

**Unveiling Obstacles: Principals' and Teachers' Perspectives
on Barriers to Implementing the UNCRC in Primary
Education in Saudi Arabia**

Ghadah Abdulrahman Abahussain

**double affiliation, The University of Sheffield, Faculty of Education
Sheffield, UK**

**Educational Leadership and Organizational Development Department
, College of Education and Human Development, Princess Nourah bint
Abdulrahman University, KSA.**

Email: Gaabahussain@pnu.edu.sa

Abstract:

The study aimed to examine the challenges faced by principals and teachers in Saudi Arabian primary education institutions in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Through qualitative and quantitative methods, the research explored the barriers hindering the integration of UNCRC principles within Saudi Arabia's primary education system. The study population included principals, teachers, and primary education children aged nine to 11 in Riyadh. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires were used to collect data, allowing for diverse perspectives on children's rights implementation. Results indicated that societal awareness, cultural perceptions, and inadequate resources were significant barriers to UNCRC implementation. The findings emphasized the need for cultural shifts, enhanced training for educators, and policy reforms to bridge the gap between cultural norms and international standards of children's rights. The study underscored the importance of comprehensive strategies to address these challenges and promote the effective implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia's primary education system.

Keywords: Perspectives, Barriers, UNCRC.

استكشاف العقبات: تصورات مدراء المدارس والمعلمين حول العوائق التي تحول دون تنفيذ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل في التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية

غادة عبد الرحمن أبا حسين

كلية التربية شيفيلد، جامعة شيفيلد، المملكة المتحدة

تخصص تربية، قسم القيادة التربوية والتطوير التنظيمي، كلية التربية والتنمية البشرية، جامعة الأميرة نورة بنت عبدالرحمن، المملكة العربية السعودية.

البريد الإلكتروني: Gaabahussain@pnu.edu.sa

المستخلص:

هدفت الدراسة إلى استقصاء التحديات التي يواجهها مديرو المدارس والمعلمون في مؤسسات التعليم الابتدائي بالمملكة العربية السعودية في تنفيذ اتفاقية الأمم المتحدة لحقوق الطفل من خلال استكشاف العوائق والعقبات التي تحول دون دمج مبادئ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل في نظام التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية، ولقد شمل مجتمع الدراسة مديري المدارس والمعلمين وأطفال التعليم الابتدائي الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين ٩ إلى ١١ سنة في مدينة الرياض، كما تم استخدام المقابلات شبه المقيدة، ومجموعات التركيز، والاستبيانات لجمع البيانات، بما يسمح بالوصول للعديد من وجهات النظر المتنوعة حول تنفيذ حقوق الطفل، ولقد أشارت نتائج البحث إلى أن الوعي المجتمعي والتصورات الثقافية وعدم كفاية الموارد كانت بمثابة عوائق كبيرة أمام تنفيذ اتفاقية حقوق الطفل، وشددت النتائج على الحاجة إلى التحولات الثقافية، وتعزيز تدريب المعلمين، وإصلاحات السياسات لسد الفجوة بين المعايير الثقافية والمعايير الدولية لحقوق الطفل، وأكدت الدراسة على أهمية الاستراتيجيات الشاملة لمواجهة هذه التحديات وتعزيز التنفيذ الفعال لاتفاقية حقوق الطفل في نظام التعليم الابتدائي في المملكة العربية السعودية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تصورات، عوائق، اتفاقية حقوق الطفل.

Introduction

Childhood is the most important period of a person's life. It is the period during which all aspects of a person's character—physical, mental, and social aspects—are structured (Isaac, 2010). In addition, it is known as a period of innocence, happiness, and natural development, and as the most dependent period in human life. Therefore, children need to be cared for and protected from any kind of harm. It is adults' responsibility to care for children's health and help children live their childhoods, become responsible adults, and secure the well-being of society's future (Cunningham, 2005; Vasabhai et al., 2014).

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

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

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

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

Almohaimed (2009) mentioned that there are numerous laws in Saudi Arabia to protect children's rights. However, despite the existence of these laws, there are some shortcomings and inconsistencies in the implementation of children's rights, which require immediate intervention to resolve the problem, correct mistakes, and avoid deficiencies in these laws. Moreover, the Saudi National Committee for Childhood [NCC] (2012) admitted that there are problems in the implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia. They revealed that achievements regarding children's rights still fall short of their hopes and expectations and that there is a lack of proper care and attention. In addition, Alfaryan's study (2014) showed that even though there are policies in place for protecting children in Saudi Arabia, they are not effective. Albaker (2013c) argued that producing legislation and laws to protect children will not ensure the child's safety if these legislations and laws are not embedded within the structure of the society and its culture. In her articles (2013a, 2013b), she mentioned that the implementation of these legislations and laws will interfere with the social and cultural beliefs in Saudi Arabia.

Siaciwena and Lubinda (2008) said that the UNCRC takes on differing interpretations depending on the people and their culture, which affects the awareness and practice of these rights. The implementation of the UNCRC is affected by people's understanding of these rights, as they are influenced by people's culture and beliefs (Alshail, Hassan, Aldowaish, & Kattan, 2011). Despite the availability of legislation and laws to protect children's rights, violence against children still takes place around the world (Freeman & Saunders, 2014). Maboe (2013) confirmed that despite legislation that protects children's rights, schools still breach the UNCRC. Maboe (2013) said that the practice of child abuse and

neglect is still widespread in schools, as physical punishments, sexual abuse, and discrimination still take place in the hands of educators in South Africa.

There is an expanding body of research regarding children's rights in education. A huge amount of research has also studied children's participation in school, including whether or not a child's voice is heard. For example, Wyse's (2001) study found that children in primary and secondary schools in the UK do not express their opinions, which suggests that the right to participate is not implemented in these schools. Lundy (2007) said that there is a gap between the government's obligations regarding the right to participation and actual practices in the field of education in the UK.

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

Education is responsible for informing children about what rights they have and how to best demonstrate and utilise them. Furthermore, the education system should protect children and their rights (Maboe, 2013). Thus, the present study has identified concerns regarding the protection of children and their rights in the education system. A key focus of this study is to explore whether the education system in Saudi Arabia, as represented by schools, is implementing the rights of children in accordance with the UNCRC. This research needs to be understood from the sociocultural and historical contexts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

These developments of Saudi's education system present concerns about providing access to all stages of education for boys and girls, based on the Saudi concepts of justice, consultation, and equality. The education system has conferred certain rights as well as responsibilities of the state when developing policies and providing funding for primary, secondary, and tertiary education. In order to support these developments, policymakers have looked

outwards towards the UNCRC on the provision of children's rights, and inwards towards Islamic Law and the Saudi Arabian system.

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

The UNCRC contributed to an emerging paradigm shift in the perception and treatment of children in all countries. It introduced a new definition of the child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen', which had not been adopted before by any other declarations (Beigbeder, 2001). Additionally, one of the main innovations of the UNCRC was its recognition of the importance of children's voices and their participation in all decisions that affect them (Beigbeder, 2001; Pare, 2003). The UNCRC contains 54 articles divided into three parts. The first part is the main section, which covers every child's rights, including the right of life, healthcare, education, freedom of expression, protection of a child's dignity, and assurance of a child's safety. In addition, it includes other rights that affect either the child or the guardian, such as the rights to live with a family and have a nationality (UNICEF, 1989).

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

There are many regional children's rights instruments, such as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam. Those instruments aim to address children's rights in the context of the community. Therefore, The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) stresses that the aim of implementing an Islamic instrument for children's

rights is that Islamic values and principles are essential for Muslims, and they play an important role in the life of Muslims (OIC, 2004).

However, the UNCRC's importance is evidenced by the nearly unanimous agreement of the whole world, with the exception of two countries and it would lose its importance if its articles were not implemented. To ensure the effectiveness of the UNCRC, specifically in Saudi Arabia, current research will explore the implementation of this convention in primary education in this country. Since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country, and the Quran and Sunnah are its constitutions.

Primary education is crucial for upholding children's human rights, as it provides the essential building blocks for their development. At this stage, children learn basic skills like reading, writing, and math, which are necessary for their future. The connection between primary education and child human rights is clear, as it ensures every child, regardless of their background, has access to learning opportunities. This aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which emphasizes the right to education for all children without discrimination. By providing quality education in the early years, societies help children develop a sense of dignity and confidence, reinforcing their fundamental rights. Primary education also promotes values like tolerance and respect, contributing to a more inclusive and fair community. This relationship between education and human rights shows why it's vital for policymakers, educators, and advocates to work toward ensuring that all children have equal access to a solid educational foundation.

Children's rights policies in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has a significant interest in human rights. As such, it signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, with the exemption of two articles: Article 16, which gives people the freedom to choose their spouse regardless of any differences of religion, and Article 18, which says that everyone has the right to change his or her religion or beliefs. The government of Saudi Arabia has rejected those two articles because they conflict with Islamic teachings and the legal system of Saudi Arabia (Saudi National Society for Human Rights [NSHR], 2008). The importance

given to human rights by the Saudi Arabian government appears in its regime, however. For instance, Article 26 of the Main Ruling Regime of Saudi Arabia states that the government protects human rights in accordance with Islamic law. In addition, Article 8 of the same regime states that laws in Saudi Arabia are based on the concepts of justice, consultation, and equality (Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers [BECM], 1992).

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

In spite of the progress in governance, Alkaabi (2012) mentioned that there are many disadvantages to the reservations the Saudi Arabian government has regarding the UNCRC. It did not determine their reservations exactly, which may affect the implementation of the UNCRC. Alkaabi states that there is nothing to prevent the Saudi Arabian government from declaring their reservations and these reservations may be due to the absence of a civil status law and the lack of specific laws regarding child custody and other matters that relate to and affect a child's life. According to Alkaabi (2012), child abuse and child marriage are the two most common issues that have been addressed among the international criticisms of children's rights in Saudi Arabia. She suggests that these problems could be solved by creating a law that declares a minimum age for marriage, by regulating the civil status law, and by assigning child custody to someone other than one or both parents if there is evidence of abuse within the family. Many improvements are still needed in internal regulations concerning children's welfare in Saudi Arabia.

