB), I contacted a list of schools that matched the research inclusion criteria. I received approval from a school and discussed my research with the school’s director, who sent a preliminary approval letter. However, a few days before my flight to Saudi Arabia, the school informed me that they had to postpone my data collection for four to five weeks. Since I had a limited time to spend in Saudi Arabia, I decided to consider another research site. When I arrived in Saudi Arabia, I contacted five Kindergarten schools that match the site inclusion criteria. I was able to find a site that showed commitment to participate until the last day of the data collection process. It was challenging to convince schools that the data collection process requires children’s participation. This is because the culture of research in Saudi schools is limited to data collection methods such as surveys or observations rather than interaction with children.

The research site selected is a kindergarten classroom in a private school that implements the government curriculum. The site is located in an urban city in the west region of Saudi Arabia. The selected school has been implementing the kindergarten government curriculum, starting from its first edition during the early 80s until this day. In the chosen classroom there are six centers: art center, house center, library center, cognitive center, construction center, and science center. Children are introduced to reading and writing through teacher-planned lessons.
Students spend seven hours at school: the school day starts at 7:30 am. and ends at 2:30 pm. After morning circle time, the classroom teacher introduces a lesson to the children using a projector and PowerPoint® slides. Center time follows the teacher’s planned lesson, taking place three times a week for 50 minutes each.

In the chosen site, the house center or dramatic play center included plastic kitchen pots and dishes. There were both informational and narrative books in the library center. In the construction center, there were wooden blocks in different sizes and shapes, cars, and plastic trees and farm animals. The cognitive center included puzzles and activities, such as classifying, sorting, matching, and tracing, with different levels of difficulty. In the art center, there were markers and drawing sheets. There was a desk, chair and computer for teacher use only. There were three rectangular tables in the middle of the classroom, used for most of the activities. A projector and a projection screen were located in a visible area in the classroom. There was a washroom and exit door to the backyard inside the classroom. Commercial posters of numbers, alphabets and shapes were displayed on the classroom walls. Kindergarten children’s work and drawings were displayed in very small area in the classroom.
Participants

Here, I describe the recruitment strategy and the roles of the Director of the school, the classroom teacher, the participating children, and the researcher. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select the participants. According to Merriam (1998), a purposeful sampling strategy is used when the research aim is to discover and gain insights. The sample, thus, should be one that enriches the research.

In the selected classroom there were 16 children between five and six years old. The children spent most of their school day participating in teacher-initiated activities; child-initiated activities were limited to center time, and playground or outdoor recess time. During center time,
children were invited to choose and move between centers. However, the teacher controlled the number of children in each center.

In the present study, the participants selected met the following research criteria: (1) children who obtained parent or guardian approval; (2) children who had previous experience in any childcare setting; and (3) children who gave their verbal assent to the researcher before the data collection process began. After receiving parental consents, three boys and three girls were considered to participate in the study. Pseudonyms (Arabic names) are used for confidentiality reasons.

Table 2. Pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asma</td>
<td>Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leena</td>
<td>Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majed</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nada</td>
<td>Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yusuf</td>
<td>Boy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The role of participating children

As noted in the introduction, participants were invited to play an active role in the data collection process. After obtaining the children’s assents, each child was equipped with a research camera for 50 minutes during center time. They were invited to take photographs within the classroom setting. The participating children’s role in the research started with photograph taking. The following day, participating children were invited to discuss their photographs with the researcher. This was followed by two drawing tasks in which children were invited to draw in a group setting within the classroom, and then share their reflections on their drawing individually with the researchers.

The role of school director and classroom teacher

After obtaining the school Director’s and the classroom teacher’s voluntarily participation approval, the Director of the school selected a kindergarten classroom that matched the research inclusion criteria. She also assisted the classroom teacher in choosing the participating children. The teacher’s role in this research was primarily to send the consent forms to children’s parents, and then receive their replies. Another important role of the classroom teacher was to ensure that the classroom’s camera was accessible for non-participant children during the days of photo taking. Although the researcher supplied the classroom teacher with a classroom camera, the teacher was responsible for making the camera available for the non-participating children, and then to upload the pictures to her computer. These photographs taken by the non-participating children were not included in the present study. Lastly, the teacher of the classroom participated in the two drawing tasks sessions by managing the non-participants group.
The role of the researcher

Merriam (1998) stated that one of the qualitative research characteristics is the active role of the researcher in the research process. In qualitative research, the researcher is expected to mediate, process, and analyze the data. Merriam also highlighted the significance of the researcher’s involvement in the research field. In the present study, I attended all the data collection sessions. I began the research with informal visits to the classroom during center time in order to build relationships with the children before interviewing them. Interaction between the researcher and participating children plays a key role in encouraging children to express themselves and share their thoughts (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). Thus, I devoted the first week of the data collection process to informal visits in order to get to know the children and become part of their center time routine. Children with parental approval were invited to give their assent to the researcher on the same day of participation. The researcher took part in every step of the data collection process.

Obtaining Consents and Assents

The Director of the school was invited to select a kindergarten classroom using the inclusion criteria. The teacher of the classroom was provided with a letter of instructions, highlighting her rights and responsibilities. After receiving her voluntary approval, she was invited to suggest participating children. Eight children met the inclusion criteria; then, information and consent letters were sent out to their parents. Some changes were made to the consent letter for cultural reasons. These changes included deleting my personal phone number from the consent letter, since the school Director thought that listing my phone number would be inappropriate in the this context. However, my email address was kept in the contact list.
From the eight invitation letters, only six parents gave their consent; one parent did not approve her child’s participation and another did not send back a reply. The participating children with the approval were three boys and three girls. After receiving parental agreement, the participating children were invited to give their assent individually within their familiar classroom environment during center time. The researcher introduced herself to each child as a student researcher, a person who is interested in learning about kindergarteners’ views of kindergarten activities. The researcher clarified to each child that their parent’s approval did not mean they had to participate. They were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study, if they wished.

Each one of the six children was invited to give his/her assent on a different day, right before their participation (to use the research camera for taking photographs). Once the child agreed to participate, he or she was given the research camera and the rules and instructions of using the camera were explained (Cameron, 2005). The six participating children showed interest and gave their assents for participating in the data collection process.

Data Sources

For many years research studies have relied on adults’ views in order to learn about children’s worlds (Eide, & Winger, 2005; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). However, in recent years, many research studies have included children’s views by involving children in the research process, listening to their voices, and utilizing methods that match children’s preferences (Clark, 2001). In the present research, the research methods were selected to be child-friendly and to provide a range of choices for participating children (Cappello, 2005; Clark, 2001; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011; Rinaldi, 2006). The data collection sources include photographs taken by the participants, interviews about their photographs, participating
children’s drawings and their comments about drawings. The data sources and procedures for the present research are primarily inspired by the Mosaic approach, (Clark, 2001). This involves utilizing multiple methods, treating children as the experts of their own lives, and focusing on their lived experiences (Clark, 2001, 2005).

The utilization of appropriate methods when working with young children enhances the validity and credibility of the research (Birbeck, & Drummond, 2005). Cremin and Slatter (2004) examined the reliability and validity of young children’s views using a case study with six four-year-old children. The researchers adopted the Mosaic approach using varied data collection methods, including interviews with parents and staff, observations, and photographs taken by children (Clark, 2001). Cremin and Slatter argued that their findings provide evidence that children’s views are reliable, with consistency between the identified themes of parent interviews and children’s photographs. In the current study, I considered the possibility that different methods of data collection would increase the reliability (Jabeen, 2009).

**Photographs**

Photography has been utilized as a tool in participatory research studies in order to give children a means to express their thoughts through an expressive non-verbal language (Clark, 2010; Einarsdottir, 2005). Many research studies have shown that photography is a useful tool for listening young children’s voices (Clark, 2001, 2010; Einarsdottir, 2010; Cappello, 2005). In the current research, photographs taken by the participating children are used as both a data source and a facilitator of communication. Photography is a form of representation that provides details and expressions of feelings that cannot be delivered in spoken or written words (Cappello; 2005). Thus, children’s choices of what to photograph can say a lot about their perspectives and views on a given topic (Clark, 2010). In addition, children’s photographs can bring out important
details about the context of their everyday experiences. Children’s photographs also enable adults to see the world from the child’s point of view and the child’s eye-level (Cappello, 2005).

Using participants’ photographs as a facilitator in the interviews allows children to lead the interview (Cameron, 2005; Cappello, 2005; Clark, 2010; Einarsdottir, 2005). It also increases the active role of children in the research, since they can make decisions about what to photograph. This, in turn, contributes to reducing the problem of researcher-child power relationships (Einarsdottir, 2005). Finally, using children’s photographs enables the researcher to engage the participants in an in-depth interview and motivate children to express and discuss their opinions (Singal & Swan, 2011).

