# University of Glasgow

AL-Gharibi, Zainab Mohammed (2025) *Needs of Omani children during their transition from KG2 to first grade: a case study of stakeholders' perspectives.* PhD thesis.

*final*

*Needs of Omani Children During their Transition from KG2 to First Grade: A Case Study of Stakeholders' Perspectives*

**By Zainab Mohammed AL-Gharibi**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education
College of Social Sciences
University of Glasgow
2025

# Abstract

Children learners' experiences can have a long-lasting influence on their future well-being, active participation both in school and life, and academic success. The purpose of this research is to shed light on children's transition from KG2 to first grade, its general situation, and children's needs during this time from their viewpoint as well as those of the stakeholders involved in this issue. Theoretically, this study builds on two perspectives of experience: Dewey's concept of the continuity of experience and the notion of boundary objects, CHAT, as introduced in 1978 by Vygotsky. The study followed a multi-methodological design that incorporated gathering the perceptions of relevant stakeholders and children's experiences in this area, along with the effects of cultural and historical influence, through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Data validation included triangulation via observation. Stakeholders included nursery teachers, primary one teachers, nursery and primary school principals, curriculum developers for kindergarten and first grade, nursery and primary supervisors, policy makers, and parents. Data collection also included children's drawings and visual narratives, along with research field notes and observations of first-graders in the classroom at the beginning of the school year, in order to illustrate young learners' experiences in nursery school and first grade. Data analysis entailed identifying main motives and needs and exploring through the lens of the underpinning theories whether the children's experiences demonstrated continuity. The theoretical framework and study findings guided the development of the suggested model, which presents the theory behind it: community, continuity, and public content. It was designed according to Fullan's framework and the theories of CHAT and Dewey as the theoretical framework for the study, in a summary on an illustration explaining its components and steps. It is developed to bring about positive change in the issue of transition of children from KG2 to first grade and secure the future for young learners.

*Keywords:* Children's academic needs, children's social needs, children transition, primary school, kindergarten school.

# Content

# Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the wonderful children who formed part of this study. Their cooperation and love enriched my data and helped me achieve my research goals. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the teachers and school principals who helped me complete the implementation. I would also like to thank the stakeholders who welcomed my cooperation, gave everything they could, interacted with me, and encouraged the idea of benefiting from the results of my study.

My deepest and most profound gratitude goes to Dr Julie McAdam, who provided me with ideal support and guidance. She stood by me throughout the difficult psychological circumstances I experienced; her words like a balm offering me support throughout my research journey as the best supervisor I could have asked for. I would also like to thank Dr Cathy Fagan for her support and enriching comments on everything that I presented to her. I would also like to show my appreciation for her encouraging words and sincere feelings when I experienced difficulties in my research journey. Their advice was exceptional and their support was endless. Their kindness and support consistently helped me move forward with enthusiasm and steadfastness.

I am very grateful to my husband Saif, whose care and kindness accompanied me during my turbulent study journey. He held my hand in times of trouble and led me to safety. And those three spirits that emanate from my soul, my children Sheikha, Qaboos and Oman, their words were a source of inspiration to guide me through the bumps of my studies. Sheikha, my eldest daughter, challenged and inspired me to continue forward. I would also like to thank my officials at work in the Ministry of Education for their continuous cooperation with me both before and during my study period. Dr Ali Al-Jahouri, Ali Al-Ajmi, Hashim Al-Mousawi, Yousef Al-Malahi, and Nawal Al-Sinani – thank you. Special thanks to my friend Anisa, who accompanied me with her prayers throughout my study period.

# Dedication

To.

My other half, my husband Saif,

My soul siblings, my children, Sheikha, Qaboos, and Oman,

My father's soul, my mother's heart that contains my being,

The children of Oman, in whom I saw a look of sadness during the transition to primary school, and to those I did not see, with my love.

# List of Tables

# List of Figures

## Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature:


Printed Name: Zainab AL-Gharibi

# Chapter 1

# Introduction: The Initial Scene

## 1.1. Entry

*The transition to a new school can set the tone for children's future school experiences*. (Budniewski, 2007, p. 11)

As I contemplated Budniewski's (2007) suggestion of setting the tone, I found myself carried back in my mind to 1984, sitting in my first-grade seat in my primary school, crying and feeling scared. I did not know why I was upset or what compelled me to remain silent. I do remember that not knowing anyone around me contributed to my not feeling safe. Compounding my mistrust was my perception that the teacher only cared about emptying everything in her mind into our little heads. I spent every morning in tears in that place, which I saw as a gloomy prison instead of the nice, normal school it actually was. My hatred of that place made my view of my surroundings very dark. I thought of the teacher as a witch, and although I understood everything she was explaining, I did not care to tell her I got it. Nor did I respond to any of her questions. In fact, I did not talk to anyone around me, even the other children.

All of those feelings resurfaced in 2011 when my daughter Shaikha began first grade. Looking into her eyes, I could see a familiar feeling, one I had known all too well at the same age. That feeling of being overwhelmed invariably leads to tears, sometimes even screaming. Fear and anxiety are followed by tension and not wanting to sleep at night, imagining that staying awake would keep the morning from coming. Morning meant going to school.

I lived through the same story again in 2013 when my son Qaboos started elementary school. On a typical day, he cried and pulled my scarf off my head as the teacher tried to draw him away. I could not go without my hijab, still clenched in his little hand, yet I could not return to him, as I knew he would not let me leave again. I cried, myself, as I stood helplessly outside the classroom, hearing his screams. I knew exactly how he felt.

I saw the same scene again in 2019 with my youngest daughter, Oman, whose suffering continued for 2 months at the beginning of her first-grade school year. Stress made her eat little and vomit often. She did not enjoy anything after coming home from school, knowing she would have to return to class the following day. She woke up more than three times every night. She was anxious and afraid that the morning would come too soon. Completely aware of what she felt, I shared her trauma.

Thus, I saw the suffering I had experienced myself repeated with my children, causing me to feel their distress so deeply, I even joined them in crying. Despite the importance of education on many levels – affecting the individual, community, society, even the globe – seeing the situation I had experienced extend to my children and potentially, if no changes are made, to future children, motivated me to research the issue and try to find ways to help those around us who are helpless like us. Thus, I began my thesis journey.