To ensure and protect children's rights, the Saudi Arabian government has established specific government organisations, such

as the Human Rights Commission (HRC), established in 2004 (NSHR, n.d.). Also, the National Family Safety Program (NFSP), established in 2005, aims to protect victims of domestic violence, including children (NFSP, 2015).

Furthermore, there is legislation to protect children and their rights in the law in Saudi Arabia. Article 30 of the Main Ruling Regime of Saudi Arabia emphasises the importance of education, for instance, stating that it is the government's responsibility to provide free education for all people living in the country. Article 31 of the same regime confirms the government's responsibility to provide healthcare for all in Saudi Arabia (BECM, 1992). In addition, Almohaimeed (2009) confirmed that there are 131 laws in Saudi Arabian legislation that protect children and their rights. Six of these laws in the main ruling regime of Saudi Arabia ensure the main rights for each child, such as the rights of life, health, and education; 17 of the laws in Saudi Arabian regulation of human rights secure legal rights, such as protection from abuse, 16 of the laws involve the education system, 22 of the laws involve the health sector, and 23 of the laws involve civil services. Almohaimeed (2009) stated that, despite this comprehensive legislation, there is a failure to apply these policies for children's rights. Almohaimeed said that this may be because there is no specific central department for children's rights in Saudi Arabia, which indicates that there are both opportunities and barriers for institutions in Saudi Arabia. He added that these laws are clear and explicit to the children of stable families, but not to the children of unstable families, who suffer from custody issues. There is also conflict about determining the legal age of commission for the war, as the age of puberty is a condition for the application of legal sentences such as capital punishment. According to the Saudi Arabian system of work, people are allowed to work at 15 years old, while the civil and military service systems require people to be 18 years old to work. Almohaimeed's research thus suggests that, as indicated above, there are both opportunities and barriers for institutions in Saudi Arabia.

Alfaryan (2014) also studied the policies and legislation in Saudi Arabia that aim to protect children from abuse. He went on to

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

In 2014, the Child Protection Law was introduced by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The aim of this system is to protect children against any kind of maltreatment, to ensure the implementation of children's rights, to increase awareness regarding children's rights, and to help children know their rights. The strategies to achieve these goals focus on assessing the suitability of the environment around the child at home, school, or any other places that provide services to children; adopting appropriate processes to ensure the protection of children from inequality, abuse, and injury; enabling children to practice their rights via the organisations that deal directly with children; increasing awareness about children and their rights through the media and the educational system; working to include some concepts of children's rights in school curricula, as well as ways to report any breaches of children's rights; identifying workers who provide services to children and enrolling these workers in training programmes to learn about the best ways to treat children; and identifying childhood issues that aid the success of the Child Protection Law (BECM, 2014).

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

to children's, parents', and caregivers' problems and by helping to solve their problems or by redirecting them to the appropriate authorities that can help them (NFSP, 2017).

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

The third and fourth reports regarding the application of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia addressed problems in implementation. In these reports, the NCC admitted that the achievements in Saudi Arabia regarding children and their rights still fall short of their hopes and expectations and that there is a lack of proper care and attention (NCC, 2012). The annual report of the Saudi Human Rights Commission [HRC] (2017) also showed evidence of issues in the implementation of the UNCRC. According to the HRC report, after 245 visits to some social institutions such as social welfare centres, institutions for disabled children, hospitals, and schools in order to monitor the implementation of the human rights and the

UNCRC, they discovered 333 human rights issues, 45 of which were related to violence and 35 of which were related to education. There are violations of rights within the education system in Saudi Arabia, which could also be a violation of the UNCRC. This study will investigate the implementation of child protection policies related to the UNCRC within the education system, which will be represented by a primary education in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in an effort to learn more about the types of violations occurring.

The Barriers of Implementing the UNCRC

The lack of awareness of child protection laws and the UNCRC among the children and adults in a particular society is one of the biggest barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC worldwide. NFSP (2011) found that in Saudi Arabia, court employees in the judicial system have a low level of awareness of children's rights—a claim confirmed by their lack of awareness regarding child abuse and neglect. As the judicial system is the highest system of law in the country, this lack of awareness of the UNCRC has an influence on its implementation. Arif (2011) likewise confirmed that the lack of awareness regarding the UNCRC amongst parents and people who work with children is one of the most significant barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Isaac (2010) said that implementation of the UNCRC is affected by people's awareness of it. Alfaryan (2014) also found that, as there is a lack of general awareness of child protection laws, including the UNCRC, these laws will not be implemented in Saudi Arabia.

Cultural challenges are another barrier for the implementation of the UNCRC around the world. Albaker (2013) emphasised that the implementation of child protection laws, such as the UNCRC, interferes with the social and cultural structure of society. Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014) said that social culture—including customs, beliefs, and traditional practices—is a significant reason for the breach of the UNCRC in Zimbabwe. Clarke (2008) said that the UNCRC is a product of Western culture, and anything from the West is treated with suspicion by Eastern societies. In addition, according to Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014), children must

be subject to adults and obey them, which is a part of African cultural norms, so it is expected that children learn and do their duties instead of having rights at home and at school. This also affects the implementation of the UNCRC.

One of the cultural norms that interferes with the implementation of the UNCRC is the value given to adult rights—especially parents' rights—in some societies. Alshail et al. (2011), along with Clarke (2008), pointed out that the UNCRC challenges parents' rights, as it is a form of intervention in parents' methods of raising their children. Ju and Lee (2010) said that parents' rights are given priority over children's rights in Korea. Alanazi (2008), Albaker (2013b), Alshail et al. (2011), and Imoh (2014) mentioned that traditional societies reject any laws that intervene in their methods of treating children, as they consider those laws a breach of their privacy. Freeman (2006), however, emphasised the importance of parents' rights, and he mentioned that these rights are respected by the UNCRC, as parents' responsibilities toward their children is stressed within them. Freeman pointed out that rejection of the UNCRC happens not because it gives children rights over their parents, but because of powerful adults who find it easier to control children who are deprived of rights.

The implementation of the UNCRC is also hindered by cultural beliefs regarding parental ownership of children. Albaker (2013a) said that it is not easy to protect children in societies that strongly believe in the concept of children being the property of their parents, thus parents feel like they can do whatever they want to their children. Campbell and Covell (2001) confirmed that treating children as parental property is one of the barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in Canada. One of the consequences of societies' view of children as property of their parents is the acceptance of child maltreatment, provided that this maltreatment is caused by the parents (Albaker, 2013b). For instance, the use of physical punishment is accepted in different cultures as a way to discipline children, either at the hands of their parents or even other adults (Albuhairan et al., 2011; Alghamdi et al., 2018; Almahroos, 2007; Alshail et al., 2011; Freeman & Saunders, 2014; Imoh, 2016; Lee & Kim, 2011; O'Leary et al., 2018; Imoh, 2013). How can the

UNCRC, which prohibits all acts of violence against children, be implemented in societies where it is the norm to use violence against children in the name of discipline? Lundy (2007) said that the children's enjoyment of rights depends on how adults cooperate with children. So, if adults are not committed to, or interested in children's rights, these rights will not be implemented.

The discrimination gap between girls and boys is another cultural custom that has led to the violation of the UNCRC. One example is the issue of girls' education in Yemen, as girls' right to education is limited. Yemeni society gives boys' education priority over girls' education, as Yemeni society does not believe in the importance of girls in their overall society (Abdulwahab, 2002). In Saudi Arabia, the discrimination gap between girls and boys leads to more discrimination against girls regarding their education, as Saudi Arabian society believes that boys are more important for the future of the country (Humanium, 2011). Said (2007) found that boys have more chance to access school than girls in poor neighborhoods in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia because of the reduction of the availability of the girls' schools in these areas, and because of the families beliefs that the education is more important for boys than it is for girls.

The vulnerability of children is another barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC. Roose and Bie (2007), Sund and Vackermo (2015), and Tobin (2015) pointed out that children are viewed as both lacking the capacity to make decisions and as being entirely dependent on adults, which is used as a justification for the violation of the UNCRC by adults. Children, furthermore, have lower status than adults within their families and within society (Cassidy, 2012). Kepenekci (2006) mentioned that a child is seen as a human with no rights in some societies, such as in Turkey, which can also impede the implementation of the UNCRC. Adults decide everything on behalf of children and ignore children's views and opinions (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2017). Lyle (2014) found that the adult's attitude and views towards children are the most significant barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in Wales. According to Lyle (2014), teachers who believes that children are vulnerable were not able to implement or even embrace the UNCRC. Children's vulnerability, however, is not a reason for

denying the UNCRC; instead, it is a justification for providing children with special rights to protect them under it (Tobin, 2015). Roose and Bie (2007) said that, although children lack capacity and are dependent on adults, we cannot overlook that they are part of society and that they are citizens like any other, whose rights should be respected regardless of their age.

Treating children as the adults of the future influences their enjoyment of their rights. In this view, children are considered as a means for the future, which leads to the use of coercion in order to make them fit for the future a society aims for (Cassidy, 2012; Freeman & Saunders, 2014). Hejazi (2014) found that, in Saudi Arabia, the view of children as 'becoming human' affected the implementation of children's rights in kindergarten. Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt (2014) said that viewing children as 'becoming human' should be avoided, as children are already full human beings who have rights, like any other person.

Economic factors are another barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC around the world. Clarke (2008) mentioned that poverty is the most essential barrier to the enjoyment of the UNCRC by children in Trinidad. Clarke emphasised the lack of assistance from wealthy countries to poorer countries, particularly when it comes to helping them overcome the financial challenges that hinder the implementation of the UNCRC, along with other human rights. In some states of Europe, Lundy (2012) found that poverty affects children's enjoyment of some of their rights, such as the right to education, since it is harder for children from poorer families to access education because of its hidden costs. This was also confirmed in Yemen by Abdulwahab (2002), as some children are restricted from the right of education due to family poverty. O'Leary et al. (2018) and Wakatama (2009) also confirmed, for Afghanistan and India respectively, that poorer children cannot access school because they have a responsibility to provide additional income for their families. Homed (2009) found that there are some financial issues hindering the implementation of the UNCRC in Arab Peninsula countries and in Yemen. Homed said that, despite the fact that those countries, except Yemen, are considered to be wealthy countries and do not have financial issues,

there is a shortage of financial support for the local authorities responsible for protecting children and for ensuring their rights, and this affects their ability to do their work. Arif (2011) similarly found that financial challenges affected the implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia. Findings from different studies have showed that financial status was not an issue for some countries; however, the studies indicated that the implementation of the policy was insufficient. It appears that there are other factors that underlie the lack of financial support for such policies, which might also include cultural understanding of childhood and children's rights. One of the aims of this study is to uncover the hidden factors that have affected the implementation of these policies.