**Photo-elicitation interviews**

According to Yin (2009), one of the essential sources of data in case study design is interviewing. In the present research, photo-elicitation interviews were adopted to allow participants to describe their views using their own words, while photographs and drawings provide different avenues of visual communication (Clark, 2001, 2005; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). The children’s photographs provided a focus for the interviews. The researcher chose to conduct individual interviews about the photographs to give personal space for the participating children to express their views and thoughts (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). However, individual interviews might raise issues related to child-researcher power relations (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Specific methodological considerations were taken into account in order to reduce such an issue (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011; Roulston, 2010). First, spending time with the participating children before the data collection process is believed to play a role in building the interviewer-interviewee relationship (Eide & Winger, 2005; Cameron, 2005). Second, choosing a familiar place and time for the interview within the classroom environment
should help to comfort children (Eide & Winger, 2005; Cameron, 2005). Third, paying attention to non-verbal language during the interview, such as eye contact and body language, was taken into account (Cameron, 2005).

**Drawings**

The pictures drawn by the participating children are the third major source of data in this research. Drawing is a familiar activity that encourages children to share their opinions and ideas (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009; Einarsdottir, 2012). Sociocultural theory asserts that what children draw and scribble is as important as writing (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Children represent their thoughts through different languages and drawing is one of children’s expressive languages (Edwards, Gandini & Foreman, 1998).

**Drawing comments**

To overcome the misinterpretation of children’s drawings, the researcher spent several minutes with each participant to discuss the content of his or her drawings individually (Coad, & Lewis, 2004). Information and clarification about the children’s drawings (asking children to comment on their drawings) took place individually, as a secondary source of data. In the present study, the children’s drawings are seen as an expression of understanding, meaning that children’s drawings were not analyzed from a psychological or developmental stance (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). Rather, they were analyzed by considering their meanings (the drawings themselves and the children’s comments about them), with consideration to the cultural and social context (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009).

**Methodological Considerations**

Merriam (1998) asserted that qualitative research must provide a depiction, in enough detail, of the research process to show the trustworthiness of the results. The research also has to
describe the events within context. According to Merriam, several strategies can be used to enhance the validity and reliability of a qualitative research. Internal validity is a strategy that tests the validity of the research process by questioning the meanings of reality (Merriam, 1998). However, in qualitative research, reality is never an objective phenomenon that needs to be discovered or observed, especially when human beings are the main instrument in data collection and analysis. The fact that people construct reality based on their understanding of the world makes it impossible to view reality as a fixed phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Thus, internal validity in qualitative case study is tested through strategies that take into account understandings about the nature of human beings (Merriam, 1998). These strategies include triangulation, the active role of participants in research, and acknowledgment of the researcher’s biases.

In the present study, validity was tested through a triangulation strategy that, in turn, enriched the data children provided (Merriam, 1998). The different data sources proposed different avenues of communication and ways of expression for the children. In addition, the involvement of the participating children in the data collection process contributed to understanding how this group of participants view and experience the world. As the researcher, I was aware of the possibility of my biased opinions. Thus, I provided a description of the research process, an overview of the study context, and the consideration of ethical practices.

The second aspect of research quality is its external validity, which is concerned with the possibility of applying the findings to different situations or settings (Merriam, 1998). In other words, external validity is concerned with the generalization of the findings. However, one of the characteristics of a qualitative case study is to study the bounded case in depth, rather than generalizing its findings (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Therefore, in the present study, the researcher provides a thick description of the context and the process so that the readers can
determine if their situation is similar to the research, and then decide whether these findings might be adopted or implemented (Merriam, 1998).

The suggested third strategy is testing the reliability of the research. The traditional perspective of reliability involves duplication of a study in an attempt to achieve the same results (Merriam, 1998). However, in qualititative research, reliability is approached differently: the main objective of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases (Yin, 2009). Thus, reliability is tested by questioning whether, or to what degree, the results are consistent across the data collected (Merriam, 1998). Merriam stated that researchers could use several techniques to test the dependability of the results. In order to test reliability, I invited another rater to test my codes. The reliability rater is a female, holds a degree in Psychology, and speaks both Arabic and English. This was important because the interviews were conducted in Arabic, and transcripts were transcribed and analyzed in Arabic. The rater was given a detailed explanation of the coding system. She tested the codes of the 170 photographs and 12 drawings, producing consistent codes. Her testing of the photo-elicitation interviews also resulted in similar codes. However, this rater noted that some of the children’s data showed their sense of belongingness, which was not included in the researcher’s codes. Thus, I revisited the data to examine the new code she suggested; the ability to accomplish activities or work without assistance. Looking through the lens of the social constructivist perspective, I considered children’s accomplishments as evidence of their capabilities as learners. Therefore, a new category was added to the findings: the child’s identity as a capable learner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1979).

Second, according to Yin (2009), in qualitative case studies, the documentation of the research process is a way to approach reliability. Therefore, I provided a detailed description of the research process in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the research (Yin, 2009).
The main goal of testing the validity and reliability is to test the ethical manner of the research process (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research, ethics should be considered on many levels, especially in the researcher-participant relationship (Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Merriam, 1998). In the current research, children were invited to take part in the data collection process. Children’s involvement in photographing and drawing played a vital role in leading the research in multiple directions. Many ethical considerations have been explained throughout the research, including the research design, recruitment procedures, establishment of relationship, and time and space (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011).

**Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher explained the chosen research design by providing an overview of the case study methodology, and the selected research site and participants, in the study of a kindergarten classroom in an urban city of Saudi Arabia. The roles of the classroom teacher, school director, participating children, and the researcher were explained. This is followed by an explanation of the procedure for obtaining parental consents and children’s assents. This chapter also described the data sources utilized in the study. These data sources are photographs, photo-elicitation interviews, drawings, and drawing comments, all of which enabled children to communicate using non-verbal tools as well as verbal language. Finally, this chapter presents the methodological considerations. The next chapter describes the processes of data collection and analyses.
Chapter Four

Data Collection and Analysis

This chapter presents the data collection and data analysis process. The data collection section of the research was divided into three phases: (1) introducing the data collection process, (2) collecting the data, and (3) concluding the data collection process. The data analysis is divided into two parts, beginning with a brief description of the preliminarily analysis process. Next comes a detailed analysis of the data sources. For the purpose of clarity and consistency, the term “interviews” refers specifically to the photo-elicitation interviews; the term “responses” refers to what children said in the interviews in response to my questions; and the term “comments” refers to what children said about their drawings.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a period of four weeks, from the third week of October until the second week of November, 2012. The data were collected during regular school hours. I attended the data collection sessions three times per week for 50 minutes. The data were collected and analyzed in Arabic because it is the first language of the participants and the researcher. This decision was made to enable the participant children to express their views and interests. According to Roulston (2010), when interviewing participants in a language different from the representation language, it is crucial to point out the stage of the translation. Thus, in this research, the data collection and analysis were undertaken in Arabic, while the findings were written in English. This section presents the phases of the data collection process. It has been divided into three phases: introducing data collection process, collecting data, and concluding the process.
Phase 1: Introducing the data collection process

According to Yin (2009), the preparation of the data collection process is a critical step in the project process. Preparation involves considering ethical practices, planning confidentiality, and acknowledging power differentials (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). This step also includes consideration of practices such as asking good questions, being a good listener, and being sensitive and responsive (Yin, 2009). Moreover, establishing a positive rapport with the participating children before the data collection process is crucial (Clark, 2005; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). Interactions between the researcher and children play a key role in encouraging children to express themselves and share their thoughts (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011; Freeman, & Mathison, 2009).

Before the actual data collection process, the researcher visited the classroom for several days during center time. These informal visits totaled three visits over a week. The informal visits allowed the researcher to establish a relationship with the children and the classroom teacher. These informal visits helped the researcher to become familiar with the classroom routines and the classroom language. I had the opportunity to visit different centers in the classroom, and to engage in different activities with most of the children, yet I also considered the privacy of children’s play. I joined children only when I felt welcomed; at other times I observed their play. By the end of the acclimatization week, most of the children in the classroom were familiar with my presence; some would initiate conversations.

As noted earlier, the motivation behind the informal visits was primarily to build a positive relationship before establishing the data collection process. On the first day of the informal visits, the classroom teacher explained to the children the reason behind my attendance.
I introduced myself as a student researcher who is interested in learning about children’s thoughts regarding the activities in their kindergarten classroom. The classroom teacher introduced the definition of the term research to the children, clarifying the researcher’s position within the classroom. This was important, because defining unfamiliar terms is essential when establishing a partnership with the participants (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011).

After the preparation period, an informal introductory interview took place between the researcher and each child participant. The researcher asked participating children for their assents and explained the role of their participation in the project. These meetings took place in the classroom, library center during center time. The researcher interviewed each child participant individually. This decision was made to give each participant personal space and time to express his or her thoughts (Coad, & Lewis, 2004).

In the introductory interview, children were given more information about the purpose of the research in simplified language (Cameron, 2005; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). The children were invited to participate in the research by taking active roles in the data collection process. Each child participant was informed that his/her participation in the data collection process included one day of photo-taking, one interview to view and discuss his/her own photographs, and two sessions of drawing. Then, the researcher asked each child participant whether he or she wished to participate. Participating children were told that their parent’s approval did not mean they must participate (Coad, & Lewis, 2004; Fredman, & Mathison, 2009). They were also informed that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time, if they wished, and without any consequences.

After gaining the participant child’s assent, the researcher demonstrated how to use the research camera and explained the rules for using it. This included the invitation to take
photographs of anything in the classroom except for people, such as peers or teachers. This regulation was adopted for cultural reasons. The researcher assumed that in a conservative society such as Saudi Arabia, it would be challenging to convince schools and families to participate if their personal photos were included.