## 1.2. Study Rationale and Importance

According to the early education literature, the transition from preschool to the first grade is critical for many children, as well as their parents and caregivers, especially in terms of children's social and academic development (Hughes, 2015; La Paro et al., 2000; Marcon, 2002; Rimm-Kaufmman & Pianta, 2000; Toohey & Day, 2001). In a comparison of the environments found in preschool and first grade, Yeom (1998) characterised preschool as affective in nature, gentle, child-paced, play-oriented, engaging and nonpunitive. As a result, the author noted, many schoolchildren experienced positive feelings about their nursery school. In stark contrast, other authors have described the school environment as typically structured around explicit goals of instruction, including literacy, numeracy, and socialisation, in addition to focusing on developing children's academic progress (Parent et al., 2019).

Similarly, Decaro and Worthman (2008) elucidated the elementary school environment as also including larger classrooms, new rules, greater structure, and explicit learning goals, as well as different expectations for greater independence and responsibility. In addition, a young learner's transition to school involves a major change in identity due to shifting from being a child to a pupil. This new identity requires children to adapt from the play-

based pedagogy characteristic of early childhood settings to a more structured, cognitive learning environment. Entering a novel peer-group setting and facing new social and cognitive demands leads young children to encounter behavioural, cognitive, social-emotional and physical challenges during the transition process (Dunlap & Cushing, 2002; Groeneveld et al., 2013; La Paro et al., 2000; Laverick, 2008; Russ et al., 2012). In this vein, moving to a less flexible environment upon entering first grade might cause children to experience school failure (Marcon, 2000).

Overall, ample evidence speaks to the relationship between school entry and stressful challenges for children, especially in terms of socio-emotional aspects (Gunnar & Quevedo, 2007; Hirst et al., 2011; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). Ladd (1999) highlighted the influence of stressful social experiences in preschool settings on classroom participation and academic achievement. Conversely, Dockett et al. (2010) contended that a positive entry experience left an impact on children's future academic and social competences.

Despite the recent increasing research interest in this field in Western countries, examinations of this topic remain rare in Oman and other Arab nations. Almost no research in this area covers both the Omani and other Arab contexts. For the purposes of this study, I surveyed 1,499 studies examining early education in Arab contexts. I then narrowed the list down to include only studies focusing on the transition from nurseries to the first year in primary school. Arabic studies in this area fall into five categories, as detailed in the following discussion.

**The first group of studies** focuses on children's academic achievement and how it is affected by the curriculum employed. These studies include Habib (2016) in Kuwait, Khayyat (2010) in Saudi Arabia, Salama (2007) in Sudan and Ibrahim et al. (2019) in Iraq.

**Studies in the second group** deal with specific issues regarding academic achievement. For example, Al-Harahisha (2019) focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic skills possessed by first-grade primary children who had been enrolled in nursery programmes in Jordan. In contrast, Al-Sheikhi (2016) investigated the relationship between enrolment or non-enrolment in nurseries and educational attainment in mathematics among first and

fourth-grade children in Saudi Arabia. In a similar vein, Soman (2014) scrutinised the effect of enrolment or non-enrolment in nurseries on developing reading and writing skills in first-grade children in Jordan. Additionally, Mazeed (2013) focused on the geographical concepts of first-grade children who had been enrolled or not enrolled in nurseries in Iraq. In another study conducted in Iraq, Musa (2002) studied the reading preparedness of first-grade children who had or had not been enrolled in nurseries. Lastly, Al-Felfli et al. (2018) evaluated the effect of the quality of educational nurseries on developing creative thinking in first-grade children in Yemen.

**The third group of studies**, most of which were conducted in Iraq, feature investigations of psychosocial aspects (Al-Khafaf, 2017; Al-Saadi, 2010; Khalaf, 2019; Samouie, 2012), with the exception of one study carried out in Saudi Arabia (Nasreddin, 2010). Three studies focused on children aged 5, 6, or 7 include Khalaf's (2019) exploration of the development of emotional awareness in such children, AL-Khafaf's (2017) examination of the development of children's moral intelligence, and Samouie's (2012) investigation focusing on the development of self-concept in that age group of children. Al-Saadi (2010) examined the social behaviour of first-grade children who had or had not been enrolled in nurseries in Iraq. In contrast, Nasreddin (2010) explored emotional intelligence and its relationship to innovative thinking among a sample of first-grade children who had or had not been enrolled in nurseries in Saudi Arabia.

**The fourth group of studies** investigated academic achievement and its relationship with psychosocial aspects. Abbas (2007) confirmed the effectiveness of enrolment in nurseries in developing autonomy, school compatibility and academic achievement in first-grade children in Sudan. In contrast, Mohammed (2009) examined school readiness, academic achievement, and the social behaviour of first-grade children who had or had not been enrolled in nursery in Iraq.

**In the fifth group**, only two studies emerged, which evaluated the role of nurseries in school adaptation for first grade. Saber (2008) sought to identify the role of nurseries in school adaptation for first-grade children. Likewise, Abdelhamid (2007) explored the relationship between nursery enrolment and children's adaptation in school in a study set in Egypt.

Regarding Oman, the existing research focusing on childhood education, in general, remains limited. The relevant literature offers discussions of various issues related to childhood education, including Kilani and Al-Qaryouti (2016), Kazem (2016), Al-Farsi (2009), Al-Henaee (2013), Al-Nawafli (2013) Al-Shehhi (1997), Al-lawati et al. (2005), Al-maamaria and Saleh (2018), Al-sawafi et al. (2019), Al-Rahbi and Al-Nuaimi (2018), Al-Saadi (2014), Ahmed (2018), Ahmed et al. (2015), Ibrahim and ALkenani (2016), Abu Harb (2007), Al-Balushi (2010), Abdulwareth (2005), Al-Dhofri (2016), Al-Qaryouti (2016), Al-Marhoon and Jimiaan (2018), and Al-Bosafi et al. (2016). Nevertheless, none of those studies focused on the topic of transition from preschool to the first grade.