The qualifications of employees who work with children are another barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC worldwide. Homed (2009) mentioned that the lack of employee qualifications hinders the implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia and in other Arab peninsula countries; workers at school or the local authorities who provide services for children are not qualified to implement the UNCRC—they are, for example, not aware of these rights. The NFSP (2011) confirmed the lack of employee qualifications in dealing with children, as they found that 77% of their study samples who worked with children did not know how to deal with child maltreatment cases in Saudi Arabia. Arif (2011) found that workers employed in institutions for children with disabilities had low qualifications. Arif (2011) also added that, even if the workers are qualified to implement the UNCRC, the heavy workload, and the number of children they work with could hinder their capacity to implement the UNCRC, especially at schools. The qualifications of the workers who deal with children and their heavy workload thus hinder the implementation of the UNCRC. Arif (2011) studied the social and cultural barriers of the implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia, which is one of the aims of my study, and teachers were a part of Arif's study sample. Arif's study (2011) was, however, a quantitative study, while mine employs mixed methods and my sample includes school principals and children as a part of the study sample. Arif (2011) also focused on the social and cultural barriers in Saudi society, while my study

aims to shed light on all barriers that hinder the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia.

Clarke (2008) criticised the UNCRC for its ambiguous language, which makes it hard to implement it in some countries. Clarke (2008) agrees with White (2002) that the UNCRC has a general assumption that all children around the world have the same types of childhood and experiences, which is incorrect. Clarke (2008) and White (2002) argued that the UNCRC is based on Western culture, which might not be relevant to cultures in other parts of the world, such as Bangladesh and Trinidad. White (2002) emphasised the need to provide children with an international rights convention that considers the similarities and differences between children worldwide if this convention is to be implemented. Clarke (2008) also stated that an international convention such as the UNCRC should be balanced worldwide instead of being based on Western culture and perceptions. Clarke (2008) posited that the UNCRC is not suitable to some extent to non-Western societies where children have some obligations to their parents, that it does not determine the minimum age of marriage, as there are some societies that tolerate underage marriage. Moreover, it does not mention the rights of orphaned children or street children who do not have a family. Clarke (2008) argued that the UNCRC needs to be revised to be more suitable for all children worldwide. Lundy (2007) said that the UNCRC language is general, however, and it does not need to be interpreted literally; rather, there must be a teleological interpretation of it. Even if the UNCRC has not mentioned some groups of children, such as street children, they are still taken into consideration and must be provided the same protections. They must enjoy health rights, education rights, and protection rights, even if they are not mentioned directly in the language of these articles, as is the UNCRC is general for all children. Pearson (2015) supported that in order to implement the international policies there should be an establishment of a society-based framework in each country that contains localized ideas, systems and methods that can really protect children's rights and needs, within the opportunities and confines of their own unique contexts.

In summary, the previous discussion covered the studies that discussed the barriers of the implementation of the UNCRC. Those studies are significant to my study, as they showed that there are different barriers to how the UNCRC is implemented in different social communities. These barriers include the understanding of the UNCRC, and the costs of implementing children's rights, especially in poorer countries. The establishment of local national legislation in each country is, furthermore, important in implementing the UNCRC, but without respect for the legislation, it will not be sufficient. The discussion of the literature helps in determining the theoretical framework of the current study, which is discussed next.

Problem of the Study

The problem addressed in the study pertains to the challenges faced by principals and teachers in Saudi Arabian primary education institutions when implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Despite Saudi Arabia's ratification of the UNCRC, there exists a notable discrepancy in effectively integrating children's rights within the primary education system. The key focus of this research is to answer the following question:

What are the principals' and teachers' perspectives regarding the barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia?

Research Objective/s?

The research examined the barriers that principals and teachers face in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in primary education in Saudi Arabia. It focused on primary schools in Riyadh and utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data from principals, teachers, and primary education students aged nine to eleven.

Significance of the Study:

The study aims to investigate the specific barriers hindering the implementation of UNCRC principles within the cultural and societal context of Saudi Arabia. These barriers include societal awareness, cultural perceptions, and resource constraints. By identifying and analyzing these obstacles, the study seeks to inform targeted interventions and policy reforms aimed at promoting the

realization of children's rights in Saudi Arabia's primary education system.

Methodology of the Research

Mixed-Methods Approach

Creswell (2014) mentioned that research approaches are divided into three types: qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods. As mentioned above in the discussion on the literature review, a mixed-methods approach enriches findings.

Mixed-methods research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods (Gray, 2014). It is defined as:

An approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone. (Creswell, 2014, p. 4)

According to this definition, the mixed-methods approach provides a deeper and more complete explanation of a research problem. Matthews and Ross (2010) stated that using two or more different methods allows researchers to better check the validity of data. They also assert that this process is called triangulation, which they define as 'a measure of research quality, meaning that if different types of data are collected to address the same research question, each set of data can be used to check the findings from the others' (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 145). Triangulation techniques enable researchers to obtain a more comprehensive perception of phenomena than can be obtained from using a single method. This makes the picture of the phenomena clearer and more fully understood, produces more nuanced, accurate, reliable data and develops the incorporation of the data to allow the researcher to accurately interpret the findings (Berg, 2001; Cohen et al., 2011). In this research, I used both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection.

The use of qualitative methods helps researchers gather data that explain social phenomena and explore the participants' understandings, beliefs and experiences (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Quantitative methods help to evaluate how well policies work and reveal factors that contribute to shaping policy implementation, both of which are aims of my study (Ritchie & Ormston, 2014). Qualitative methods involve a small sample, however, and data gathered through these methods cannot be generalised. On the other hand, quantitative methods usually work with constructed data that can be represented numerically and, in this case, could involve a larger amount of the participant sample, making it possible to generalise the findings (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Therefore, since I desired in-depth information about the phenomenon I was researching and to balance the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative methods, I adopted a mixed-methods combination using interviews, a questionnaire and focus groups. These methods enabled me to obtain a deep exploration and understanding of the UNCRC implementation in Saudi Arabian primary education.

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

As a data collection method, interviews help researchers gather information while giving people an opportunity to explore their views and perspectives (Berg, 2001; Wellington, 2015). Furthermore, interviews allow a researcher to explore some areas that other methods cannot reach, and they prompt responses, such as the interviewees' feelings, thoughts, perspectives and values (Hammond & Wellington, 2013; Wellington, 2015). I used this method with school principals because it helps protect their privacy

and makes them feel comfortable talking about their school and child's rights situation in these schools. Principals are responsible for everything at their school, so any issue that arises might be understood as a failure of their ability to do their work, which might affect the reliability of their answers if they discuss these issues in front of others (such as in a focus group). Therefore, I used the interviews to gather data from the principals and obtained in-depth answers to the research questions.

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

The focus group method was used to gather data from the teachers and the children. Because children have the right to make their voices heard and their views respected, they were part of the sample, and the focus group was used to enable their participation and to gather data from them. The focus group was chosen because of its advantages: it tends to provide a comfortable environment for participants because they feel safer and more secure when they are with others, especially when a focus group involves children, teenagers or teachers (Wellington, 2015). Furthermore, focus groups are suitable for children because they feel as though they are being challenged, and that encourages them to give their best (Cohen et al., 2011). It also helps the researcher understand the children's language and interact with them in responsive ways. In general, focus groups help people of any age be more relaxed with one another and push them to express their opinions (Wellington, 2015).

Selection of Participants

The 'participants of the study' means the 'sample of the study', which refers to 'the smaller number of cases, units or sites selected from a much larger population. Some samples are assumed

to be representative of the entire, i.e., generalisable from, but this can never be done with certainty' (Wellington, 2015, p. 345).

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

Due to our cultural demands, contact between women and men who are not known to each other is difficult and unacceptable. Saudi Arabian policy prohibits women from accessing male schools, and vice versa. I thus preferred to focus on females in the interviews and focus groups. For the interviews with principals and the focus groups with children, I chose five primary schools representative of the local area. Because the Education Department in Riyadh consists of five educational areas— divided into East, West, North, South and Central, with each area containing an education office—the sample included a school from each educational area. The intention was to explore the children's rights situation in those schools from the principals' points of view, simultaneously considering their attitudes regarding the UNCRC and factors that affect UNCRC implementation in Saudi Arabian primary education. To that end, semi-structured interviews were used as a method for gathering information from each of the five schools' principals.

In addition, to examine the children's awareness of their rights and their perceptions of the implementation of these rights, I planned to conduct focus groups with 30 students. Each group would contain three students of the same age. One principal did not agree with this plan, however and there was no time to include

another school, I worked with children from the other four schools and increased the number of children to 36—three children from the fourth, fifth and sixth years in each school.

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

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

For quantitative data, and especially for the questionnaire, Cohen (2011) suggests that the researcher should opt for a large sample because that will increase the research reliability. Moreover, Berg (2001) clarifies that probability sampling is usually used to select samples for quantitative research. However, to ensure that a large number of teachers would answer the questionnaire, the electronic network was used to distribute and collect the questionnaires. This was done through the Survs.com website. The teachers' sample was also gathered via probability sampling, targeting all the public primary school teachers (both male and

female) in Riyadh—25,359 teachers (Ministry of Education, 2016). The link to the online questionnaire's page on Survs.com was broadcasted (via social media applications, such as Twitter and WhatsApp) to as many teachers as possible to procure a large number of fully-answered questionnaires. It was also sent to the principals' sample so that they could dispatch it to the teachers in their schools. Consequently, the online page of the questionnaire was visited by 1079 people but there were only 635 submitted questionnaires. The questionnaire was answered by 635 teachers—421 females and 214 males which means that from the distributed questionnaire 59% of them were fully answered.