The researcher showed the children simple photography techniques, by seeing a black screen right after hearing the click, to ensure the capturing of their photographs. Moreover, the researcher gave the participating children information about the expected duration of time they could use and keep the research camera. The researcher clarified to the participants that the research camera should be returned to the researcher (Cameron, 2005). This introductory interview ended with equipping the child participant with the research camera. Some of the participating children had asked for more information about the techniques of using the camera; others told me they are familiar with photographing using digital cameras.

The research camera was a small, digital, dark blue, Canon, which was chosen so that the children could easily operate it. The camera included features such as automatic focus, flash, simple manual zoom, and quick battery recharge. It provided high quality images and saved the photographs in folders based on the date. The researcher equipped the non-participating children with a camera of the same colour, shape, and size, which was less expensive, and thus had lower resolution. The classroom teacher took responsibility for the classroom camera.

**Phase 2: Collecting the data**

This phase of data collection started in the second week, following the preparation phase. The researcher was involved in managing the data collection process by attending every session of data collection. This was important because the researcher answered participant’s inquiries
and interviewed them. After equipping a participant with the research camera, the researcher invited another participant to the photo interview.

As noted earlier, obtaining the children’s assents did not occur in one sitting. Instead, the researcher held the informal, introductory interview with each participant in the library center during center time. When the child participant agreed to participate, the researcher then equipped him or her with the research camera. This means the assent process took place right before the photo-taking task. The researcher adopted this strategy in order to avoid the waiting period between the participant child’s assent and the actual participation. Participating children expressed immediate interest in participation; thus, it was more compelling to follow their enthusiasm with the participation opportunity. On each day of photographing, the researcher assigned one participant child to use the research camera. Participating children had never had any experience with using a camera inside the classroom; thus, assigning one child to use the camera was more appropriate. Each participant was invited to take photographs within the classroom setting. On the following day, the participant child was invited by the researcher to view his or her photos and discuss them.

The two drawing sessions were held after the photographs and photo-elicitation interviews. These took place on two different days for 30 minutes each. All the children in the classroom were invited to participate. Afterwards, the six children who were research participants were invited to share their comments on their drawings. These drawing discussions were conducted individually in the library center. Below is a table that provides an overview of the research data collection in relation to the data sources. This is followed by a detailed presentation of the data collection process.
Table 3. Overview of the Data Sources & Data Collection Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources &amp; Collection Process</th>
<th>Photographs</th>
<th>Photo-elicitation Interviews</th>
<th>Drawing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In the classroom;</td>
<td>- In the classroom;</td>
<td>Session #1:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- During center time for 50 minutes;</td>
<td>- During center time for 50 minutes;</td>
<td>- Group task;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One child per day;</td>
<td>- Following the day of photo taking;</td>
<td>- At the table in the classroom;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- No photographs of people;</td>
<td>- One child per day;</td>
<td>- During transition time for 30 minutes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Prompt: take photos of what you like-except people- in the classroom.</td>
<td>- At the library center;</td>
<td>- Prompt: Draw self and peers in the classroom setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Interview protocol:</td>
<td>Session #2:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Can you tell me about this photo?</td>
<td>- Group task;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Can you tell me what center activity you were doing in the photo?</td>
<td>- At the table in the classroom;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What center activities do you like the most?</td>
<td>- During transition time for 30 minutes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• If you had a free choice to do whatever you want in center-time what would you do?</td>
<td>- Prompt: Draw self and teacher in the classroom setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Is there anything else you would like to tell me?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Is there anything you would like to ask me?</td>
<td>Comments:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- In the classroom;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- At the library center for 3-5 minutes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Same day of the drawing sessions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Each child commented on his/ her picture individually;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Prompt: Tell me about your picture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Photographs

As noted earlier, the photo-taking process was managed by assigning the research camera to one participant child for the 50 minutes period of center time. On the first day of data collection, participating children and non-participants asked questions about their turn to use the camera. They were assured that everyone would have a turn to use one of the two cameras. By the third day of data collection, children were engaged in the activities in each center, without expressing any concerns about their turn. This might be attributed to their trust that they would have their chance to use the camera, or that the camera became a familiar part of the classroom context (Eide & Winger 2005).

It was essential to discuss some ground rules with the participants before using the research camera. In turn, participating children showed respect for our agreements about the research camera restrictions, such as excluding peers and teachers from the photographs and returning the camera to the researcher. On the first two days of data collection, participating children asked for assistance in deleting or checking photographs. However, by the second week, children shared their knowledge and experience with one another. Participating children were engaged in conversations about the camera, its instructions, and rules. For instance, after obtaining a participant child’s assent, and as I started to explain the camera’s instructions, the child told me that he knew the rules. He continued to say, “I know am not allowed to take photos of my peers or the teacher.” Some participating children took fewer photographs because they were engaged in activities such as drawings or building blocks. They, thus, would put the camera aside or in their pockets and take it out when they were ready to take more photos.
Photo elicitation interviews

Individual interviews about the photographs were conducted with the six children who were participating in the research. Interviews took place on the following day of the photographing task. During center time, the researcher would invite one participant child to view his or her photographs. The library center was selected to be the location for the interviews because it is the quietest corner in the classroom and a familiar space for the child participant (Cameron, 2005). In the library center, there were two large pillows and one comfortable chair; such a choice of furniture played a key role in minimizing the size difference between the researcher and the child (Clark, 2005; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). I always chose to sit on one of the pillows, so that the child participant could choose between sitting on a chair or pillow. It was necessary that the participating children do not relate the researcher to an authority figure, which might affect their comfort and limit their narrative responses (Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). Thus, I avoided sitting behind a desk or on a chair.

After the participant child was seated, the researcher reminded him or her about the reason behinds the discussion (Eide & Winger 2005). I explained that this was an invitation to view the photographs and discuss them. I also showed the participant the audio recorder and invited him or her to explore it. The photographs were viewed from the researcher’s tablet device, which was a practical and economical choice. The researcher had prepared questions to prompt the interview and to maintain the child’s attention. The following questions were used for the interview protocol:

- Can you tell me about this photo?
- Can you tell me what center activity you were doing in the photo?
- What center activities do you like the most?
• If you had a free choice to do whatever you want in center time what would you do?
• Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
• Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Although I prepared and posed these questions, participants were given time and space to bring up topics of their choice (Clark, 2001, 2010). The fact that each participant was invited to handle the tablet device while viewing his or her photographs afforded them more comfort and power to direct the discussion (Einarsdottir, 2010). Some participants were verbally explicit about their feelings; others represented their ideas in implicit ways, such as ignoring some of my questions or confronting a question with silence. Following are some examples of responses to one of my comments during the photo-elicitation interviews,

**Researcher:** So let’s start with this photograph:

*Nada:* No, I want to see the next one.

*Majed:* I want to delete this photograph; I do not like it.

*Salem:* I want to show you another photograph; it is a photo of my drawing.

**Drawings**

In this research, drawing was introduced as a group task, meaning that every child in the classroom was invited to participate at the same time on the same day. The researcher took responsibility for managing the participating children’s group, and the classroom teacher was in charge of the non-participant group. This task took place on two different days, right after lunch, which is a transition period that the children usually spend drawing. This choice of time allowed children to draw in a familiar routine and context (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). The researcher supplied the participating children with drawing paper and markers. Children were
informed that the researcher would take their drawings, but she would provide each participant with a copy of his or her own drawings on the following day.

The drawing topics given to the children were mainly to investigate the second research question. In session one, the researcher invited children to draw themselves and their peers within the school settings. Two children expressed their discomfort, saying that drawing a school is too difficult and complicated. Thus, I suggested they draw themselves and peers in any location of their choice. In this research site, children play through drawing more than playing on the playground. For most of the children, drawing is a free activity since the classroom teacher seldom intervenes in their drawing worlds. I anticipated that these children might be concerned with the possibility of receiving an adult’s judgment of their drawing abilities (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). Thus, I was thoughtful about my comments, giving the participating children space and time to draw any pictures of their choice. In session two, the researcher invited the children to draw themselves and the teacher within the school environment. On this day, the children received the invitation with more interest and were more engaged in the drawing task. To overcome the misinterpretation of the children’s drawings, the researcher spent several minutes with each participant to discuss the content of his or her drawings individually (Coad, & Lewis, 2004).

**Phase 3: Concluding the data collection process**

A collection of the children’s photographs, photo-elicitation interviews, drawings and comments were gathered over a period of four weeks. I concluded my visits to the site by giving each participant a copy of his/her drawings along with a thank-you letter.
Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is an iterative process that allows the researcher to produce trustworthy findings (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). According to Merriam (1998), in qualitative research, data collection and analysis are interwoven. In the present research, the preliminary analysis started along with the first interview, while the secondary analysis took place after collecting all the photographs, photo-elicitation interviews, drawings, and comments. The data analysis became more intensive once all the data were collected.

Preliminary analysis

During my data collection, I wrote comments about the process of the data collection of each day in my research journal right after I left the classroom. I also downloaded and viewed the collected photographs for each child participant. The interviews were transcribed on the same day that they took place. I organized the data into folders, making both an electronic copy and a hardcopy. I used Microsoft Word© to transcribe, dividing each transcript document into two sections: one for the conversation and another for commentary. I wrote initial comments and tentative codes in the paper of each transcribed interview. This phase of analysis primarily helped me to rethink the wording of some of the questions I posed when interviewing the children (Roulston, 2010).