Therefore, the present study fills a wide gap concerning children's transition to primary school in the international literature, in general, and the Arabic literature, in particular. The current study thus makes a theoretical contribution by investigating for the first time children's agency in Oman and young learners' perceptions of the transition from preschool to first grade, an area of research that scholars have to this point neglected in both the Omani and Arab contexts. Due to this lack of scholarly attention, the impact of sociocultural conditions that influence children's motives in their new setting remains ambiguous, potentially contributing to problems that affect students' socio-emotional status and, in turn, their academic development. Thus, this investigation of the topic follows Sairanen and Kumpulainen's (2014) suggestion that such an examination will enable scholars "to understand how agency is socially constructed and how this mediates, and even determines, the educational engagement and learning of children" (p. 167). In consider that the agency here is in relation to navigating entry to school.

This study also offers a practical contribution in furthering a scholarly understanding of the sociocultural motives that mediate children's transitions to first grade. Identifying the motives and needs of the children supports the ability to review the nature of social policy and practice in the Omani preschool and primary school system and develop interventions that will enhance the experiences of young students and other relevant stakeholders (see chapter 2. P:20). In addition, the current study's findings provide policy implications for better supporting children's transition to formal schooling that can be helped to draw some comparisons internationally (see chapter 4. P:74). In addition, the findings offer insight

into how closely educational settings meet the expectations of children's agency conceptualised in children's law and policies issued in Oman.

## 1.3. Study Context.

Before the 1970s, although Oman had no nursery schools, some children were sent to mosques to learn the Holy Qur'an. The modern state of Oman was established in 1970, and from that point, Omani interest in education gradually witnessed remarkable growth, both in general and in the context of nurseries. Nursery schools vary widely according to the institutions that supervise them. A report published in 2018 by the National Centre for Statistics and Information identified six types of schools serving young learners. Two types of nurseries were listed as operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development: Child Corners, affiliated with the Omani Women's Associations, had 713 children enrolled in 62 centres in 2018, while 11 Children's Growth Houses, established by voluntary civil organisations, served 1,764 children at the time of the report. Memorising the Holy Qur'an, another kind of nursery under the supervision of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, spanned 809 facilities in 2018, with attendance numbering 8,498 children. The Ministry of Defence also sponsors nurseries that serve the children of military personnel; in 2018, these included 18 nurseries with 1,160 children. Similarly, the Royal Oman Police oversees nurseries for the benefit of children of law enforcement personnel; the statistics indicate that these centres served 644 children in 2018. In addition to these specialised organisations, most nurseries are run by private-sector entities that are licenced and supervised by the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Investigating the transition from preschool to first grade in Oman requires considering certain important aspects particular to the context of the current study. This study examines Omani nursery schools (preschools) that are run by the private sector. In addition, most preschools are in the capital city, Muscat, instead of being widely spread across the country. Another aspect to keep in mind is that children move from one institution to another (i.e. preschools to different primary schools) to attend first grade. Specifically, children start preschool in Oman at age 5 and go on to attend primary school upon reaching 6 years of age. Lastly, the school year in Oman starts in September and ends at the end of May.

According to Carr (2013), the various cultures and traditions of nurseries and schools encourage different behaviours in children while also imposing different cultural limitations. In light of Carr's observation, I chose the study's sample of 5-year-old children from three different nurseries located in the capital city Muscat and then arranged with their parents to follow them to the primary schools where they transferred at age 6. The duration of the study was 1 year to enable the collection of data from the same sample at different points in time.

## 1.4. Study Purpose and Research Questions.

The primary focus of the study was to gain knowledge in order to shed light on the transition of children from KG2 to first grade. The area of interest encompassed the current situation as Omani children experienced it, as well as their needs during this time of transition, by exploring the viewpoints of these young learners and other stakeholders involved in this issue .This aim was further divided into the following sub-objectives:

1. Exploring the concept of transition among stakeholders in the educational field.
2. Identifying children's needs during their transition from nursery to first grade from the perspective of children and stakeholders, including the factors affecting them and how are they affected.
3. Examining the impact of the transitional practices implemented during the transition of children from nursery to first grade, if any, from the opinion of the stakeholders, and determining whether they are positive or negative.
4. Achieving the short-term goals set for each category at each of the identified levels (e.g. teacher training, provision of necessary tools, training of stakeholders and parents according to their position and mission).
5. Uncovering the interaction between the different groups at the three existing levels (schools, school district, state), along with the extent of their interaction with the surrounding environment represented in history, societal culture, and technology.
6. Ensuring the existence of an infrastructure of expertise, tools, and environment to ensure the proper functioning of the work.
7. Achieving the proposed framework to bring about change in the process of children's transition from nursery to first grade in Oman.

Based on these objectives, the questions designed to guide the study were developed gradually, moving from general to more in-depth topics. I adopted the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) system as a framework for my study to explore the transition phenomenon in the context of Oman's education system. Next, I included Dewey's work within my consideration of the topic (see chapter 3. P: 56).

Guided by CHAT, I designated the study community as the sample needed to cover the surrounding human influence on the issue of the children's transition, including children, nursery teachers, first grade teachers, nursery and primary school principals, policy makers, parents, supervisors of nursery and primary schools, nursery-level curricular materials, and first grade curriculum developers. I then formulated questions to explore the phenomenon of children's transition from the nursery setting to the first grade in terms of stakeholders' knowledge; I also wished to uncover any applications that might reflect CHAT's elements of mediating, division of labour, rules, and historical and cultural context.

I also incorporated Dewey's principles of continuity and interaction into the study framework in order to consider the experience continuity of children during their transition and develop an understanding according to the precepts set forth in CHAT and Dewey's work. An additional goal was to clarify the problems and challenges facing various stakeholders in this context. Ultimately, I intended to apply the results that emerged from my analysis of the data to answer the final question aimed at bringing about positive change by developing a framework based on Michael Fullan's model for change. Interview questions were formulated to reflect the study sample and the participants' backgrounds.

At the time of the study, the Covid-19 situation imposed the need to develop two implementation plans to accommodate either physical or online education based on the possible need to contain the spread of the virus. Fortunately, the public health situation improved, allowing me to implement the study procedures in person in schools.