The teacher focus group was conducted at the end of data collection with the participation of five primary education teachers (all females). So, to ensure the possibility of reaching as many teachers as possible and choosing from a high population number, I used the Twitter application to research participants. I published a tweet asking for five participants who were female primary education teachers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This gave me the chance to reach some of the primary education teachers in Riyadh, ask them to participate in my research, and obtain their contact details. Table 3.1 reveals the participants in my research.

Table 3.1: Participants in my research

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

Before choosing the participants, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Sheffield Ethics System for implementing the interviews with principals, focus groups with children, and questionnaires with teachers. Then, another ethical

approval was obtained for implementing the teacher's focus group. The explanation of the study methods is discussed in the following sections.

Research Methods

To achieve the aims of my research, qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The qualitative methods included interviews and focus groups, while the quantitative method was represented by the questionnaire.

Interviews.

The interviews were a qualitative method used in my research to collect data from primary education principals. Yin (2015) suggested that the interview is the most important method for gathering evidence in qualitative data. It can be defined as 'a conversation with a purpose' (Berg, 2001, p. 66; Wellington, 2015, p. 71). One of the functions of an interview is to collect information for the researcher while giving people the opportunity to explore their views and perspectives (Berg, 2001; Wellington, 2015). Wellington (2015) continued this line of thinking by asserting that the interview is even more than a conversation with a purpose; it helps interviewees make their voices heard. Hammond and Wellington (2013) defined the interview as 'a conversation between the researcher and those being researched, variously termed participants, subjects or simply 'interviewees' (p. 91). The most important feature of using interviews as a research method is that they allow the researcher to explore and prompt some areas that other methods cannot reach, such as the interviewees' feelings, thoughts, perspectives and values, which other methods could not investigate (Hammond & Wellington, 2013; Wellington, 2015). Therefore, these interviews helped me obtain in-depth answers to the research questions from the principals.

Interview construction.

The interviews were used to achieve the research aims of (1) exploring the perceptions of primary school principals regarding children's rights as defined in the UNCRC, (2) exploring the implementation of children's rights in primary education and (3) identifying barriers to UNCRC implementation in Saudi Arabian

primary education from the principals' perspectives. The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting.

According to Wellington (2015), there are many interview styles that could be used for gathering data, depending on the research aims. These styles include unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews. I used semi-structured interviews to gather data from principals because that style is more manageable than unstructured interviews, yet more flexible than structured interviews. To obtain good qualitative data, I could thus control the interviews using questions that helped uncover the needed information and gave the interviewee the opportunity to discuss and clarify each answer by providing more detail.

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

The application of the interviews.

I pre-communicated by phone with the principals to schedule the interviews and choose places and times that were convenient for both the interviewee and I. All interviews were conducted in female-only cafés in Riyadh, except for the pilot study in the school office. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. I used two devices to record the interviews after getting permission from the interviewee.

At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself, thanked the interviewee, and began with a friendly conversation before starting to record the interview. I told the interviewee when I would begin to record the interview and promised that, to protect her privacy, I would not mention her name or her school while the recorders were running. I then began the interview questions. At the end of each conversation, I thanked the interviewees for their cooperation and for participating in my research. I then obtained their agreement to contact them after the interview by phone or WhatsApp if I needed any more clarification regarding their answers or to send them a copy of the study findings when I finished.

Questionnaire.

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

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

Electronic resources were used to distribute the questionnaire to teachers. Wellington (2015) clarified the advantages of using

electronic networks, as they make distributing and collecting questionnaires easier and quicker. This was done through the Survs.com website. The link to the online questionnaire's page on Survs.com was broadcasted (via social media applications, such as Twitter and WhatsApp) to as many teachers as possible to procure a large number of fully-answered questionnaires. Consequently, the website page of the questionnaire was visited by 1074 people but there were only 635 submitted questionnaires. the questionnaire was answered by 635 teachers—421 females and 214 males. I developed the questions myself after extensively reviewing the related literature.

Questionnaire construction.

I constructed the questionnaire based on my study questions and literature review, taking many issues into consideration during the process. Since the questionnaire was to be applied in Saudi Arabia with Arabic-speaking respondents, I designed it using the Arabic language. I also endeavoured to make the questions understandable and specific—meaning that each question did not have more than one probable answer, each point contained only one principle and the questions were not overly long (Wellington, 2015). I grouped the items concerning the same concepts together while considering the ease of answering the questions. I designed the questionnaire while gathering data from the principals. The data gathered from the principal interviews thus benefited my questionnaire plan. According to Matthews and Ross (2010), in the mixed-methods approach, collecting a qualitative data first is beneficial to develop structured questions for any other data collection method such as questionnaires.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section is a sheet including information about me, the purpose of the study, and why the participants had been chosen to take part. In addition, a question about the respondents' genders to determine if there were any significant differences between males and females regarding the research questions.

The second section contained the main questions, which were divided into three dimensions. The first dimension asked about the teachers' awareness of children's rights, and it was divided into two

sub-dimensions: (1) the teachers' learning experiences of children's rights and (2) the teachers' awareness of and attitude towards the UNCRC articles. The second dimension discussed the implementation of children's rights in Saudi Arabian primary education, while the third dimension concerned the barriers to such implementation. The third dimension contained an open-ended question for respondents to add any other information they would like to include that had not been covered by the questionnaire.

At the end of the questionnaire, I included an apology for the questionnaire's length along with a 'thank you' message for the participants' patience, for their taking part in my research and for their spending a significant amount of time answering the questionnaire. I also mentioned that, if they would like to see the research results, they could send me their contact information, so I could forward them the results when the research process was complete.

Wellington (2015) mentioned that a questionnaire's comprehensibility can be examined by testing it with friends. I therefore sent the questionnaire to two of my friends who are educational researchers in Saudi Arabia to see if they considered it understandable, clear and manageable and to obtain any other pieces of advice they might offer before translating the questionnaire and sending it to my supervisor. They mentioned some points, such as repetitious questions, and they asked that I consider shortening the questionnaire—using three choices in the rating scale for closed-ended questions instead of five. They suggested this because the questionnaire already contained a lot of information and offering five choices would not only make it longer, but would also possibly cause confusion for the respondents. Some people, they asserted, may not recognise the difference between, for example, 'agree' and 'strongly agree', and confusion on such a point could reduce the reliability and accuracy of the respondents' answers and increase the number of incompletely answered questionnaires. Following their advice, I altered the questionnaire's closed-ended rating system to include only 'agree', 'disagree', and 'I have no idea'.

My next step in designing the questionnaire was translating it into English, making sure I had an English copy of the questionnaire

that almost exactly matched the Arabic version. I then sent the English copy to my supervisor for her advice on its construction. Afterward, I sent the original, Arabic copy to the Education Department in Riyadh to obtain their permission to distribute it to the participants.

The application of the questionnaire.

After constructing the original copy of the questionnaire, a website was used to distribute it: www.survs.com. The website was intended to ensure a high number of responses from both male and female participants. Ease of access to the questionnaire, and ease of answering it via smartphones, tablets or computers, contributed to my choosing electronic distribution and collection. The respondents could access the website wherever they were and whenever they wanted. To make sure that the participants understood the purpose of their participation, the questionnaire included a section containing information about me (along with my contact details), my supervisor, the research title, aims, methodology, etc. To make the respondents comfortable, there were no questions about their personal information, which helped increase the reliability of their answers and of the questionnaire in general. The invitation and consent letters attached to the questionnaires were also intended to help increase the number of fully completed questionnaires.

Focus Group

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

Focus groups tend to provide a comfortable environment for participants because they feel safer and more secure when they are with others, especially when a focus group involves children, teenagers or teachers (Wellington, 2015). Furthermore, focus groups help researchers gain information about the participants' views and perceptions towards the research topic—allowing access to the cultural diversity in groups by including a wide range of participants, while increasing the validity of the data (Gray, 2014). Gray (2014) and Wellington (2015) mentioned, however, that there

are many disadvantages to focus groups, such as difficulties in applying controls and difficulties in monitoring participants' verbal and nonverbal responses. For example, if one group member dominates the discussion, it may prevent others' voices from being heard because they did not have the chance to talk. Taking into account the disadvantages of the focus group, I still decided to use this method to retrieve information from children and teachers in my study. Cohen et al. (2011) suggested that focus groups are suitable for children because they feel as though they are being challenged, and that encourages them to give their best. It also helps the researcher to understand the children's language and interact with them. In general, focus groups help people of any age be more relaxed, warm up, and push each other's opinions forward (Wellington, 2015).

Focus groups with children.

Due to the advantages of the focus group in gathering data from children, I chose it to achieve the research aims of exploring the information children have about their rights, as well as their perceptions of the implementation of those rights in their schools.

The construction of the focus groups with children.

The focus groups with children were conducted after interviewing the principals and despatching the questionnaire for teachers. After choosing the focus group as a suitable method for my research, I planned and organised it while considering the related research. First, I designed the main questions to be answered and added related sub-questions to encourage the children to talk. Also, to plumb the children's thoughts, I used some visual methods—such as stories and videos—to prompt the children's ideas, experiences and opinions. I searched YouTube for a video about children's rights that fit my research questions and was suitable for children to watch. I chose a video, published by the Childhood Department at Princess Nourah bint Abdularahman University; as I am a lecturer there, it was not complicated to obtain permission from the video publisher to use this video in my research. The video, recorded in Arabic and titled 'It is of my right', featured a little child talking about children's rights and providing information about the UNCRC. I also visited the Human Rights

Organisation in Riyadh and asked them, for the purpose of my research, to provide me with some books they had published for children regarding children's rights. They provided me with many books and stories, two of which I chose to use in the children's focus groups. The first book was entitled Children's Rights, and it contained a list of rights along with some pictures to be coloured. The second, entitled My Rights, gave information about the UNCRC and listed rights alongside pictures explaining them.

After translating the main questions for the children into English, I sent them to my supervisor, with the link to the video I used, and discuss the plan of the focus group with her in the research supervision meeting. I then contacted the Education Department in Riyadh to obtain permission to work with children in schools.

Focus group with teachers.

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

The construction of the focus group with teachers.

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

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

The application of the focus group with teachers.