Secondary analysis

Merriam (1998) describes data analysis as a process of making meanings, whereby the researcher discovers what the data means within the context of the proposed research question. In this phase of data analysis, the information gathered about the case was organized and investigated together (Merriam, 1998). I utilized the constant comparative method to analyze the data (Merriam, 1998; Roulston, 2010). The construction of categories and subcategories took
place after the coding process. I started with constructing categories for each piece of data, and then looked at them in relation to one another (Roulston, 2010). The analysis shifted between inductive and deductive thought. I moved back and forth between considerations of the purpose of the research, the collected data, and the framework (Merriam, 1998). I looked for commonalities among the data and considered the topics raised by the participants (Roulston, 2010). Some categories emerged prior to the analysis, constructed from the research purpose and framework, whereas others emerged during the study, specifically from the collected data (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafi, 2003). This means these categories included not only topics considered prior to the research, but also topics brought up by the participating children (Clark, 2005; Harcourt, Perry, & Waller, 2011). Following is a conceptual map that illustrates the combined categories and subcategories of the data sources (Figure 2). I then provide a detailed description of the analysis of each data source.
The photographs were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Roulston, 2010). The six participating children created 174 digital photographs. Each participant child had been invited to use the research camera for 50 minutes during the data collection process. During the preliminary analysis, I downloaded and saved the photographs of the participants on my computer into my personal account in the Dropbox© application. Only photographs that included human subjects were deleted. This editing process removed 4 out of the 174 photographs.

For the analysis, I printed off some of the photographs; however, I continued the analysis using the electronic copies. This decision attributed to the high colour quality and resolution of
the electronic copies. It has also enabled the researcher to have multiple electronic folders, and to place the same photograph across different categories. Many of the photographs were placed in more than one category, depending on the complexity of meanings in each photograph. In the current research, the photographs facilitated the interviews and also helped children express their ideas of the stories behind the photographs. All the categories were developed through inquiring into the photo-elicitation interview response categories along with examining the contents of the photographs (Clark, 2005). The photos not discussed by the participants were also included in the analysis, considering that photographs are a medium that express their views and perspectives (Einarsdottir, 2010).

As noted earlier, the photos were utilized as both a facilitator of the interviewing process and as a data source. Along with the photo-elicitation interview response categories, other categories emerged to represent the non-verbal language in the children’s photographs. This process took time and thought as I went back and forth between the photographs and the photo-elicitation interview response categories. The final categories that emerged were: (1) peers, social interaction and affiliation; (2) home, family members and experiences; (3) physical perspective; (4) preferences, (5) notions of learning, official worlds and unofficial worlds; (6) gender identity; (7) learner identity; (8) role of the educator; and (9) secret places.

The category of children’s preferences, gender identity, and learner identity emerged from the children’s responses in the photo-elicitation interviews. The other categories, including notions of learning, role of the educator in the classroom, secret places, home, and peers emerged from both the contents of the photos and children’s responses in the photo-elicitation interview categories. The physical perspectives category arose through the examination of the photographs. I adopted the physical perspectives category from a Master of Arts thesis research study (White,
that investigated young children learning within nature using photographs as a main data source.

Table 4. Photograph Categories & Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photograph Categories and Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical perspective</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preferences</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notions of learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Official Worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unofficial Worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender Identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learner Identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of the educator in the classroom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secret places</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5. Examples of Children’s Photographs Placed under One or More Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s Photographs</th>
<th>Categories &amp; Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Image](https://example.com/image1) | **Physical perspective:** Salem was experimenting the research camera looking from up to down.  

**Social interaction:** non-participating children invited Salem to take this photograph of their finished work. |
| ![Image](https://example.com/image2) | **Secret places:** this shelf is a hidden place in the classroom and I considered it as a secret place.  

**Physical perspective:** the photograph also represents a different camera angle or physical perspective of the participant. |
| ![Image](https://example.com/image3) | **Social interaction and affiliation:** Leena took this photograph upon request from a non-participating peer. It also presents the finished work of a peer. |

**Photo-elicitation interviews**

There were six photo-elicitation interviews, one for each child. Each interview took between 12 and 16 minutes. The interview transcripts were examined and categorized using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009; Roulston, 2010). In this phase of analysis, the interviews had already been transcribed; thus, the analysis involved studying each transcript along with its photographs. I started the process by highlighting the relevant information in each
transcript using a coding strategy. The theoretical framework and the purpose of the study played
critical roles in framing the coding system (Roulston, 2010). However, when developing the
codes in each interview, I considered the context of the study and the perspectives held by the
participants.

The continuous visits to the transcripts enabled the researcher to connect codes to one
another and view categories in a more holistic manner. The resulting categories and
subcategories that emerged from this process were: (1) peers, social interaction and affiliation (2)
home, family members and experiences; (3) preferences; (4) wishes; (5) gender identity; (6)
learner identity; (7) role of the educator; (8) notions of learning, official worlds and unofficial
worlds; and (9) secret places.

Some of the categories and subcategories shown in Table 6 emerged from the topics
raised by the children, while others were influenced by the questions posed by the researcher.
The categories raised by the children include: peers, home, notion of learning, secret places, role
of educator in the classroom and gender identity; whereas preferences, wishes, and learner
identity were primarily influenced by the researcher’s questions.

Table 6. Photo-elicitation Interview Response Categories & Subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo-elicitation Interview Response Categories and Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parents &amp; Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56
Photo-elicitation Interview Response
Categories and Subcategories

Gender Identity

Learner Identity

Role of the educator in the classroom

Notions of learning

- Official Worlds
- Unofficial Worlds

Table 7. Examples of Children’s Interview Responses Placed under One or More Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s Photo-elicitation Interview Responses</th>
<th>Categories &amp; Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leena: This is in the cognitive center. When we are there, we have to focus, so that we learn how to count.</td>
<td>Learner Identity: Leena shared her understanding of being a learner in a particular context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher: What about the other peers? Asma: I don’t know. It is annoying to be with them. Researcher: So, do you work in a team with Salem, Majed, and Maryam? Asma: No, we all help Salem. Researcher: How do you decide what kind of construction you are going to build? Asma: Salem decides and we just hand him the blocks. He does not tell us the plan. Researcher: So who builds? Asma: Salem Researcher: Aha, So you all help him by bringing blocks to the rug! Asma: See this photograph, my friend Noha made this.</td>
<td>Social affiliation: Asma’s affiliation to this group of peers is obvious in her response. She declared her interest in playing with Majed, Maryam and Salem. Preferences: Asma is interested in building blocks in the construction center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yusuf: This is in the cognitive center. I like the puzzle of the boy with the yoyo because I like to play yoyo but my mom do not like it. She says I once hurt myself and my sister so no need to play with it.</td>
<td>Family: Yusuf recalled an experience that happened at home with family members. Preferences: Yusuf likes to play with yoyo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Drawings

The drawing tasks were the last data collected and analyzed. Following the drawing sessions and individual conversation with the participating children about their drawings, the researcher wrote a narrative that described the content of each drawing along with the child’s comments on his or her own drawings. The purpose of including drawings in this research was to learn about the children’s perceptions of their position as learners within the classroom. The drawing analysis thus considered only the meanings in the drawings, rather than taking a developmental stance (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). In order to develop codes, I looked for the meanings in each drawing and in the child’s comments on his or her drawings. I also considered the social context of children’s drawings by considering the fact that the children drew in groups (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). This, in turn, likely influenced the ways in which participants responded to the drawing tasks (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009; Hopperstad, 2008). The constant comparative method suggested eight categories, including: (1) peers, social interaction and affiliation; (2) role of the educator; (3) notions of learning, official worlds and unofficial worlds; (4) gender identity, (5) learner identity, (6) family, (7) play, and (8) nature.

Although I invited children to draw themselves within the classroom setting, the majority drew themselves and their peers in outdoor environments. The categories of gender identity, family, play, nature, and notion of learning emerged from the meanings children conveyed in their drawings. The following categories: learner identity and role of educator in the classroom represent the topic given to the participants. The category of peers arose from both the meanings in children’s drawings and the topic given by the researcher.

Table 8. Drawing Categories & Subcategories
Drawing Categories and Subcategories

Peers
- Social Interaction
- Social Affiliation

Role of educator in the classroom

Notions of learning
- Official Worlds
- Unofficial Worlds

Gender identity

Learner identity

Family

Play

Nature

Table 9. Examples of Children’s Drawings Placed under One or More Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children’s Drawings &amp; Comments</th>
<th>Categories &amp; Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Image](Salem: This is the classroom teacher, Majed, Ali, Norah, and I. We are playing outside.)</td>
<td>Social interaction: Salem included peers in this drawing even though this was in drawing session#2, where children were invited to draw self and teacher. Gender identity: Salem drew the teacher and Norah with long hair while the boys were drawn with shorter haircut. Preferences: the participant chose to draw an outdoor environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Children’s Drawings & Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Majed: That’s me and Salem with our mothers at the shopping mall.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family: Majed drew self and his mother in a shopping mall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social affiliation: He chose to draw Salem and to include Salem’s mother in the drawing even though he did not draw a school context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leena: This is the teacher, and I standing beside her, and my friends over there, we are all in the classroom. The teacher is teaching us. Look, this is the projector and the screen. I drew three friends because I did not have enough space to draw everyone else.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of the educator: teacher as authority figure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner identity: the children are portrayed as passive listeners in this picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notions of learning: the child associated learning with the official world and traditional teaching materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction: Leena drew some peers even though children were asked to draw self and the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social affiliation: the rainbow in Leena’s picture was seen among many of the other children’s drawings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary

This chapter presented the process of data collection and analysis. The data collection process started with the informal visits to the site, followed by obtaining the children’s verbal assents, and then equipping them with the research camera. Each child participant was invited to view his or her photographs and discuss them with the researcher in the classroom during center time. The final step in data collection process was the drawing tasks and comments, which took
place on two different days. I started the preliminary analysis during the data collection process.