Four research questions guided the study. Each of the main questions included related and more detailed questions. The study's research questions were formulated as follows:

**Research Question 1: How do stakeholders conceptualise the transition process from nursery to first grade?**

From this question, I obtained the perceptions of some of the stakeholders, along with their general understanding of the topic of transition. I also sought to obtain the children's point of view on how important this stage was for them afterward. I compared the data that emerged from this question to the general understanding of the concept of transition found in the education literature and researchers' efforts to develop workable interventions to address current challenges while applying elements from CHAT and Dewey's interaction principle.

**Research Question 2: What factors affect children's needs during their transition from nursery to first grade from the stakeholders' perspectives, and how do these factors affect those needs?**

This second main question was divided into the following five sub-questions which are guided by CHAT:

- How do mediating artefacts affect children's needs during their transition from nursery to first grade according to the stakeholders' perspectives?
- How do rules related to childhood learning affect children's needs during their transition from nursery to first grade from the stakeholders' perspectives?
- How does the division of labour affect children's needs during their transition from nursery to first grade from the stakeholders' perspectives?
- How does the historical and cultural context affect children's needs during their transition from nursery to first grade from the stakeholders' perspectives?
- How do children have experience continuity during their transition from nursery to first grade from the viewpoints of stakeholders and the children themselves?

From the interview questions whose design was based on these questions, the gathered data helped me understand the situation of children's transitioning from KG2 to first grade in Oman's educational system in terms of practices, experiences, curricula, the childhood education rules, functions of stakeholders who were involved in the transition phase and

the effects of the surrounding cultural and historical environment as well as past experiences. The data obtained from this main question covered some elements of CHAT in terms of mediation, division of labours, rules, and historical and cultural context, along with the interaction and continuity principles from Dewey's theory of experience. In addition, the children's agency was recognised by soliciting their opinions about their needs and making them effective and influential agents of a topic in which they played an essential part.

**Research Question 3: What is the impact (positive or negative) of transition practices implemented during children's transition from nursery to first grade from the stakeholders' points of view?**

This question provided data about the phenomenon of continuity of experience during the young learners' transition from KG2 to the first grade in terms of different stakeholders' knowledge, practices, manifestations, problems, and challenges. These data cover the continuity principle found in CHAT and Dewey while uncovering the reality and challenges of the transition phase. Thus, it supports the suggested model for development.

**Research Question 4: What is the best framework to bring about positive change in Omani children's transition process from nursery to first grade?**

I applied Michael Fullan's framework to the results arising from the first three research questions to formulate a framework that would support improving Omani children's transition from the KG2 to first grade. In turn, the suggested framework led to the development of the recommendations listed in Chapter 10.

## 1.5. Theoretical Framework

The existing literature offers a variety of theoretical perspectives on the concept of experience. Thus, the present study draws from Dewey's (1974) theory of experience and Vygotsky's (1978) concept of boundary objects to understand the needs of Omani children in moving from KG2 to the first grade while examining the realities of this transition from the children's point of view, along with the perceptions of the stakeholders concerned with

this issue. According to Dewey (2005), experience is characterised by certain features. Specifically, experience depends on previous experiences, meaning that the influences and environment that children have experienced in the nursery should continue when moving to the first grade.

In addition, experience is related to social and cultural practices, requiring individuals to connect to objects along with the use of objects in different settings. From the viewpoint of Fabian (2007), transitioning from the nursery setting means that children will experience a new physical environment characterised by different needs in terms of academic content and working methods. The new needs might subject children to feelings of insecurity if they lack continuity of experience. This aspect of transitioning from one educational setting to another underpins the current study's exploration of the case of Omani children.

In the context of this study, children's needs are related to the concept of "boundary objects", which, as Akkerman and Bakker (2011) mentioned, has its origins in Vygotsky's (1978) work and CHAT (Hogsnes, 2015). Boundary objects, which exist in and between different settings, are involved in motivating children to continue constructing their experience in the new environment. Therefore, the objects that children experience play an integral role during their transition from one setting to another. According to Vygotsky (1978), boundary objects function as both tools and signs and help children act and master themselves in and across settings.

Accordingly, the current study applies the concept of boundary objects as outlined in the two chosen theories to identify the motives and needs (tools) that Omani children experience during their transition from nursery to first grade. Fabian (2013) highlighted that boundary objects include things, such as family photographs and children's toys, in addition to the experiences and events related to social and philosophical conditions wherein they participate and interact with others. Similarly, in specifying the objects that children bring to school, Corsaro and Molinari (2000) included activities linked to both social and philosophical conditions, such as literacy activities. These activities, called "priming events", comprise activities wherein children attend prospectively to ongoing or anticipated changes in their lives. In a later study, Cosaro and Molinari (2005) stressed that

children's social representations arise from their experienced activities other than thinking about social life.

The understanding of boundary objects in the present study construes them as concrete objects, referring to events, activities and experiences that the participating Omani children drew upon and the participants' related narrations associated with them, as school transition creates needs in children for an understanding of and relationship to knowledge and their sense of themselves as learners and competent actors (Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2019). These needs represent objects containing events, activities or experiences associated with particular social and philosophical contexts children wish to continue when they move to the first grade. By allowing children to narrate their needs, educators offer them an opportunity to exercise their agency as active and competent learners. Figure 1.1 illustrates the relationship among boundary objects, needs and children's agency in the present study.