I used Twitter to reach five primary education teachers (all females) in Riyadh by publishing a tweet asking for participation in my research. The first five teachers who contacted me were the participants I chose. I sent them the information sheet and consent form through Twitter and they contacted me via WhatsApp. After obtaining their permission, I made a group in WhatsApp including each of the five participants and introduced them to one another. We decided a suitable place and time for the focus group, choosing to meet at one of the female-only cafés in Riyadh. The focus group lasted for approximately two hours, including a friendly conversation at the beginning. The discussion was audio recorded. At the beginning of the focus group, I provided the participants with the focus group scenario and gave them the themes to read carefully. They then began to discuss each topic in the scenario and I intervened to lead the conversation and ask for more clarification if necessary. At the end of the conversation, I thanked them for participating in my research and asked for their permission to contact them again if I needed further clarification.

Data Analysis

According to Hammond and Wellington (2013), data analysis is 'the process of breaking down the topic or object into its component parts and understanding how those parts fit together' (p. 9). It aims to 'describe, discuss, interpret, evaluate, and explain the data in terms of the research questions or hypothesis of the research project' (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 317). As mentioned above, my research used a mixed- methods approach. To achieve the aims of data analysis, I therefore used two different strategies, depending on the methods used to collect the data.

Analysis of quantitative data.

I used statistical analysis to analyse the data collected by quantitative methods (i.e., the questionnaire). Statistical analysis in social research applies to 'data that is structured and can be counted or is already expressed in numerical terms. The data is usually collected using a questionnaire or other format' (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 343).

To analyse the quantitative data, I used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, which was provided to me free of charge under the University of Sheffield license. I used this software because I am familiar with it, as I used it previously to analyse data during my master's degree studies. SPSS is also one of the most broadly utilised and highly regarded pieces of software for investigating quantitative data (Gray, 2014).

As previously mentioned, I designed an online questionnaire and it was published on www.survs.com website, which, made it easier to distribute it. The link to the online questionnaire's page on [Survs.com](http://www.survs.com) was broadcasted (via social media applications, such as Twitter and WhatsApp) to as many teachers as possible to procure a large number of completed questionnaires. Consequently, the website page of the questionnaire was visited by 1074 people. However, only 635 teachers—421 females and 214 males—completed and returned the questionnaires. The analysis of the quantitative data began with receiving the data from the www.survs.com website, which were discharged in Excel form. The data in the Excel form were written out in words, which I converted to numbers as the first step of analysis. I then inserted these data into the SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the quantitative data. I used frequency distribution as a descriptive statistical method, which means 'the number of instances in a class....In surveys it is often associated with the use of Likert scales' (Gray, 2014, p. 566). The frequency distribution focused on summarising the data in combination tables.

Findings of the Research

Since I used a mixed-methods approach, and the sample was varied and diverse, I obtained a large amount and wide range of data. I therefore decided to report the findings of each method in separate chapters to avoid obscuring any details. Each group of participants also viewed the phenomena from different standpoints, depending on their situation (i.e., the principals' views were different from the children's and teachers' views and vice versa). Dividing the findings into chapters thus gave a whole picture of the phenomena investigated by this research. In these chapters, I determined the most essential findings, and the significant evidence

supporting them, and presented the information as either quote from the participants from the qualitative methods or frequency from the quantitative method. Afterwards, I discussed the findings in a separate chapter, divided into three themes based on the research questions. In that discussion chapter, I attempted to understand the agreements and disagreements in the findings, combining them to interpret the findings based on previous literature, theory and Saudi Arabian cultural perspectives and social context.

Barriers to the Implementation of the UNCRC in Primary Education in Saudi Arabia From the Teachers' Perspectives

Analysis of teachers' answers to the closed-ended questions.

The teachers' responses to the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire about the barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC is discussed in detail.

Table 5.4

Teachers' perspectives about the factors that hinder the implementation of the UNCRC in primary schools in Saudi Arabia

o.	Items		Agree	have no idea	Do not agree
	The lack of people's awareness about children's rights.		40	5	0
			5		1
	Society gives priority to the family and its privacy Over anything else.		38	0	7
			4.7	.7	0.6
	The number of students in each school is so high that it is hard to fully implement the UNCRC.		70	0	5
			5	2.6	3.4
	Saudi culture believes that children belong to their parents, so parents may treat children as they want.		44	6	65
			9.9	.1	6
	Undergraduate curricula focus on the development of teachers' academic skills with no focus on children's rights and its implementation in the work field.		37	8	00
			8.8	5.4	5.7

	Schools are not being well prepared to apply the UNCRC.	27	54	09
		8.6	4.3	7.2
	Educators are not well qualified to implement the UNCRC.	49	23	63
		5	9.3	5.7
	The financial support for education is lacking.	43	6	06
		4.1	3.5	2.4
	Saudi society is a traditional society, so it rejects anything from other cultures, such as the UNCRC.	30	3	22
		2	3	5
0	The UNCRC articles conflict with Islamic teachings.	55	23	57
		4.4	0.9	4.7
1	There are no laws or legislations that protect children and their rights.	55	18	92
		5.4	8.6	6

As shown in the above results, teachers agreed with nine items from Table 5, did not agree with two items, and have no idea about one item. The data reveals that the most important barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC at primary education in Saudi Arabia is 'the lack of people's awareness about children's rights'. This item was agreed upon by 85% of the teachers' sample. This is similar to the principals' answers about how the lack of the people's awareness about children's rights affect their implementation, and that this shortage of awareness appears in society's beliefs and thoughts that the family and its privacy should be given priority over anything else, even their children. The item 'Society gives priority to the family and its privacy over anything else' was agreed upon by 84.7% of the teachers' sample. Teachers therefore agreed with principals in this regard.

The third item that was agreed upon by 75% of the teachers' sample was that the number of students at schools is high, which makes it difficult to ensure that the children can enjoy their rights. In total, 69.9% of the participants agreed that society's awareness of

children's rights is limited. This item relates to how Saudi society's culture denotes that children belong to their parents, so parents have the right to treat their children the way that suits them and their children. This factor was mentioned by one of the principals, in her interview.

The teachers' responses placed the following item fifth: 'Undergraduate curricula focus on the development of teachers' academic skills with no focus on children's rights and its implementation'. A total of 68.8% of the participants agreed upon this item. This supports most of the principals' answers about how they have not studied the UNCRC before. However, one of the principals and 61.7% of the teachers' sample proved that they had studied children's rights in Islam at their universities, which means there is a conflict between this and the teachers' response to this item.

After that is the item about schools not being prepared to apply the UNCRC. A total of 58.6% of the teachers agreed with this item, which relates to the principals' perspectives that schools are unprepared for the implementation of the UNCRC. The item concerning the lack of qualified educators who could implement the UNCRC came in seventh. A total of 55% of the teachers agreed with this item, and this supports the principals' views that the shortage of qualified workers to implement the UNCRC at schools was one of the barriers. Also, 54.1% of the teachers agreed with the principals that the lack of financial support that schools receive hinders the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education.

Saudi society and its rejection of anything that comes from outside cultures, such as the UNCRC came next, with 52% of the teachers agreeing. This item confirms the lack of society's awareness of the UNCRC and agrees with the principals' perspectives about Saudi society and its members, who are closed-minded and who try to refuse anything new while simultaneously trying to control others who live within their society.

Those items scored a high percentage of agreement from the teachers' sample. The next item, about a conflict between the UNCRC articles and Islam, was answered with 'have no idea' by 50.9% of the teachers' sample. This is in conflict with the

principals' perspective that the UNCRC has the same rights as those mentioned in Islamic teachings. However, 71% of the teachers confirmed that they had not read the UNCRC before and they could not identify whether it conflicts with Islam or not.

The last item is rated as 'do not agree' by those in the teachers' sample. This item is that there are no laws or legislation that protect children and their rights. It was rated as 'do not agree' by 46% of the teachers' sample, whereas 35.4% of the sample agreed with the statement. This supports their responses to the question about there being laws to protect children and their rights as 59.7% of them agreed with this statement.

In the end, teachers agreed that the lack of societal awareness about the UNCRC is the first barrier to its implementation. This can be demonstrated in the teachers' perspectives on how Saudi society gives the family and its privacy priority over the needs of the children. Saudi society also sees children as belonging to their parents, so no one can intervene in how parents treat their children. Furthermore, this society is very traditional, so its members refuse cultural elements that are imported from the West.

Another barrier concerning educators and their preparations is that educators have not studied the UNCRC before and that they are not qualified to implement it. Also, the schools, the number of students attending the schools, and the lack of financial support hinder the implementation of the UNCRC in primary schools. These were the barriers with which teachers' sample agreed upon as hindrances to the implementations of the UNCRC at primary schools in Saudi Arabia.

Analysis of teachers' answers to the open-ended questions.

The teachers' responses to the question, 'Do you have any additional information about the barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education? If yes, please list them.' As mentioned in principals' and teachers' answers on the previous part of the questionnaire, the awareness of children's rights is absent in Saudi society. This was the first barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC in the primary education that was highlighted by teachers when answering this point. It was said:

The non-implementation of the UNCRC is because of the lack of people's awareness about it.

She confirmed that the lack of societal awareness about the UNCRC is the most important barrier to its implementation. It was added that Saudi society's views of children are based on the underestimation of children and people obtain their knowledge about children and their rights from this society. In this regard, he said:

Everyone in Saudi Arabia gets their knowledge about children's rights from society, which says to underestimate children.

He means that society—not the culture of Islam—despises children and their rights. The Islamic teachings state many rights for children, and it calls for respecting other's rights. Also, as stated before, teachers and principals agreed that children's rights in Islam are the same as the children's rights stated in the UNCRC. It was confirmed that Islam does not stop people from applying the UNCRC, but people themselves and the society do that:

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country, and Islam knows and protects the rights of the child. The Islamic teachings are very interested in children's rights and duties, and therefore, the teachers are aware of these rights, but those rights are not activated. The implementation of children's rights is affected by the cultural and tribal aspects of the teacher.

Therefore, the absence of society's awareness is the most important barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia from the perspectives of the teachers, which is consistent with the perspectives of the principals.

The lack of society's awareness about children's rights appears in some of the teachers' answers. For instance, society's rejection of any new topic or cultural elements that come from the West appeared in some of the teachers' answers. For example, it was said:

I do not think that we need any international conventions to control bringing up our children or protecting them. Islamic law contains everything about human beings from their birth, and it is the only law we need.

Also, it was said:

As an Islamic society, we do not need the UNCRC to know and respect children's rights. All we need is the obligation of Islam.