When the data collection process was completed, the secondary analysis was established. The researcher presented the emerged categories from each data source, providing examples from children’s data.
Chapter Five

Results and Discussion

The purpose of the research was to listen to children’s views of their classroom activities, with the purpose of learning about kindergarten children’s preferences and wishes, and the children’s perception of themselves as learners in the classroom. Children were invited to bring topics of their choice to the discussions. In this chapter, I suggest five themes that arose from the categories and subcategories of the analysis across all data sources.

![Figure 3. From Categories to Themes](image)

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The findings of the study are interconnected in many aspects, and each piece of data presents multiple and complex meanings. That is, the themes were not related to only one specific data source. Furthermore, I present the five themes in separate points for the sake of clarity. It is worth noting that in the Saudi context, asking children to give their input or share their views is not a culturally supported practice. This means that some children might never have been asked to share their views; thus, responding to such questions might be an unfamiliar practice to them. However, because this research utilized more than the verbal medium, it enabled many children to express their feelings and thoughts also through visual media.

Table 10. Overview of the Five Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Data Analysis Category</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Examples from Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1: Preferring open-ended activities and the outdoor environment</strong></td>
<td>Preferences and wishes</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>Asma’s picture of the playground (Figure.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo-elicitation interviews</td>
<td>Asma’s interests in the construction center. (p.p 72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drawing session#1 and drawing comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 2: Constructing gender identity and learner identity</strong></td>
<td>Learner identity</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>Leena’s views of the car in the construction center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender identity</td>
<td>Photo-elicitation interviews</td>
<td>(Figure.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of educator</td>
<td>Drawing sessions#1 &amp; 2 and drawing comments</td>
<td>Children as capable learners in the unofficial worlds (Figure.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notions of learning (official worlds)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3: Experimenting with perspective</strong></td>
<td>Physical perspective</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>Yusuf and the yellow pillow (Figure. 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secret places</td>
<td>Photo-elicitation interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notions of learning (unofficial worlds)</td>
<td>Drawing session#1 &amp; 2 and drawing comments</td>
<td>Salem’s integration of imaginary world with reality (Figure.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Data Analysis Category</td>
<td>Data Source</td>
<td>Examples from Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Negotiating and managing social relationships</td>
<td>Peers (social interaction &amp; social affiliation)</td>
<td>Photographs, Photo-elicitation interviews, Drawing session#1&amp;2 and drawing comments</td>
<td>Asma’s role in the construction center. (p.p 81) Salem’s integration of imaginary world with reality (Figure.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: Bridging home to school.</td>
<td>Home (parents, siblings &amp; experiences)</td>
<td>Photographs, Photo-elicitation interviews, Drawing session#1 and drawing comments</td>
<td>Majed and the shopping mall (Figure.13) Salem in the farm (Figure.14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first theme presents children’s preferences and wishes among the activities in their kindergarten classroom. Children’s preferences and wishes are articulated in two main aspects: (1) children’s interests in open-ended activities such as drawing, building blocks, and playing different roles; (2) the outdoor environment, in particular, the playground. The participating children’s preferences and wishes are connected to their past and present experiences, whether at home or in previous childcare settings. The second theme in this study is the ongoing construction of children’s gender and learner identity. Within this theme, children shared their perceptions of self as a learner, and as a boy or a girl. Participating children’s perceptions of their roles and identity are seen to be supported by the Saudi culture.

In the third theme, I present the different perspectives through which children played and experimented during center time. The data reveal how the children view and experience center time differently from adults. The fourth theme reflects children’s interests in the social world. I provide examples whereby children negotiated and managed their social relationships throughout
the data collection process. In addition, the research camera played a critical role in mediating children’s social relationships. In the fifth theme, I present how children bridged their home and school experiences during center time and the data collection process. Children brought up topics related their family, home experiences and memories.

**Theme 1: Preferring Open-ended Activities and the Outdoor Environment**

Across the data sources, children shared their preferences and wishes. During the photo-elicitation interviews, children shared their preferences regarding the activities in their classroom, and they listed activities they wished to have in the centers. While some children were explicit orally, others expressed their wishes through photography and drawings. For instance, children drew themselves and their peers in outdoor environments, adding many nature elements and referring to play as their happy moments. The commonality across the data was articulated in two main aspects: children’s interest in open-ended activities and the outdoor environment.

**Open-ended activities**

As shown in Table 11, children referred to certain activities as their favourite activities, including building blocks, painting, drawing and dramatic play. This shows the extent to which children prefer and enjoy the unofficial open-ended activities. Moreover, the children chose activities that provided them with opportunities to socialize, such as building blocks and dramatic play. Children’s wishes also reflected their interest in media materials, nature, animals, and pretend play. These findings are consistent with Dyson’s work (1989, 1997) in which she discussed how the children in her studies brought into the classroom their interests in popular culture, even when such topics were not encouraged by the teacher or included in the formal school education. The open-ended activities and the outdoor environment are part of the
participating children’s unofficial worlds. These unofficial worlds, in turn, offer the children opportunities to make meanings of their world, declare themselves as members of the childhood culture, and make connection between their individual experiences (Dyson, 1989, 1997).

Table 11. Examples of Children’s Preferences and Wishes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Preferred Activity</th>
<th>Wishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Majed</td>
<td>“I like building blocks the most.”</td>
<td>“I wish if we could have new things in the centers. When I was in KG2 the teacher use to bring things such as doctor’s kit and teaching stuff so that we play the teacher’s role. It was so much fun back in KG2.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asma</td>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>“I wish I could bring my math board games from home. And if we had animals in the playground; real ones like a cat, giraffe and tiny dinosaur.” “I would love it if we had farm center instead of the house. And to have many cars in the center.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leena</td>
<td>Painting and playing in the kitchen center.</td>
<td>“Doctor’s kit, farm, house to sleep in it, or we just pretend we’re sleeping. Sewing machine to pretend we sew.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Nada        | Drawing and doing puzzles                 | “I wish if we had Ariel the little
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Preferred Activity</th>
<th>Wishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mermaid doll and Barbie doll.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I like to be a princess.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>“I don’t know what I like to have. Whatever.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yusuf</td>
<td>“I used to like building blocks more but now I like drawing”</td>
<td>“I like puzzles”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outdoor environment**

In the following drawings, children shared their interest in the outdoor environment, specifically, the school’s playground, even when they were asked to draw themselves within the classroom setting (Figure 4). The integration of various data sources gave the children spaces and avenues to express themselves and their ideas without boundaries. While the photographs were limited to the classroom environment, drawings offered the children opportunities to move beyond the classroom setting. Learning about children’s views and opinions can tell adults a great deal about children’s worlds (Eide & Winger, 2005).
Asma: This is a slide in the school’s playground, but it is located in the older children’s playground/ primary school building. We are not allowed to go there, but we went once when there was a festival at the school last year.

Salem: This is a picture of my friends and I, playing in the playground; Norah, Abdullah, Sultan, Majed myself, Ahmad,
Theme 2: Constructing Gender Identity and Learner Identity

Cultural beliefs and experiences contribute to children’s construction of identity (Rogoff, 2003). When children were participating in both center time and the data collection process, they were also constructing their identities and constructing meanings of the world. Their views toward what they like, dislike, and wish to have, are part of their identities (Dyson, 1989, 1997).

Gender identity

According to Eide and Winger (2005), a child’s role in constructing his/her identity depends on the ability to identify which roles are expected in which settings. Children learn about cultural expectations from a very young age, situating themselves in their society (Browne, 2004; MacNaughton, 2000; Rogoff, 2003). The following example presents a child’s understanding of her gender-supported role and identity within the Saudi context. It also tackles the notion of media material appropriation.

Figure 4. Examples of Drawings Conveying Children’s Interest in the Outdoor Environment

Figure 5. Photograph Captured by Leena in the Construction Center

Transcript for Figure 5:
Leena: Salem built this place, and someone helped him out. He brought the car too. He only let the people he likes to drive the car.

Researcher: And who drives this car?

Leena: Boys, Saleh, Ahmad or anyone who likes cars

Researcher: How about girls do they get to drive?

Leena: No, girls do not like cars

Researcher: Why?

Leena: Because (thinking for few seconds) Do you know the movie Cars?

Researcher: Yes, I know that movie

Leena: Girls do not like it. Only boys like to watch that movie

Researcher: So, girls don’t get to drive?