**Figure 1.1**

*Relationships among Boundary Objects, Needs and Agency*
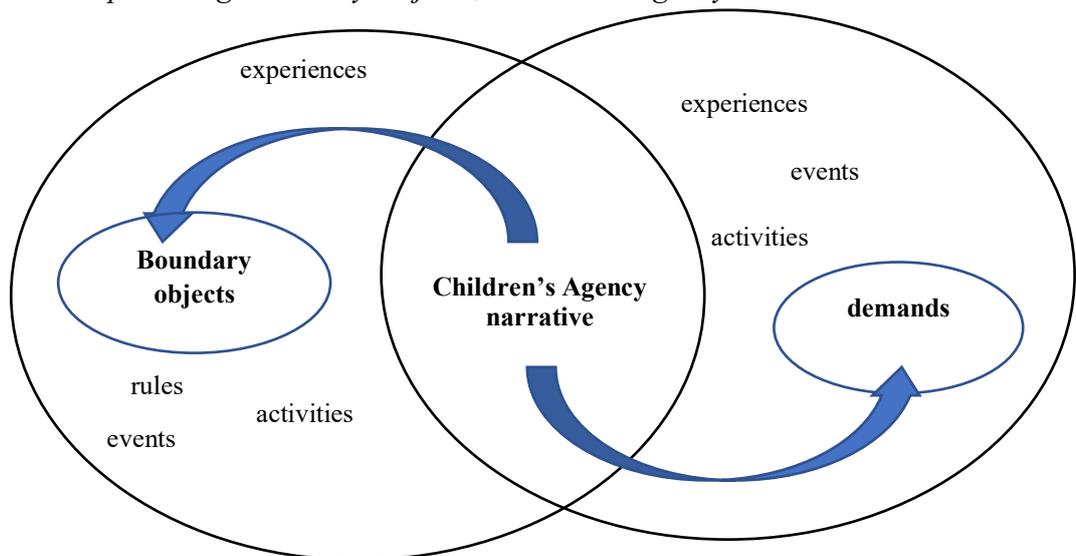


## 1.6.  Study Methodology

The current research was designed according to CHAT and Dewey's theory of experience and principle of continuity. These concepts supported the information that participants provided in relation to the research issue; specifically, the children's responses came from their previous experiences and exposure to the prior environment while also reflecting the influence of cultural and historical reality in this topic. In structuring the procedures for the

current study, I followed Silverman's (2000) suggestion to use interviews to collect the internal experiences of the respondents' feelings and perceptions while simultaneously documenting the external reality represented by the situations and events that they were exposed to. In line with my desire to find facts both in depth and originality in this research, I adopted focus group interviews (Newby, 2014), semi-structured interviews, and visual methods involving children by combining children's drawings with visual narratives, as well as observation. Details of the data-gathering methods employed in the current study are as follows:

- **Focus Groups.** Two focus groups, each consisting of 10 participants who provided informed consent, were conducted to gather the perceptions of a group of representatives of the stakeholders. These focus group sessions took place at the beginning of implementation to gather indicators of the general ground of the study topic. This preliminary step helped me build subsequent implementations and provided an understanding of the stakeholders' directions and knowledge. The focus group sessions each lasted an hour and a half.

- **Semi-Structured Interviews.** I conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 stakeholders related to children transitioning from the nursery to first grade. The interviewees included educational policy makers, curriculum developers for the nursery and first grade, nursery and first-grade supervisors, nursery and first-grade teachers, nursery and first grade principals. Each interview lasted from an hour to an hour and twenty minutes. The interviews in the current study were analysed according to Radnor's (2002) framework. Thus, stared with writing an initial impression concerning the most prominent issues that the interviewees discussed. Afterward, transcribed the entire dialogue. I then compared the transcriptions to the notes I had taken during the interviews. Next, I identified the common issues between the interviewees, then documented the major issues that emerged, followed by listing the sub-issues for each of them. Lastly, I linked the issues and sub-issues to the study objectives and the results that emerged from the rest of the tools based on the theoretical framework underpinning the study, including the interviews.

- **Visual Methods.** Applying visual methods on the participating children entailed combining the children's drawings with their visual narratives and my researcher field notes. The study sample included 45 children in KG2 in the last semester of the school year. The same children were followed when they moved to first grade in the next semester (i.e. the first semester of the subsequent academic year). The visual methods-based data collection took place during a classroom session where the children were asked to make some drawings (e.g. activities they enjoyed in kindergarten and first grade, such as playing, reading, drawing, meeting friends, and so forth). Each child completed the required drawing within 30 to 45 minutes. After they finished their drawings, they were asked to describe them. The children were recorded by video during the discussion phase. These tasks provided me with information about how the children experienced the transition from nursery to primary school.

- **Children's Visual Narratives Analysis**. Data obtained from the children's visual narratives were analysed according to the social semiotic approach in two stages (Barthes, 1977, p. 42). The first stage entails "*denotation*" which is the superficial message. The second stage "*signified*" provides the most profound meaning, which I obtained from the children's dialogues about their drawings and some of the symbols they included in the drawings. I recorded videos of all the children talking about their drawings and expressing themselves. It was then necessary to develop a method for organising, classifying, and then analysing the data. For this procedure, I applied Deguara's (2019) cross-data grid using the code based on CHAT and the aims of the study to research the needs and problems of children from their point of view.

- **Observation.** I carried out the current study's observation procedure in five primary schools, two public, two private, one bilingual, and one international. These primary schools were selected for the current study because the children I began the study with in KG2 had transitioned to first grade in these schools. Some were distributed among two public schools, and some of them remained in the same private and international schools where they had attended at the nursery level. I implemented the observation as a participant observer. I showed my identity to

everyone, including the children and observed the behaviours and actions of all those who represented the study sample in the reality of their ordinary day at school. I did not try to interfere in anyone's work; even if I considered a pupil's work less than satisfactory, I did not suggest any changes. In specific terms, the observation conducted in the current study fit was direct in nature, according to the classification of Ciesielska et al. (2018). The behaviours were actually happening in front of me. I also recorded the events at the time in the field. Therefore, the resulting information can be considered deep because it is real, as it came from young children without the ability to pretend to show an image other than reality, even if the teachers or principal wished to convey a different impression.

- **Observation Analysis.** Data collected via observation were analysed based on the approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for "grounded theory". This technique centres around identifying similarities and differences between the observational data collected and the data that were previously coded; in the current study, the latter included stakeholder interviews and children's visual narrations. The approach applies triangulation to try to uncover the meaning of the findings, along with sub-categories, and describe the possible links between them.