They used Islam as an excuse to reject the UNCRC, even though they might either not have read it or know much about it. This can be explained as a fear of Western culture overtaking Islamic culture. This also has been mentioned before by principals; although the perspectives and ideas of the new generations in Saudi Arabia are changing for the better, some people still reject modernisation in society by rejecting anything from Western culture and they try to control society by making people obey them.

The teachers' answers showed their disapproval of the idea of controlling how families treat their children. The current culture views that a child is the property of his or her parents. Two of the teachers agreed with each other about the UNCRC not being implemented in primary education in Saudi Arabia if it tries to restrict parents and their ways of bringing up their children. It was said:

The UNCRC should not encourage children's disobedience towards their parents by giving them the power and priority over their parents.

It was said:

I do not know about the UNCRC's articles but, in general, I believe in children's rights if those rights do not conflict with the parents' role in bringing their child up.

He did not specify how these rights could be reflected with the parents' roles in bringing up their children.

The privacy of the family in Saudi society means that no one can intervene in how parents treat their children or even ask about it. Principals noted in their interviews how families refuse any sort of intervention from others in how they bring up their children. In regard to the privacy of Saudi families, It was said:

One of the factors that hinder the implementation of the UNCRC at primary schools in Saudi Arabia is the privacy of Saudi families. It is hard to access these families' houses, so specialists in

protecting children's rights do not have the ability to know about the truth behind the walls inside the houses or to investigate the real situation of the child.

She confirmed that it is not easy to explore childhood issues in Saudi society due to families' privacy.

The previous discussion proves that there is more to the story than what we know about children and the violation of their rights, because the truth is hidden by the protection of the family's privacy, which has priority in Saudi society. It was said:

Action must be taken fast by the government to protect the children. Our hearts are broken because of the cases of abused children that we see in schools; the children suffer badly from being in an unstable family.

This confirms that school administrations are aware of violations of children's rights at home. Such violations continue, however, because schools have to wait for action from the government and schools prefer not to intervene in such cases. This view was corroborated as it was said:

Schools prefer to not intervene in protecting children and their rights because they are afraid of getting into trouble with the child's parents or try to protect the child from being punished more by his or her parent, stepparent, brother, uncle, or anyone if the school intervenes.

They think that they are protecting the child by keeping the child away from the problems at home, which confirms the absence of a rights-based culture in the school and society.

The misinterpretation of rights is also confirmed as a barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education. In this regard, it was said:

The misunderstanding of the articles on children's rights leads to the failure of implementing some of or all these articles, as well as the absence of training courses that explain and promote the culture of children's rights.

He pointed that to avoid the misunderstanding of children's rights, and for full implementation, there should be training courses—which are currently absent—for people in this regard.

One of the authorities responsible for improving the awareness of children's rights is the human and children's rights organisations, whose roles are absent in society. It was agreed with principals in that those organisations do not cooperate with schools and society to implement the UNCRC. She said:

There is no cooperation between rights' organisations and schools. They do not contribute to seminars, speeches, or training courses for educators or parents to improve their awareness about the UNCRC.

It was argued that children's rights organisations do not cooperate on improving society's awareness about the UNCRC, which affects the implementation of the UNCRC.

Those were the external factors that affected the implementation of the UNCRC in schools from the teachers' perspectives. Many internal factors in schools also hinder the implementation of children rights at those schools, however. The first internal factor is the high number of students at a school. It was said:

It is difficult to give each child his or her rights at school because the number of children in each class is high, and it increases, versus the teachers' numbers, which decrease.

This means there is no balance between the number of students and the number of teachers in schools. It was mentioned that the shortage of staff as a barrier of the implementation of children's rights:

Schools have a shortage of educational staff, and if there is an approach to implementing the UNCRC in schools, there should be employment of special cadres for this task.

This is related to what the principals mentioned before about the need of having qualified staff to take the responsibility of applying the UNCRC in schools.

The shortage of workers in schools leads to another barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC, which is teachers' heavy workload. It was said:

Teachers do not have enough time to do their work within the curriculum, so they could not do anything with the enrichment or education programs given about the UNCRC.

She confirmed that the workload leads teachers to focus only on the curriculum that they teach, with little interest in the quality of school life, including the children's practice of their rights and improving their awareness of children's rights.

Primary education curricula also do not help the implementation of the UNCRC, as the UNCRC is not mentioned in any of them. It was said:

There is nothing in the school curriculum that refers to children's rights at all.

If it is absent from the curriculum, if the teachers are limited in teaching these curricula—which are their most important duties—at school with a heavy workload and the high number of students, and if the rights culture in society is absent or misunderstood, students will not be able to learn, ask for, and enjoy their rights within or outside schools.

According to the previous discussion, teachers agreed with principals about the existence of barriers that are both external and internal to schools regarding the implementation of the UNCRC. The external barriers concern society and its lack of awareness about children's rights, as well as the absence of cooperation between rights organisations with schools and society. The internal factors include the high number of students in schools, the insufficient number of school staff, their heavy workload, and the absence of a rights culture in primary school curricula. These factors were identified by teachers as the main hindrances to the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia.

Barriers to the Implementation of the UNCRC

This section answers the third question of my study regarding principals' and teachers' perspectives on the barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia. Based on the study's findings, there are many key barriers stopping the UNCRC from being applicable. These key barriers are Saudi society itself, insufficient efforts from authorities, the lack of qualified employees in schools, and inadequate school buildings and equipment.

Saudi society.

Saudi society and culture are the main barriers preventing the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education. This is due to a lack of awareness about the UNCRC in the society, the society's customs and norms, and people's resistance to change.

The principals and teachers who participated in the focus group agreed that if people do not have knowledge of the UNCRC, it will not be implemented. Additionally, 85% of the questionnaire respondents confirmed that people's lack of awareness regarding the UNCRC is a barrier to the implementation of the UNCRC. This agrees with Isaac (2010), who found that people's lack of awareness about the UNCRC affects its implementation in Saudi Arabia. This could be because of the high rate of illiteracy in Saudi Arabia, as argued by Almuneef et al. (2012), who claim that child abuse cannot be prevented because the illiteracy rate is so high in Saudi society, which means that people treat their children by the same means that their parents used with them. According to Bronfenbrenner's (2005), the parental behaviour of neglect, abuse, or any other parental behaviour could contribute to formatting the individual's behaviour due to genetic potential. Vygotskiï (1997) said that human behaviour is a result of the experiences obtained from previous generations, reinforced by physical in-

heritance. It is the reproducing of child abuse because the illiterate people do not have any knowledge of what constitutes child abuse and they also do not have much awareness of children's rights. However, because educated people who work directly with children, such as teachers and principals, also do not have any awareness of the

UNCRC, it is not surprising that society also lacks awareness of the UNCRC.

Society not only lacks awareness of the UNCRC but also there are widespread misconceptions of childhood and children. One of the questionnaire respondents stated that 'People obtain their knowledge about treating children from society, which is based on the underestimation of children.'

According to this quote, culture constructs people's beliefs, which control their interactions with others and acquired through

experiences that gained by these interaction activities. The Saudi people's beliefs about children come from the culture they belong to, which underestimates children. Vygotskiï (1997) argued that the individual's experience is completely driven by the social environment and because of that the individual's reactions are diverse dependent on the historical, geographical, and social circumstances surrounding him or her. The occasional video emerges on social media of children being abused by their relatives or teachers to illustrate that child abuse issues exist in Saudi society, which usually irritates the society at large and leads to pressure to sanction the abusers and the intervention of the official authorities. According to the study's findings, the spread of child abuse in Saudi society can be understood by cultural norms, which hold that a child is the property of his or her parents as confirmed directly by two of the principals and 69.9% of the questionnaire respondents. This agrees with Albaker (2013b), who stated that Saudi culture supports the belief that children are the property of their parents.

The belief in parental ownership of children does not just exist in Saudi society; it is evident around the world. Campbell and Covell (2001) point out that this belief about the ownership of children also hinders the fulfilment of the UNCRC in Canada. They mention that although Canada's society has become more civilised than others, people in this society still treat children as parental property. This may be because this belief is deeply rooted in their culture and it is not easy to change. Campbell and Covell (2001) indicate that this culture conflicts with the reality of children as rights-bearers and their rights should be respected. If a society views children as the property of their parents, however, the children are not considered rights-bearers. Cassidy (2012) and Kepenekci (2006) agree that children are seen as humans with no

rights in some societies, which makes it difficult to reach the full implementation of the UNCRC.

The idea of the ownership of children in Saudi society may be because of a misinterpretation of the Islamic discourse from the Quran and Sunnah. This misunderstanding of Islam leads to that people don't protect children they see being abused in Saudi Arabia (Almuneef et al., 2012). One example of this misunderstanding is

the Prophet Mohamed's—peace be upon him—words, 'You and your wealth belong to your parents' (Ibn Hanball, n.d.; p. 503). This saying is understood to mean that sons and daughters are the property of their parents. The meaning of this saying, however, as explained by Ibn Hanball (n.d.), is that if a father needs his son's money because he is poor, he can take as much as he needs, and if the son is able to work and earn money, the son is required to spend from this money on his poor father; this saying does not allow the father to take his son's money as he pleases but only as he needs it. The problem here is the literal understanding of the religious discourse in the Quran and Sunnah. This misunderstanding has transferred into knowledge that creates a culture, which is learnt through the daily interactions among people and inherited by subsequent generations. Vygotskiï and Luria (1993) said: 'Man is a social creature, and social-cultural conditions profoundly change him, developing a whole series of new forms and techniques in his behaviour' (p. 213).

Such societies that hold these beliefs in the parents' ownership of the children may consider the UNCRC as a restriction of the parents' rights to their children. My study's findings confirmed this as there were two questionnaire respondents who stated the view that the UNCRC may conflict with parents' rights in raising their children. Campbell and Covell (2001) and Freeman (2006) agree that some people reject the UNCRC because they think it is incompatible with parental rights, which are sacred. This is the situation of parental rights in Saudi culture, which embraces the Islamic belief that gives parents a high value. According to Alhilali and Khan (2017), in Surat Luqman, Verse 15, Allah says: '...if they (the parents) endeavour to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness' (p. 551). This quote confirms the high value given to parents by Islam, as even if they refuse Islam and also try to persuade their son/daughter to do so, they still have the rights over their children.