Leena: No, but they can build things like houses

Researcher: Is there anything else that you think girls don’t like?

Leena: Yes, girls don’t like Spiderman

Researcher: How about boys? Is there anything they don’t like?

Leena: I think boys like art center. I see Majed and Salem there a lot. They like to mix colours and paint. I have only seen a boy in the house center once.

In this example, the child participant shared her knowledge of the expected gender role and identity in Saudi society. She constructed these meanings from her experiences (Dyson, 1997; Gallas, 1998; Rogoff, 2003). When the researcher asked her to give reasons for her perception of girls’ ability and interest in driving, she appropriated popular media material to demonstrate and justify her thoughts (Dyson, 1989, 1997). Her reference to the animation film, Cars, indicates how children appropriate available cultural resources to answer others in the
social world (Dyson, 1997). Although this participant referred to media that does not reflect the meanings in her culture, this media material is an available resource in her environment (Dyson, 1997; Gallas, 1998). Therefore, Leena, who lives in the only country in which women are not allowed to drive, saw the film *Cars* as a boys-only film. She did not receive the message from popular culture passively; rather, she appropriated meanings from the film and reframed them within her everyday experiences (Dyson, 1997; MacNaughton, 2000). In addition, her declaration of the absence of boys in the house or kitchen center led me to revisit the data from boys, in which I noticed that none of the participating boys mentioned the house center in his discussion or photographs. This drew my attention to the significance of the silent voice. When participating children ignored a center, activity, question, or request, they were voicing their views silently (Gallas, 1998).

Children also shared their perceptions about gendered identity through drawings. Participating children drew girls having long hair while boys were drawn with shorter hair (Figure 4 and 11). In this research, the cultural assumptions toward gender have raised many questions concerning current and future gender equity within the Saudi context. It is noted in the literature that the positive reinforcement and rewards children receive from society toward particular behaviour contribute in forming their gendered identities (Grossman & Grossman, 1994). As in this case, children adopt the roles that are acceptable by their societies, seeking affiliation and belonging.

**Learner identity**

Children from a very young age construct their views of themselves as learners within the school environment (Dyson, 1997). In the current study, participating children shared their understanding of their positions as learners within the classroom. They also shared their
understandings of the role of the educator who was, in many cases, seen as an authority figure with full control of the learning process. The following photographs show the extent to which children associated learning with traditional teaching materials and methods. I also present examples where children defined themselves as capable learners.

Yusuf: This is the projector screen. It is for the teacher to teach us lessons. She shows us pictures of different things and teaches us their names.

Yusuf: This is the teacher’s chair. It’s only for work; she sits there to work at the computer.

Leena: This is in the cognitive center. When we are there, we have to focus, so that we learn how to count.
The term learning was associated mostly with traditional teaching materials and methods, including activities planned by the teacher. The term learning in relation to center time was used only in relation to the cognitive center’s activities. Most activities in the cognitive center are structured activities, such as counting, tracing, and copying. The participating children shared their notions of learning inside the classroom, referring to their experiences in the school context (Singal & Swann, 2011). In addition, when the participating children were invited to draw themselves and the classroom teacher, most of their drawings were located inside the classroom, and included traditional teaching materials. In contrast, when children were invited to draw themselves and their peers, their drawings were located outside the classroom, particularly, in the playground.

*Salem: These are our notebooks.
And, there it is, the teacher’s stuff: we are not allowed to use them.

Figure 6. Photographs Captured by Different Participants of Traditional Teaching Materials
Leena: This is the teacher, and I standing beside her, and my friends over there, we are all in the classroom. The teacher is teaching us. Look, this is the projector and the screen. I drew three friends because I did not have enough space to draw everyone else.

Figure 7. Leena’s Picture in the Second Drawing Session

The drawing in Figure 7 includes the classroom teacher figure drawn with a darker marker, emphasizing the role of the teacher inside the classroom. The child participant who drew the above picture had drawn the teacher giving a lesson inside the classroom, using a projector and screen to deliver information. The children, in contrast, were sitting and listening silently to the teacher. This finding aligns with the results of research by Singal and Swann (2011), in which the participants linked the practice of learning inside the classroom to passive listening to the teacher. This picture conveys how the participant viewed her role inside the classroom as well the educators’ role.
Although the children associated the notion of learning with traditional learning materials, they proved that they are capable and competent learners in their unofficial activities. Whenever children drew a picture or built a construction, they shared their finished work with one another. Participating children took photos of their finished work and discussed them during the photo-elicitation interviews. Their perspectives on their work are a representation of their views on themselves as capable learners and meaning-makers (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). In this research, children shared their accomplishments and success stories. The photographs in Figure 8 are examples of photos taken by the participants of their own work.

Nada: *This is my drawing. I took a picture of it. This me, my brother, any my friend’s mother.*

Asma: *I did this. I sorted them starting from largest to smallest.*

Figure 8. Photographs Captured by Different Participants of their Own Finished Work
Theme 3: Experimenting with Perspectives

The photographs taken by the participants reveal the variety of ways children experience center time, and are taken from different levels (at their eye-level or from above or below). The different camera positions and physical perspectives are seen across the photographs. Children took photos of areas, materials, and spaces that are not usually noticeable or visible to adults. Moreover, children did not only experience center time in many levels, but they were also keen to experience the research camera by using it differently. I spotted children who were purposefully using the camera upside down to take pictures. This finding proposes that children experience their classroom worlds in multiple ways. Seeing the classroom from the eyes of the child opens adults’ eyes to children’s world (Eide, & Winger, 2005). It also makes adults reconsider their ideas and beliefs toward early childhood practices (Eide, & Winger, 2005).

Figure 9. Photograph Captured by Yusuf in the Construction Center

Transcript for Figure 9:

Researcher: Could you tell me about this photograph?
Yusuf: It is a pillow, I take a nap there!
Researcher: Where in the classroom?
Yusuf: In the blocks center

Researcher: So, is it there for nap time?

Yusuf: No, I am the only one who uses it to take a nap during the day.”

The pillow in Yusuf’s world (Figure 9) is a space to relax even though it is in the construction center. It shows how adults’ views of the construction center differ from a child’s point of view. This finding also suggests that there is no single, authentic child perspective; rather, each child in this classroom might view the construction center differently (Eide, & Winger, 2005).

In addition, the participants’ photographs indicated how the children explore their environments, experiment with objects, and see things through multiple lenses. Looking into the classroom from the child eye level is a way of listening to children’s voices in schools (Clark, & Moss, 2005). The photographs presented in Figure 10 show the different physical perspectives children utilized when taking photographs.

Drawing was another medium that conveyed the many worlds of the children’s experiences in the classroom. A child participant drew the following picture in the second session of drawing (Figure. 11). The participant chose to draw in an outdoor environment and include some peers. Figure 11 reflects the child’s interest in the social and imaginary world. Despite the fact that rainfall is rare in the chosen location of this research, many of the children drew rain and rainbows. Most of these children might have never seen a real rainbow in their lives. It is probable that the children appropriated the rainbow from media materials or peers, and then reframed it within their imaginations.
Figure 10. Examples of Photographs Showed Different Physical Perspectives
Salem: This is the classroom teacher, Majed, Ali, Norah, and I. We are playing outside.

Figure 11. Salem’s Picture in the Second Drawing Session

According to Dyson (1997), children integrate the imagined world with reality to make meanings and establish social connections. In addition, children in this research drew in the company of their peers, influencing each other’s drawings (Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009). This was visible in the second drawing session, in which many of the children included rainbows in their pictures. Moreover, participating children who drew in the same group did not only include rainbows in their pictures, but also drew similar school buildings. This drawing in figure 11 also conveyed children’s interests in social affiliation and their understanding of gendered identity. The above data shows that within the classroom’s setting, participating children experience different worlds and many perspectives.

Theme 4: Negotiating and Managing Social Relationships

In the present study, children’s interest in the social world is seen across all centers and data sources. The socialization aspect is the motivation behinds participants’ photographs, discussions, and drawings. During the data collection process, children established, managed,
and negotiated their social connections. Moreover, the camera served as a medium that facilitated the establishment and promotion of social connections between the children. Participating children took photographs of their peers’ finished work. Alternatively, non-participants requested participating children to take photos of their finished work. Although participants were restricted from taking photographs of their peers, they took photographs that captured part of their peers’ bodies such as photos of hands or feet. These photographing requests assisted the children in establishing and negotiating their relations with one another.

In addition, children shared information in relation to photography skills and the research camera’s instructions with one another. During data collection process, some children offered help to the participant with the research camera, such as showing the participant how to view or delete a photograph. In other cases, some participants went seeking help from an experienced peer instead of the researcher. These practices relate to Vygotsky’s theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where an experienced child scaffolds the learning of a less experienced peer. Figure 12 includes photos taken by participants, showing children engaging in activities or displaying finished work.
Along with the social interaction, participating children brought up topics and issues related to social belonging and affiliation. The following transcript reveals the complex meanings in relation to power, gender, and social affiliation.

**Researcher:** What about the other peers?

**Asma:** I don’t know. It is annoying to be with them.

**Researcher:** So, do you work in a team with Salem, Majed, and Maryam?

**Asma:** No, we all help Salem.

**Researcher:** How do you decide what kind of construction you are going to build?

**Asma:** Salem decides and we just hand him the blocks. He does not tell us the plan.
Researcher: So who builds?

Asma: Salem

Researcher: Aha, So you all help him by bringing blocks to the rug!