## 1.7. Thesis Structure

My research journey with Omani children as they moved from KG2 to first grade comprises several chapters containing details of events, facts, and theories. The organisational scheme is intended to present a coherent, integrated thesis. The following points summarise each of the chapters in turn:

**Chapter 2. Context of the Study.** The first part of the chapter reviews the general context of childhood in Oman. The discussion considers the country's stable political situation, which positively affects the stability of life, including education, and the endeavour to develop it in terms of quantity and quality. The good economic situation that characterises Oman also helps in this development and supports the effort to focus on the accompanying educational issues. For the purposes of this study, reviewing the geographical and demographic situation of Oman can facilitate recognition of the

challenges facing children when they enter public school, especially given the geographical distribution of the population in distant areas. In addition, the cultural diversity that is evident in the many local languages and dialects increases the difficulty of this stage of a young learner's educational journey. Next, the chapter presents a detailed discussion of topics related to childhood in Oman, including children's rights, both internationally and Islamically, Oman's accession to international conventions, and the state's interest in children's rights in all fields. Then the chapter describes the institutions that work to implement in practice all of the aspects mentioned in the mentioned agreements. This aspect of the discussion undergirds the current study's approach of supporting children's rights by encouraging young learners to express their opinions on an issue that concerns them. Next, the chapter presents a review of education in Oman, starting from daycare centres up to the twelfth grade, to provide a general context for this study, then tightens the focus to the nursery and first cycle schools (Grades 1–4). This part of the chapter offers details about many aspects of the different environments that children pass through on their educational journey. The chapter concludes by comparing the environments of KG2 and first grade and considering their impact on the children's transition from one to the next.

**Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework.** In this chapter, the theoretical framework on which this study was based is discussed. Specifically, the study's theoretical underpinnings include the boundary objects in Vygotsky's (1978) CHAT and Dewey's (1974) theory of experience. Accordingly, a description of the historical development of CHAT is presented in terms of the three stages described in the relevant literature. The discussion also covers the implementation of the CHAT components in the current study through the development of a practical framework for its implementation. Next, the chapter reviews Dewey's theory of experience and principle of continuity and describes the implementation of this theory in the current study. In the conclusion of the chapter, the development of the proposed framework is described, which is aimed at explaining the constituents of the study issue according to the applied theoretical frameworks.

**Chapter 4. Empirical Evidence and Current Practices for Children's Transition Between Levels.** The fourth chapter begins with a review of prior studies concerning the issue of children's transition from KG2 to first grade. In the existing literature, the overwhelming focus on this topic features European countries, the United States, and – to

some extent – East Asian countries. Next, a review of the most important implementations and practices carried out in different countries around the globe is presented for the purpose of identifying them and finding later benefit from their examples, including children's experiences in the United States and Europe (e.g. the UK, specifically England and Scotland, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries, specifically Finland), Latin America (Mexico), Australia, East Asia (China and Japan), Arab countries (Sudan, Jordan and Lebanon), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait), in addition to Oman, the location of the current study, as already mentioned. The chapter then focuses more closely on research in Arab and Gulf countries, including Oman. The chapter wraps up the discussion with a general summary of the most prominent strategies implemented worldwide regarding this transition issue, as covered in the chapter.

**Chapter 5. Research Methodology.** The fifth chapter deals with the methodology of the current study and describes the tools used to collect data. The discussion begins by reviewing the types of interviews used in research, followed by a description of the approaches adopted for the study, comprising semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The study's interview questions are the next topic, along with describing how the interviews were implemented in the current study. Then show how the interviews in the current study were analysed according to Radnor's (2002) framework. The chapter also discusses observation, explaining types of observation and approaches to implementation, along with reasons for using this tool and ways of analysing the resulting data which based on the approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for "grounded theory". The final tool the chapter addresses is the use of visual narration with children, along with drawing methods, techniques that were suited to the age of the children in the study sample. Which were analysed according to the social semiotic approach in two stages (Barthes, 1977) (see an analysing methods summary in point 1.6). Lastly, the discussion covers ethical issues, considers the limitations of implementing children's drawings as a part of data collection, and describes the current study's collection of data from the children who participated.

**Chapter 6. Representation of Children's Drawings and Visual Narrative Data.** This chapter discusses and analyses the participating children's visual narratives. The discussion begins by describing the schools where the study was implemented and outlining the study steps, including communication with the school principals, my initial

visit with the children, further visits to learn and play, actual implementation 1, actual implementation 2, encoding and storage. Next is a review of the method and steps for analysing the collected data: The first analytical phase concerned the "denotation" of cognitive and skill-related needs, social and psychological needs, cognitive skills and social problems, followed by the second phase, which "signified" the children's cognitive and skill-related needs, social and psychological needs, cognitive skill problems, and social and psychological problems. The chapter concludes with general and detailed results on the issue.

**Chapter 7. Representation of Interview Data.** Chapter 7 explains the analysis of the current study's interview data. In the chapter, the method for conducting the analysis is reviewed, including the type and number of interviewees, going on to explain how their names and positions were coded and the data were saved. Subsequently, the data are discussed and analysed according to the theoretical framework provided by CHAT, which formed the basis of the interview questions. The chapter then outlines the following main points that emerged from the analysis: conceptual ambiguity, relative lack of mediating artefacts, absence of organisation or official guidance, the loss of the stakeholders' roles, the lack of rules, and the absence of interaction and continuity. Next, sub-issues are extracted from each issue and then discussed individually. A summary of focused general results concludes the discussion.

**Chapter 8. Representation of Analyses of Observation Data.** The data collected from observation are reviewed and discussed in this chapter, which begins by presenting the implementation steps, comprising the initial visits followed by the implementation phase, along with a description of the events observed at each stage. The discussion moves on to describe the analysis process used in the current study for observation data, including the codes used for various themes. The last part of the chapter discusses and analyses the collected data and presents the results.

**Chapter 9. Proposed Framework to Bring Positive Change.** The ninth chapter presents the framework developed to address the issue of children's transition from KG2 to first grade. The chapter includes the starting points behind the need for change and reviews the theoretical framework supporting the development of the proposed framework intended

to bring about this change based on Fullan (2009). The choice of framework is explained in terms of its characteristics, including a clear methodological framework, comprehension, tri-level reform, sustainability or continuity, and change in the methodology directions. Next, I describe the framework I developed and present the theory behind it: community, continuity, and overall content. The chapter then explores the study's implementation according to Fullan's framework and the theories of CHAT and Dewey as the theoretical framework of the study, ending with a summary of the framework, which includes an illustration explaining its components and steps.