Furthermore, disobedience of children against their parents is one of the biggest sins in Islam; the Prophet Mohammed—peace be upon him—mentions disobe-

ence to parents as the second worst sin after polytheism when he says, 'Shall I inform

you of the biggest of the great sins?' They said, 'Yes, O Allah's Apostle!' He said,

'To join partners in worship with Allah and to be undutiful to one's parents' (Albukhari, n.d., p. 1332).

This statement confirms the great value given to parents by Islam. Some people may hence reject the UNCRC as it is in conflict with the order to obey one's parents. Although Islam supports the rights of parents, it does not ignore children's rights, however. One of these is children's right to be treated with mercy because the Prophet Mohammed—peace be upon him—tells the story of when he kissed AlHasan bin Ali (his grandson) while Al-Aqra' at-Tamim was sitting beside him. AlAqra said, 'I have ten children and I have never kissed any one of them.' Prophet Mohammed—peace be upon him—cast a look at him and said, 'Whoever is not merciful to others will not be treated mercifully' (Alnisaburi, n.d., p.1809). This confirms the mercy of Prophet Mohammed—peace be upon him—towards children and his message to all Muslims to treat children with mercy and love. People seem to be placing parental rights over children's rights because they are selective and take what works with their benefits as adults; however, it is a misuse of power.

The culture of a society affects interventions for preventing violations against children. One of the principals in the study confirmed that families refuse interventions by others into their children's problems, such as child abuse. Families consider this to be a breach of the family's privacy. This affects the reporting process of violations against children in Saudi society. While Aleissa and Almuneef (2010) indicated that the rate of reporting of child abuse cases to the authorities increased tenfold from 2000 to 2008, the National Family Safety Program (2011) confirmed that child abuse and neglect are widespread in Saudi Arabia and that the number of actual cases is higher than the number of reported cases. Protecting family privacy is one of the reasons for not reporting these types of problems. Three of the principals and 84.7% of the questionnaire respondents confirmed that society places a higher value on family privacy than on child protection. This is supported

by Albaker (2013a), who said that reporting child abuse cases in Saudi Arabia is affected by the idea that this is a type of violation of family privacy.

The fear of getting in trouble with families such as family complaints, putting pressure on teachers to quit, or even threats of violence or legal sanctions stops educators from reporting child abuse cases to the authorities, as confirmed by one of the principals and one of the questionnaire respondents. This agrees with Albuhairan et al.'s (2011) study, which found that protecting the relationships between school pro-

fessionals and children's parents was a factor that impacts the reporting of child abuse. This is due to the importance of social connections in Saudi society and their influence on all aspects of a person's life because it is a tribal society and everyone tries to protect his or her tribe members. Educators will therefore not report child abuse as it might become a personal affront and the whole tribe could be affected by this report, especially if the abuser is a family member. Alsaif et al. (2017) confirmed that educational professionals worry about the intra-familial effects of reporting child abuse, particularly when the abuser is one of the victim's family members.

It is also possible that the fear of scandal can affect the reporting of cases of child abuse, as confirmed by the school principals. This is especially true in sexual abuse cases when the victim is a girl. Saudi culture places a high value on girls' virginity and its protection before marriage, and Islamic teaching forbids sexual relationships outside of marriage (Alsaif et al., 2017). Alsaif et al. (2017) added that the fear of affecting a child's reputation also stops the children themselves from reporting sexual abuse cases. In traditional societies such as Saudi Arabia, a child who faces sexual abuse is treated as a criminal, and his or her future will be affected, as confirmed by one of the principals in my study. As a boy, this will affect his sense of manhood, as others may look on him with shame. Girls in particular are affected because they usually will not be considered desirable for marriage. The reactions of Saudi society towards children's issues thus affects child protection. These reactions are a product of the culture and it is wholly determined by

the structure of the environment that the individual grows in (Vygotskiĭ, 1997). These reactions are behavioural functions, which are products of cultural and social influences, relating the individual with his or her environment and determining his or her perceptions (Vygotskij, 1993). In this way, the culture of fearing a scandal produces powerless adults who cannot protect themselves or their children.

The principals in my study confirmed that not reporting child abuse cases has a negative influence on society as it will contribute to these cases increasing in number. This agrees with Lansdown, Jimerson, and Shahroozi (2014), who point out that not reporting these cases helps to protect the criminal instead of the victim because the criminal will continue to practice his or her crimes unchallenged. The culture of keeping these kinds of cases secret therefore hinders the protection of children in a society that is a part of the UNCRC. However, this is not the only negative effect of not reporting child abuse. For example, abused children may grow up to be abusers,

as confirmed by Almuneef et al. (2012), Freeman & Saunders (2014), and McCowan (2012). Furthermore, abused children are more likely to be violent or abuse drugs/alcohol as mentioned by Almuneef et al. (2012). In contrast, Glasser et al. (1994) challenged the belief of the cycle of abuse as they found that male victims of abuse in their childhood are more likely to become perpetrators than females, especially if their abuser was female, but they found that for just a minority of males in their study. The Office for National Statistics in UK (2016) found that the abused child is more likely to be a victim of more abuse as an adult, especially female.

Saudi society also hinders the implementation of the UNCRC by refusing change, even if it is for the better. The principals and teachers in the focus group and 52% of the questionnaire respondents confirmed this. They noted that some people in their society reject anything from the West. This is in line with Clarke (2008), who found that in Trinidad, anything from the West is treated with suspicion. This is in part because of the radical differences between Western societies and non-Western societies in

terms of traditions, customs, and beliefs. As the UNCRC is a Western-based convention (Imoh, 2008), it may hence be rejected by Saudi society, as predicted by the principals in my study. The principals also mentioned that those who reject change may be seeking to control society by influencing the decision makers. Imoh (2008) argued that people who reject change aim to achieve their personal goals by protecting the customs that serve their own benefits. Imoh (2008) added that there is a fear of the consequences that Western concepts such as the UNCRC could have for the cultural and social structure of their society such as the introduction of new norms, which do not belong to their culture, or the abandonment of traditional customs and norms. In Saudi society, the adults fear negative influences on their religion, as they believe that Western concepts are products of non-Islamic religions; this leads them to reject all Western concepts even though they have not researched them and do not understand them. Pearson (2015) mentioned that the decision-makers are influenced by local policies and beliefs and the international legislation, therefore, there should be a balance between the international polices and the local uniqueness in order to implement the international polices and protect children's rights and needs.

From the previous discussion and based on the study findings, it is obvious that Saudi society and its culture are the key barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in primary education in Saudi Arabia. One of the teachers in the focus group said, 'The non-implementation of the UNCRC is a sociocultural issue, not a legislation issue.' She emphasised that legislation on the UNCRC will not be obeyed if the culture and society have not been changed. She agreed with Imoh (2008) that the implementation of the UNCRC is a cultural issue. Lundy (2007) agreed with the need for cultural change in school to implement the UNCRC articles, such as Article 12 about the child's voice at school. However, to implement the UNCRC, there is a need for a cultural shift in society, not just in school. Almahroos (2007) indicated that child protection laws and conventions will not be applied unless society's attitudes change, which requires changing the cultural roots that control the people's behaviour towards children. This can be interpreted in terms of

sociocultural and ecological theories, which emphasises the role of the society and culture in which a person lives in shaping his or her understanding, behaviour, and skills and this occurs through the interaction activities between people (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Daniels, 1996). Thus, the society believes of rights determine the people's understanding of the UNCRC.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, however, there is a concentric circle of influences on the developing person, which determine his or her characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In regard to the implementation of the UNCRC I could say that the implementation of this convention includes not just the influences within the circle, but also the influences from outside—as the UNCRC is an international law—into the circle. Culture is very dynamic, especially in the 21st century; there should be a change in Saudi culture itself in order to implement the UNCRC.

Insufficiency of authorities' efforts.

The study's findings reveal that the authorities have made insufficient efforts in the implementation of the UNCRC. This finding is supported by Almohaimeed (2009), who said that there are barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC at the level of the authorities in Saudi Arabia. The NCC (2012) also found that there is a lack of proper care and attention to protecting children. This may be because Saudi Arabia signed the UNCRC with reservations on the articles that conflicted with Islamic teachings, with no determination of exactly what these articles were. This may lead to difficulties in the implementation of the UNCRC. Alkaabi (2012) argued that there are many disadvantages of the reservations that the Saudi government has made on the UNCRC as these reservations are not clearly determined. Homed (2009) said that the reservations that the Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, made regarding the UNCRC should nonetheless not affect the essence of the convention.

These insufficient efforts, confirmed by the study's findings, can be specified as the lack of planning for implementing the UNCRC, which requires increasing overall awareness. There are no training sessions to increase educators' awareness about the UNCRC. This is in agreement with Al-Zaboon et al. (2016)

findings, which indicate the lack of training sessions for teachers about the UNCRC in Jordan. The teachers in the focus group revealed that the training sessions that are available to improve educators' knowledge of children's treatment at school do not mention the UNCRC in any way. Moreover, although there are many directives dispatched by the MoE to schools that deal with some aspects of children's rights such as banning violence of any kind, these directives do not consider this to relate to children's rights. Albuhairan et al. (2011) found that the training sessions and directives that address child violence are readily available to educators, but they do not address any of the UNCRC articles. This can be understood as authorities working to keep up with international law and to fulfil their obligations to the international community in terms of international conventions by signing the convention and organising some laws. This is supported by Sund and Vackermo's study (2015), which found that the efforts of decision-makers in implementing the UNCRC do not include much more than signing it and making some laws, but there are no real efforts to implement it. This is because the decision-makers are a part of a society that does not believe in the UNCRC. According to Vygotskiï and Luria (1993), individuals are social beings and their behaviours, thinking, and perceptions are created by their culture. The UNCRC will thus not be seen as 'real' as it may be in other societies because it is not a part of Saudi society's culture and it is not embedded in people's interactions, such as in the interactions between parents and their children.