Asma: See this photograph, my friend Noha made this.

In the previous transcript, social affiliation and participation was more significant to the child than social power. As Gallas (1998) discussed, girls often seek affiliation through association and support. The child participant also confronted my questioning with silence, and then continued by describing a photo of her choice. Her silence in this case is not empty; rather, it represents meanings and resistance (Lewis, 2010). She was not interested in answering my questions about the same photo and topic.

The following day happened to be Majed’s interview. When Majed brought up his interest in playing at the construction center, I purposefully asked him some questions related social interaction and affiliation.

Majed: I like to play in the construction center because Salem likes me.

Researcher: So who decides what to build?

Majed: Both of us

Researcher: Is there any other peers who join you and Salem in the construction center?

Majed: Yes, some peers help us out.

Research: like who?

Majed: I don’t know. I don’t remember.

Salem is a dominant figure in this research site, and was always seen with Majed. This transcript shows that Majed viewed his engagement in the construction center differently from Asma. He
declared that his interest in the construction center is motivated by his friendship with Salem. Unlike Asma, Majed viewed this relationship with Salem as a partnership since both of them plan and work together. These two discussions drew my attention to this boy’s interest in social power (Gallas, 1998). Yet, the intention of power is not for the sake of power itself, but rather boys use power for social control (Gallas, 1998). The previous example also revealed the boys’ domination of the construction center. This domination, in turn, had diminished Asma’s role and presence in the construction center. Some children, especially girls, require assistance and practice to voice their needs and feelings (Gallas, 1998). Asma shared her interests in building blocks, but her participation in the construction center was controlled by the boys’ domination of the center. Children seek social affiliation and interaction, which might raise issues related power relations and gender equity (Gallas, 1998). Overall, social interest was a major topic among the collected data. Establishing, managing, and negotiating social connections are practices that are inseparable from issues related to power and gender. The collected data reveal the significant role the social factor plays in a child’s development and learning.

**Theme 5: Bridging Home and School**

Participants shared many stories related their families and home experiences. The collected data is evidence that children’s lives outside the school influence their lives inside the school. The prominence of family presence in children’s world has been addressed in Bronfenbrenner’s theory of human development (1979). The following data presents the stories, events, experiences, feelings related to home and family that children brought them up in the photo-elicitation interviews.
Majed: That’s me and Salem with our mothers at the shopping mall.

Salem: I want to show you this picture.

This is me, my mom, my dad, and my little sister, we all went to a farm. But, my sister is still in my mom’s tummy.

She is coming out soon.

Yusuf: This is my hand. I use it in everything. I hold stuff. I cover myself with the blanket. I use it to bring the shoes from the drawer; I do not reach the drawer while standing but I do when jumping.

Sometimes, I bend, and my little sister stands over my back to get her shoes.
Yusuf: *This is in the cognitive center. I like the puzzle of the boy with the yoyo because I like to play yoyo but my mom do not like it. She says I once hurt myself and my sister so no need to play with it.*

Figure 14. Examples of Photographs Linked to Home Experiences

The previous images (Figures 13 and 14) included family members and recall family experiences and feelings. Children brought their past and present experiences, and their beliefs and values to center time and the data. According to Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1979), children’s experiences in the school and at home are interrelated. Children bring up stories related to home and family even when such a practice is not encouraged or supported by the school (Dyson, 1989, 1997).

**Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the qualitative findings of the study which were distilled into five main, interrelated themes. First, children shared their preferences and wishes related the classroom activities through various mediums. Second, children shared their understanding of their gender and learner identities. Third, children played and experimented, during center time, with many perspectives. Fourth, children are interested in the social world. Fifth, children’s lives at home and school are interrelated and influenced by each other. Although the results are organized in separate points, their contents are connected to one another. For instance, children’s
preferences and wishes are woven into their home experiences and motivated by their social world. Children’s gender and learner identities were conveyed in their drawings, photos, and responses to questions. Furthermore, these identities are constructed through the complex messages from home, school, media, and religious institutions. These complex connections are demonstrated in the next chapter. The next chapter presents the conclusions and implications of the study.
Chapter Six  
Conclusion and Implications  

This study was guided by the following research questions:  

1. What are the views and interests of participating Saudi kindergarten children about the learning center activities in their classroom?  
2. What are the Saudi kindergarten children’s perceptions of their roles within the classroom setting?  

The results of the study revealed the following: First, children have preferences among the activities in their classroom. Their preferred activities have been influenced by their experiences in different contexts (Dyson, 1989, 1997). Participating children prefer open-ended activities such as building blocks, painting, drawing, and dramatic play. Moreover, through drawings, children shared their interest in the outdoor environment. Most importantly, many of the children’s views and wishes are shown to be socially motivated (Vygotsky, 1979). This finding contrasts with the current school system in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi kindergarten, open-ended activities are limited to center time and outdoor recess. This is more noticeable in formal education, which begins from grade one onwards, in which informal activities are reduced solely to recess time.  

Second, the utilization of multiple media gave children several avenues of expression and communication. They shared their perspectives verbally, visually, and physically. The different camera positions (eye-levels and points of view) children utilized when taking photographs demonstrates that children experience school differently from adults. This suggests that listening to and involving children in school decision making can open adults’ eyes to learning more about children’s worlds.
The data also reveal the ways participants shared their views of the self in relation to “being a learner,” “being a boy,” or “being a girl,” using verbal and nonverbal media. As Dyson (1997) indicated, in her work, children are not passive absorbers of messages that come from different social environments, but rather, they appropriate diverse but interrelated symbols, and then reframe them within the traditional practices of a particular context. From a sociocultural lens, the meanings that participating children have constructed toward gender and learner identities are supported by the Saudi context. Although these meanings reveal the presence of gender discrimination, they are considered desirable and acceptable meanings in Saudi society.

Bronfenbrenner’s theory of development (1979) asserts the significance of the relationship between home and school on the individual’s development and learning. The participating children’s sharing of stories and events that took place outside the school and with their families show that the children brought their home experiences to school, even when the classroom teacher did not encourage such practices. Connections between home and school have positive effects on the learning and development of the individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When teachers are aware of children’s home experiences and cultures, children will show ability in matching the experiences and expectations that, in turn, may promote their success at school (Singal & Swann, 2011).

Finally, social interest is nested in every piece of data collected in this study. It is revealed in the findings related to the children’s preferences, wishes, home experiences, and perception of the self as learner, and boy or girl. Children’s interest in social interaction and affiliation with others is also visible across the collected data. The children’s ways of socialization in the classroom raise issues related to power relations and gender equity in the classroom setting. Many researchers have discussed the importance of practices that promote
gender equality in the classroom (Browne, 2004; Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro, 2007; Gallas, 1998; MacNaughton, 2000). The children in this study expressed their interest in the social world not only through the photographs, photo-elicitation interviews, or drawings and comments, but also through the ways in which they used the research camera to socialize. The research camera played as a tool that provided them opportunities to establish and negotiate relationships (Vygotsky, 1979).

The purpose of this research was to listen to Saudi children’s views of the learning center activities in their kindergarten classroom. Children’s views revealed the gap between their experiences at school and their interests and experiences outside the school. The findings assert the importance of listening to young children. The data showed that children are capable of participating and sharing their views and ideas even when such practices are not encouraged in their cultural context. According to Rogoff (2003), “People contribute to the creation of cultural process and cultural process contribute to the creation of people” (p. 15). Furthermore, the findings demonstrate the utilization of multiple forms of representations by young children involved in research. This is important because children and adults differ in their ways of expression and thinking (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Finally, listening to children’s ideas and views make adults rethink taken-for-granted assumptions toward education and learning (Eide & Winger, 2005). Listening to children should be an ongoing practice because children’s preferences and views are always changing.

**Strengths and Limitations**

There are both limitations and strengths in this study. The choice of qualitative case study was a major strength in this research because it allowed the researcher to examine the case in its natural setting and then provide a thick description of the context. This implementation of a case
study design enabled me to provide rich insights into the children’s views of learning center activities. Yet, the lack of research conducted in the education field in Saudi schooling system is a main limitation because the findings from this study cannot be compared or contrasted with other studies in Saudi Arabia. However, the case study design contributed in building knowledge in an area that needs more investigation. The lack of research offers opportunities to inquire into and examine many issues in Saudi kindergarten education. A second limitation is related to the regulations regarding the photography task. Participating children may have more opportunities to express themselves and their ideas freely if they had been allowed to photograph their peers. The study was also limited to the extent that children were only allowed to take photographs within the classroom environment. However, as noted earlier, excluding photographs of human subjects from the research was adopted for cultural reasons. Moreover, choosing the classroom environment as a research setting supports the research purpose and question, which sought to study children’s views of the learning activities in a particular setting – their kindergarten classroom. However, the utilization of multiple data resources played a key role in drawing out children’s voices. This was essential because children differ in their ways of expressing themselves and their ideas. Most importantly, this study listened to children’s voices in a context where children’s opinions are often unvalued. Another limitation of the study might be the translation from Arabic to English. However, in order to interview the children and analyze the ideas represented in their verbal language, I conducted the analysis in Arabic; therefore, the translation to English had to be done after the analysis, and only for the sake of writing this paper in English, the language used in a Canadian university context. Finally, because the case consisted of six children in a single kindergarten classroom, the findings are specific to the
children in the classroom; if a different classroom or different children had been chosen, the results may have been somewhat different.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study are not exclusive to the Saudi context, but also to sociocultural issues related early childhood education practices. Yet, the study draws attention to particular concerns that are embedded in the Saudi schooling system. Moreover, the findings of the research suggest implications for not only policymakers, but also practitioners and educators.