**Chapter 10. Conclusions.** The final chapter provides a general summary of the thesis and offers a cohesive, definitive story of my journey to complete this work, a deeply satisfying exploration that was bolstered by my love for the children I learned so much from. I then review the study's questions and objectives and summarise the results obtained from the data I collected via all of the tools employed. The last sections of the chapter review the study's cognitive and research contributions, discuss the study limitations, and present recommendations based on the study findings. In addition, I review the general context of the study topic and offer suggestions for future research. Finally, I conclude by answering an exciting question: What is next?

# Chapter 2
# Context of the Study

## 2.1. Introduction

The general situation of any country naturally affects its foreign and domestic policy, including educational policies and options available for education. Therefore, in order to lay a foundation for the discussion to come, I will highlight in this chapter key aspects of the Omani context that will add clarity to this study's exploration of the country's educational context, such as geographic location, demographics and the prevailing culture, economic status, and the political system, concluding with the policy and system concerning education.

## 2.2. Geographic Location

The Sultanate of Oman is an Arab country that follows the hereditary sultanistic system. Muscat is the nation's capital. The Arabic language is the official language of the country; however, the use of English as an approved second language is also widespread. In terms of religion, Oman's population embraces the Islamic religion, which coexists peacefully with numerous other religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and others belonging to expatriates who have come to work in the country on fixed time stays.

Oman is characterised by the diversity of its geographical environments and different types of terrain in the same environment in all its regions (NCSI, 2021). This geographical diversity has led to variations in the population characteristics and local cultures within different regions. Furthermore, each region differs somewhat in terms of cultural and economic trends. In terms of governance, Oman features 11 administrative governorates, as illustrated in Figure 2.1: Muscat (the capital), Dhofar, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, North Al Sharqiya, South Al Sharqiya, A' Dakhiliyah, A' Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, Al Wusta and Musandam. The governorates are further divided into districts, with 61 in all. Every governorate has a local educational authority, the General Directorate of

Education, each affiliated with the MOE, which is located in Oman's capital, Muscat, and represents the country's central educational authority.

**Figure 2.1**

*Oman Map. Source: https://www.guideoftheworld.net/oman-map.asp*



## Demographics and the Prevailing Culture

According to population statistics from 2020, Oman can be characterised as having a relatively youthful society (NCSI, 2020). As seen in Table 2.1, most of its residents are children and young adults. In particular, children aged 0–9 years constitute 17.6% of the population, with 18.9% reported in the age group spanning 10–24 years. That means 36.5% are under 24 years. Although people in the age group of 25–49 years comprise 53.3% of the population, these figures include expatriate workers with fixed-time residency (33.4% of the population). Excluding foreign workers from consideration leaves 19.9% of the Omani population falling within this age range. Older adults make up much smaller proportions of the population, with 7.6% for ages 50–64 and 2.6% representing those older than age 65.

**Table 2.1**

*Population by Age Groups in 2019. Source: NCSI (2020, p. 82)*

| Age groups | Population | | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0–9 | 813,000 | | 17.6 |
| 10–24 | 875,000 | | 18.9 |
| 25–49 | Omani | 921,087 | 19.9 |
| | Expatriates with fixed time stays | 1,538,939 | 33.4 |
| | Total | 2,460,000 | 53.3 |
| 50–64 | 350,000 | | 7.6 |
| +65 | 120,000 | | 2.6 |
| **Total** | 4,618,000 | | 100% |

The high proportion of younger ages among the population of Oman is an indication of the importance of childhood in Omani society and the need for special consideration of this life stage since it represents a broad base in the population pyramid, as depicted in Figure 2.2. In other words, the country's future depends on Omani's youth**.**
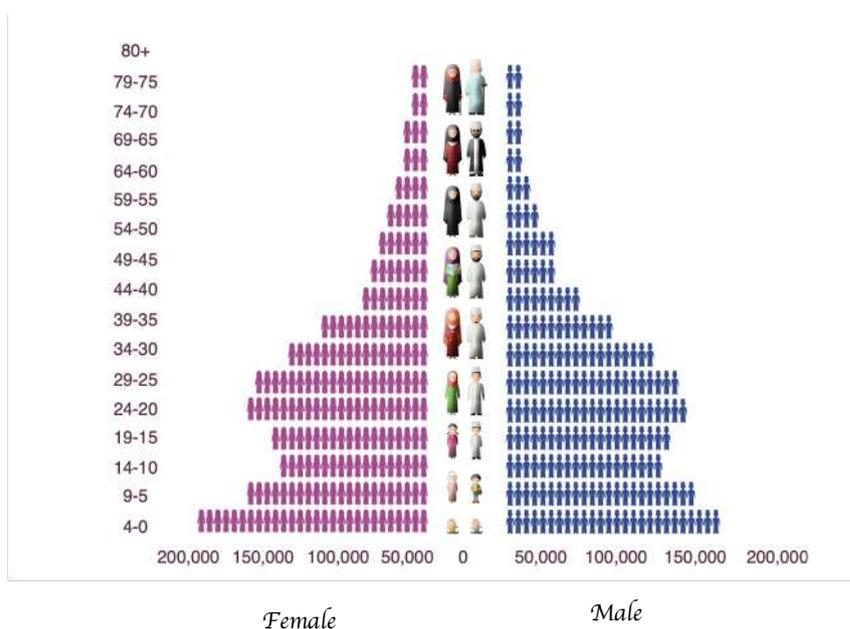


**Figure 2.2**

*Omani Population Pyramid 2020 (NCSI, 2021, p. 3)*

Regarding culture, Arabs who speak the Arabic language comprise nearly 65% of Oman's population (Fanack, 2020). The rest of the population features varied origins, reflecting diversity going back to the ancient Omani imperial legacy. Specifically, the Ya'ariba family (1624–1741), followed later by the Al Bu Said family (1749–to present day) controlled large parts of the western Indian Ocean coastal regions, including eastern African coastal territories such as Tanzania, Zanzibar, Comoros, Madagascar, and others, in addition to the western coasts of India and Pakistan. Likewise, Baluchistan and Bandar Abbas are from Iranian lands. This expansion led Omani Arabs to mix with people from other ethnicities, and many of the inhabitants of these areas eventually moved to settle on Omani lands, bringing with them new customs and traditions related to the cultural heritage of each people group in terms of language, food heritage, clothes, and others.