The limitations of school budgets are another shortfall in the authorities' efforts; the principals and teachers in the focus group and the questionnaire respondents revealed that the school budget is not enough to cover the UNCRC's requirements, such as providing children with a clean environment. Pearson and Sim (2013) mentioned that the stakeholders' priorities affect the financial support of institutions that support children's development. Thus, according to Pearson and Sim (2013), if it is not on their priority to support children's and their rights, there will be a shortage in the financial support in this regard. Clarke (2008), Mangamu (2013), and Wallace (2005) found that financial issues were one of the main

barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in Kenya, Zambia, and Ethiopia. They indicate that the reason for this is the extreme poverty in these countries and the need for help from wealthier countries to overcome

these issues. In Saudi Arabia, however, the situation is different as the total education budget for 2016, which was the year of the data collection for my study, amounted almost to \$51,109,067 (Ministry of Finance, 2018). Nonetheless, schools still suffer from a shortage of financial support from the MoE. Homed (2009) said that the weak financial support for children's institutions such as schools is one of the main barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC. This may be because the education budget in Saudi Arabia covers public education, higher education, and special education; additionally, education is still in the improvement process as many new universities have been established in the last five years and there are many school buildings currently under construction. Most of the teachers in the focus group said that they had paid out of their own pockets to provide equipment for their schools, which would indicate that the school budget is insufficient.

The other issue with the budget is that it does not include a specific amount in the budget for disabled education in inclusive schools, as confirmed by one of the teachers in the focus group. This lack of funding may be because of the belief in Saudi society about children with disabilities and their ability to be educated. In Saudi society, people with disabilities are treated as burdens on their families and most people believe that they do not have the ability to be educated. As argued by Hodge (2014), children with disabilities lost their personhood in society because they were considered a problem instead of a human being. Alquraini (2011) confirmed the negative attitude against children with disability in Saudi society has negatively impacted the disabled children. Alquraini (2011) confirmed that disabled children are considered to be a punishment or test from God to their parents, which leads to them being ignored by society and prevented from having certain rights, such as to education. This culture and these beliefs affect decision-makers and their decisions because they are a part of this culture and society,

which constructs people and their understanding (Vygotskiï & Luria, 1993).

Another shortfall in the authorities' efforts is the absence of guidance in implementing the UNCRC and protecting children, as confirmed by the principals in the study. The principals indicated that they did not have clear guidance in how to deal with children's issues such as abuse and how to report them. There was also no guidance in implementing the UNCRC in schools. Albuhairan et al. (2011) and Alfaryan (2014) confirmed that there is an absence of guidance in reporting child abuse and protecting children in schools in Saudi Arabia. This could be because of the wide spread notion that it is not the school's responsibility to report these kinds of cases (Albuhairan et al.,

2011), part of which is the belief that schools are academic places to provide children with academic knowledge and nothing else. Cassidy (2012) and Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014) say that with no guidance or framework to work within, the UNCRC will not be fully implemented.

The previous discussion confirms that the insufficient official efforts regarding the implementation of the UNCRC affect its implementation negatively. These efforts include financial issues, the lack of effort to increase awareness of the UNCRC, and the absence of a framework to implement the convention.

Lack of qualified employees.

Based on the study's findings, the schools suffer from a lack of qualified employees to help in the implementation of the UNCRC. This was confirmed by the principals and teachers in the focus group and the questionnaire respondents. Homed (2009) also found that there is a problem with the availability of competencies and cadres to implement children's rights

The most important condition to fulfil is having knowledge and awareness of the UNCRC. The study's findings confirmed that educators did not have enough awareness of the UNCRC. Cassidy (2012) indicates that with no awareness, the UNCRC will not be implemented. Alfaryan (2014) and Isaac (2010) also point to the lack of staff awareness, which affects the protection of children and the implementation of the UNCRC in Saudi Arabia. This could be

because teacher education programmes in universities do not focus on children's rights concepts as well as the absence of this concept in Saudi society.

Even if educators have awareness of the children's rights, their heavy workload leaves them unable to implement these rights. This was confirmed by the study sample of principals and teachers, who stated that they have a heavy workload that means a lack of time to influence and implement children's rights and teach children about their rights. They pointed out that there is no balance between the number of children at the school and the number of teachers, which makes it difficult for teachers to manage their work. This is supported by Arif (2011), who confirms that in Saudi Arabia the number of children far exceeds the number of teachers such that it creates a tremendous burden on teachers and makes them less able to focus on the children's needs.

Another issue is employing unqualified staff in important positions such as student advisors and health advisors, as confirmed by the study. The student advisor is responsible for listening to the children, helping them, and solving their problems. This

position needs someone who understands children's personalities, who can deal with differences, and who can solve children's problems. Psychology graduates may have these qualities, but student advisors may also be mathematics graduates or Arabic language graduates, which means they are less qualified for this position. The same is true for health advisors, who are often just teachers and cannot help children with their medical issues. This may be because decision-makers do not believe in the importance of these positions at school, which could be a result of the low status of the child in the society. In addition, as discussed earlier, children do not have a voice at school, so it is believed that there is no need for specialists to listen to their opinions or even their problems.

Finally, it is clear that the educators in schools are not qualified to implement the UNCRC as they do not have awareness about it. Furthermore, although educators are aware of some of the principles of children's rights, in general, their role in influencing these rights and implementing them is affected by society. This is supported by Ali (2013), whose found that, although kindergarten

teachers in Saudi have some awareness of children's rights, this awareness does not transmit to behaviour, since the teachers do not implement these rights due to the influence of Saudi society. According to sociocultural theory, human behaviour is a collection of experiences transmitted from previous generations to new generations. These experiences are reinforced by cultural and social norms and practices (Vygotskiï, 1997). Thus, people's behaviour towards children in Saudi society is transmitted from the previous generations, and affects the teachers' role in implementing children's rights. Moreover, the teachers' heavy workload, and the fact that they work in positions in which they are not specialised in the area of children's rights, affect the role they play in influencing and implementing those rights at school. Based on the study sample, this is one of the barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC in primary schools in Saudi Arabia.

School buildings and equipment.

The study's findings indicate that the schools themselves are not suitable for the implementation of the UNCRC. The principals said that the school buildings do not help in the implementation of the UNCRC. Furthermore, the teachers in the focus group mentioned that the schools are not suitable because they do not have suitable places for activities and some schools do not have labs. Another principal said, however, that the schools were suitable and there was one teacher who agreed with this view. Almegren (2003) also found that school buildings do not meet their users' needs.

The teachers gave a clarification of these differences in their perspectives about the suitability of schools for the implementation of the UNCRC as there are many types of school buildings: there are new buildings, old ones, and leasehold buildings. The new buildings are provided with labs and equipment and spaces that can fully accommodate the number of children, while the old buildings and the leasehold buildings are less well appointed. The use of the leasehold schools is because of the expansion of cities, which requires providing schools in these new areas. For this reason, the MoE rents houses as temporary schools until the school buildings are ready. Alluhaidan (2018) and Alhumaid (2017) state that the rapid increase in the number of students and the cities' expansion

has led to the use of leasehold buildings, which are usually houses being used as schools. Alhumaid (2017) adds that the rapid increase in the number of students has led to quick leasehold schools without focusing on their quality. Almegren (2003) confirms that the old school buildings and leasehold buildings lack proper facilities such as labs compared to the new school buildings. Furthermore, in Almegren's study (2000), he found that the school buildings in Riyadh needed to be improved in accordance with the safety requirements for school buildings. These findings are supported by Alhumaid (2017) and Alluhaidan (2018), who mention that school buildings do not have the basic elements of schools: the rooms are small, the corridors are narrow, there is a lack of proper ventilation, there is overcrowding due to the large numbers of students, and there is a lack of security and safety such as emergency exits or fire extinguishers. These facts confirm that these schools are not suitable for the implementation of the UNCRC.

The other issue mentioned by one of the teachers is that some of the schools that apply inclusive education are not prepared with the facilities needed by children with disabilities, such as customised corridors. This is because these buildings are old. On the other hand, the new buildings are well-prepared for this purpose, as confirmed by another teacher. This may be because of the misinterpretation of inclusive education, as it is an international concept that cannot be followed when there is no understanding of the needs of children with disabilities. 'Inclusive education' is clearly not being interpreted correctly, as some schools are not suitable for the children with disabilities but are still used as inclusive schools. This issue is out of the scope of this study, but needs further research. This society does not believe in the capability of disabled children to learn, they may not be focusing on the quality of schools for the purpose of inclusive education.

Vygotskiï and Luria

(1993) argued that the social prejudices against individuals with disabilities affect their

development. This is because the social expectations and attitudes toward children with disabilities influence their access to

sociocultural knowledge, experiences, and opportunity to participate in activities with peers (Kozulin et al., 2003).

It is obvious that the school buildings and equipment are barriers to the implementation of the UNCRC. Not all schools are the same, however: the new school buildings are suitable for the implementation of the UNCRC as confirmed by my study findings, but the old-school buildings and leasehold buildings are not.

Research Conclusions

The primary barrier to implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Saudi Arabia's primary schools is societal, driven by cultural beliefs that prioritize family privacy over children's rights. A significant obstacle to the effective implementation of the UNCRC is the general lack of awareness and understanding of children's rights among educators and society. Misinterpretations of Islamic teachings and resistance to Western-based concepts like the UNCRC contribute to misconceptions and rejection of children's rights, creating a challenging environment for promoting children's rights in schools.

The research revealed a shortage of qualified educators who understand and can implement the UNCRC. The heavy workload of teachers, combined with inadequate staffing and resources, hinders the focus on children's rights. Moreover, primary education curricula often lack specific content on children's rights, further impeding the UNCRC's implementation in schools. The physical infrastructure of many Saudi Arabian primary schools is not conducive to supporting children's rights. Outdated or overcrowded buildings, combined with a lack of essential equipment and inadequate financial support, are major barriers to implementing the UNCRC. These structural limitations contribute to an environment where children's rights are not prioritized or effectively safeguarded.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present research recommended:

Conducting a study to assess how the UNCRC is implemented in male primary schools in Riyadh and compare the results with those from female schools.

Exploring the similarities and differences between Islamic principles and the UNCRC to find a balanced approach that aligns with both religious values and international standards.

Identifying the gaps in Saudi educators' knowledge of the UNCRC and their ability to apply it in schools.

Creating an educational program that integrates children's rights into the curriculum while respecting Saudi cultural values.

Investigating various educational frameworks to determine which best supports the UNCRC in Saudi primary schools.

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