The practice of listening to children in schools opens many avenues and possibilities for children and educators to connect and communicate. Open discussions with children may pinpoint their preferences, expectations, and beliefs. This study suggests that not all children are comfortable expressing themselves through spoken words, especially in contexts that do not encourage such practices. Therefore, utilization of multimodal forms of representation may provide children with many avenues for expression other than verbal language. This practice is applicable in any classroom with the available tools. In this research, children shared how they view and experience their classroom using a camera. Activities such as drawings, dramatic play, and journals also facilitate teacher-child discussions and encourage children to share their views (Clark, 2005), enabling teachers to learn about children’s everyday experiences and integrate them in the school’s day (Eide & Winger, 2005). Listening to children’s voices is not only a way to learn about their interest, but also a method through which to articulate issues related power and gender which, in turn, may draw educators’ attention to rethink their practices.

In addition, encountering the experiences children bring from home to school is critically significant to children’s learning. Research studies have emphasized the importance of acknowledging and celebrating children’s experiences (Riogas-Cortez, 2001). Children’s
everyday experiences can be ascertained by observing children at play, listening to their stories, and integrating their experiences into the school day (Riogas-Cortez, 2001). Education is likely to be more meaningful when educators know about children’s everyday lives (Singal & Swann, 2011).

The children in this site shared their interests in their social worlds. The collected data also showed that most of children’s preferences and wishes were socially motivated. Children sought social interaction and affiliation in both the official and unofficial school worlds (Dyson, 1979). They learn through social interaction, and their identity formation cannot be seen apart from social factors (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). The consideration of social factors enriches the learning experience of children, and educators should give children space and time for socialization within the classroom environment. Children can make meanings of their world easily when the social and cultural perspectives are taken into account (Clark, 2005; Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Implementing a program that listen to and involve young children in their education could be challenging, especially in context in which children’s voices are not usually valued. This research does not suggest that curricula and pedagogies are not important; rather, it proposes that children’s voices should be part of the curricula and pedagogies. This could be approach by including the practice of listening to young children within the school system or curriculum and affording multiple methods for them to share their views and concerns. Moreover, educators should be aware that there might be situations in which some children could be shy to share their views and concerns. This, in turn, could cause silencing of some voices in the classroom and raise other voices, in particular, children with more social power. Thus, the awareness of the differences and uniqueness of each child is essential. Educators or adults who listen to children have to acknowledge how children differ in their ways of expression. Listening
to children through multiple methods such as drawings, photo taking, and writing would provide children with many ways of expression other than the spoken words. Schools are places and spaces that belong to children; thus, their perspectives and interests should be valued.

**Implications for Research Methodology**

When designing this research, I considered the photo-elicitation interviews to be the primary data source; however, the data collection and analysis process have shown that the sources were equally important. Children’s ways of expression varied between verbal and non-verbal communication. Each participant interacted with each data source differently. The various sources of data were equally crucial to enrich and answer the research questions. It also provided children with space and avenues to voice their views and wishes through concrete and hands-on tasks. The fact that I used photographs to facilitate the interviews played a key role in encouraging children to share their thoughts. I also invited children to comment on their drawings to avoid the misinterpretation of their pictures. The integration of these data sources in the research proved that children have views and wishes regarding schools’ activities. It also enabled children to voice their views and wishes even in a context that does not support such a practice. The implication of various data sources when researching with children has been shown to understand and celebrate children’s different ways of expression.

It is critically important to be aware of power relationships between the participant child and the researcher. In this research, I acknowledged the existence of power differentials and implemented different ethical considerations in order to minimize such an issue. These practices such as spending time with children before the actual data collection process, introducing myself as a student researcher, conducting the research in a familiar space and time, and providing various data methods for children. I also was aware that children differ in their preferences of...
expressing themselves and their views. This is especially important when working with children from the Saudi Arabian culture, because people in this culture are not often orally explicit about their ideas and opinions. For example, there are cases in which some children ignored some of my posed questions. Thus, I viewed their silent responses as a way of expressing their discomfort with my question. Children who chose not to photograph some centers or activities were also seen to express their views toward these places through their silence. Yet, in other cases, I noticed that my wordings of some questions were not clear, so I posed the same question in a different way. Overall, the implications of ethics, the ongoing written reflections in my research journal, and the consideration of the context played a vital role in raising my awareness of the power relationships. I provided many choices to each child participant to share his/her views, believing that many people might not be able to express their ideas fully through verbal communication.

**Invitation for Further Research**

This research raises many questions regarding the current Saudi educational system and its practices, specifically, the gap between the world of children and adults. This suggests the need for more research that incorporates children’s voices and addresses children’s views in matters relevant to their lives. The current research examined how children viewed themselves as learners in the classroom. These findings need to be supported by research that inquires into the perceptions of parents and educators of children and their learning. This case study also shows the need for researchers to investigate issues of gender and power in the Saudi context using a variety of methods and perspectives. This invites researchers to studies that investigating children’s unofficial worlds through the participant observation of children’s imaginative play and playground time. The current research has examined the data from a social constructivist
perspective, meaning that the analysis and interpretations could have been different if they had been framed within feminist or postmodernist perspectives. Furthermore, the current study can be a starting point for future inquiries into classrooms that incorporate children’s views in order to study the impact of children’s participation and involvement on their learning and development.
References


Appendix A

Sample of interviews transcribed in Arabic:

Discussion 1 (pp.64):

لينة: سلام عملها و واحد ساعده. جاب السيارة عشان اذا كان في واحد يحب يركب السيارة ويسوق

انا: و مين يسوق السيارة؟

ياسمين: الأولاد يمكن صالح أو أحمد و أو واحد يحب السيارات و يلعب في السيارات

انا: و البنات يسوقوا سيارات؟

ياسمين: لا هما البنات ما يحبوا السيارة

انا: لينه؟

ياسمين: لانه ... عشان (سكنت شوية ... بتفك) تعرف في فيلم "كاراز"؟

انا: ايوا

ياسمين: ايوا (كاراز) هما بس يحبوا يترجوء الأولاد و البنات لا.

انا: طبيب يعني البنات ما يسوقوا السيارات؟

ياسمين: لا ... بس يسوا مكعبات و يпечатوا حيوانات. انا كمان احب احفظ معاه حيوانات او اسوي بتي انا لودي او

بيت الحيوانات

انا: طبيب ايش في شي ثاني ما يحبوه البنات؟

ياسمين: ما يحبوا سبابات مان

انا: طبيب الأولاد ايش ما يحبوا؟

ياسمين: يعني ... محمد يحب الرسم انا شفت اولاد يحبوا الرسم و يسوف سمعته يقول ابغي ركن الرسم ... و انا شايفة

الأولاد يرسموا و أنا شايفة وحدة بس مرة وحدة و لد يروح ركن المطبخ و يخلط الأكل.
Discussion 2 (pp.72):

أنا: حكيني عن دي الصورة؟

يوسف: دي المخدة انام فيها و بعدين أصحى

أنا: فين مكانها؟

يوسف: هناك في المكعبات

أنا: وه هي مخدة للنوم ولا انت تستخدمنا للنوم؟

يوسف: بس انا أنام هناك

Discussion 3 (pp.77):

أسمى: أنا أحب ركن المكعبات

أنا: مين أصحابك الي تحبي تبني معاهم؟

أسمى: سالم و ماجد و مریم و بس

أنا: ليس التانيين لا؟

أسمى: مدري يزعجيوني

أنا: طيب و ماجد و سالم و مریم متعاونين في البناء؟

أسمى: لا نحن كلنا نساعد سالم

أنا: طيب مين يختار ايش تبنوا .. مثلا إذا مطعم او حديقة و لا بيت؟

أسمى: هوا كدا يفكر و نحن بس نعطيه ما يقول شي

أنا: و مين الي ببنيي؟ مين الي يحط المكعبات فوق بعض؟

أسمى: سالم

أنا: و انتو يعني بس تساعدوه تجيوا الاشياء؟

أسمى: هادي صورة نهي صحيتي هي عملته.
ماجد: طبعا أحب العاب في المكعبات لانه سالم مرة يحبني
انا: طيب مين يختار ايش حنينوا؟
ماجد: نحن الاثنين
انا: طيب في احد يكون معاكم في المكعبات ولا بس انت و سالم؟
ماجد: الا في احد يساعدنا
انا: زي مين؟
ماجد: خلاص ما أعرف نسيت
Appendix B

Example of worksheets introduced to KG children in reading and writing lessons

Circle the words start with the letter - أ

<p>| | |</p>
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<td>أخت</td>
<td>مفتاح</td>
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<td>سيارة</td>
<td>أرنب</td>
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