The Omani population is characterised by many spoken languages. Among the country's ethnicities are the Baloch people, who trace their origins to Baluchistan in western Pakistan (Fanack, 2020). This people group settled in the capital, Muscat, forming their own community. They speak the Balochi language, which contains some dialects. During a period of Omani control over the coasts of Zanzibar and surrounding coastal regions, many Omani merchants migrated to Zanzibar and settled there for long periods in their Swahili language.

The Lawatias, who speak the Luwati language, are a group of Khoja, originally from the Sindh region in Pakistan, who are currently based in Oman's capital, Muscat (Fanack, 2020). In addition to the Shihuh and the Kumzari in the Musandam peninsula in the far north of Oman, individuals in this group are of Persian origin from Iran. Each tribe speaks its own language. In the far south of Oman, the Shahrah tribes speak the Shahri language of Himyarite origin, as well as the Mahri language of the Mahra tribes of Yemeni origin. Another minority group in the south, also of Yemeni origin, speaks the Hubei language. Lastly, the inhabitants of Al Hallaniyat Island in southern Oman speak the Batharian language.

Consequently, Oman's diversity in languages is one factor affecting the beginning of primary education. The children from these tribes speak the language of their family, posing a challenge to schools that teach in Arabic as the official language of the country

and the language of official education, as well as putting a potential obstacle in the way of students who must begin adapting to schools as they start to climb their educational ladder. Consequently, the state has been led to seek to open preparation classes in areas where the children in primary schools speak these languages, which the thesis will discuss in some detail at section 2.5.2.3, p:37.

## 2.3. Economic Status

Oman, a petroleum-producer, has been classified by the World Bank as a high-income country. The state's main revenue sources are based on oil and gas, which provide 73.6% of government revenues (Ministry of Finance, 2016; NCSI, 2023), equivalent to 50% of the GDP. The average annual per person income was £ 12,397 in 2015 (World Bank, 2015). In addition, most of the services provided to citizens are free, such as education and health care (NCSI, 2021). Thus, Oman's economic circumstances likely support parents' ability to send their children to kindergarten even though it is paid and not public. Additional information about this topic will be covered later at section 2.5.2.3, p:37.

Beginning in the 1970s, Oman's economic infrastructure began to form and grow, guided by a series of 5-year plans (Owtram, 2004). The design of these plans makes them comprehensive for all government sectors, such as education, the economy, health, transportation, and other areas. As Alabri (2018) noted, these plans are centrally devised by the government.

Oman's dependency on oil resources often exposes its economy to risks. For example, in 1986, low oil prices led to a large deficit crisis, which was repeated in 2015 (MOF, 2016). More recently, the Omani economy was affected by the global economic and trade decline resulting from the Covid-19 crisis (NCSI, 2020). Such budget decreases usually lead to the need to postpone development projects in various fields – including the education sector, directly affecting Omani society, in turn, since children are an increasingly important factor in Oman's future, as previously mentioned. In addition, the education sector receives the largest share of government spending compared to the rest of the other service sectors. In particular, the government is focused on building modern schools in all 11 governorates, even in remote, mountainous areas, where enrolment might be as low as only 17 students

per school (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2020). The quality and diversification of skills that Omani students will obtain from the country's education system are also a matter of concern. As Oman is a young country, the numbers of young graduates are on the rise, increasing the spectre of unemployment (MOE, 2021). Thus, the future of these graduates depends on their ability to coexist and adapt to the developments of life and its requirements, as well as being able to rely on themselves, which begins with education. Ideally, the years-long process of building competent adults will start with their healthy transition as small children to the first grade of primary school, followed by building on the same approach.

## 2.4. Political State

The system of government in Oman is hereditary and sultanate, meaning that the Sultan heads Oman and its government, taking political and developmental decisions; thus, the country's governance is centralised and fully authoritarian (Al-Abri, 2018). The first basic system was established during the reign of Sultan Qaboos in the 1970s and was published in 1996, serving as the regulatory framework for state functions and institutions. The system also calls for more political participation for citizens and guarantees their freedom, protection and dignity. This constitution is based on Islamic law (MOI, 1997).

Under the Sultan's lead are two main councils, the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman. The former consists of all ministers who function as a unit. This council assists in making both internal and external developmental and political decisions related to the country. It also follows up on the implementation of those decisions, along with the rest of the state's affairs (Al-Abri, 2016). In contrast, the latter includes two subsidiary councils. The State Council under the Council of Oman consists of a group of heads of some tribes, university professors, some retired ambassadors or ministers and some governors. They are appointed by royal decree. The Shura Council, which is the other subsidiary body under the Council of Oman, includes elected members from the local population who represent all governorates. These two councils review laws and decisions issued by the Council of Ministers, especially those concerned with educational, social and economic development plans. By submitting proposals and recommendations for their amendment that could be

adopted. The Shura Council also conducts interrogations of ministers to discuss matters related to their ministries (Almoharby, 2010).

Royal rule is central to all affairs of the country, including education. In other words, the public order in Oman depends on the central authority system in the way all of the country's affairs are managed, which serves to preserve the decision-making authority. That would complicate the process of development obstacles in the education system towards decentralisation that require approval by higher authorities.

## 2.5.  Childhood in Oman

According to statistics published in 2021, children (ages 0–17) in Oman constitute more than two-fifths of the Omani population (see Figure 2.3), motivating the government to pay close attention to this age group. As they will lead the development in the future. Good preparation determines the course of development in the country in the future. There are positive indicators of significant improvement in the services provided to children. Children (0–17) in Omani society constituted 43% of the total Omani population in 2020, where their number reached 118,5059, with a ratio of 104 males for every 100 females. This ratio suggests societal balance in the light of the high number of deaths of young Omani males associated with car accidents. The highest proportion of individuals in an age group of children were infants and young children aged less than 5 years old, representing 34% of the total number of children, thus contributing to the youthfulness of Omani society. Therefore, caring for this category can be seen as building the future. These children are distributed almost equally across the governorates of Oman, as shown in Figure 2.3, suggesting the need for an equitable distribution of services for children throughout Oman.
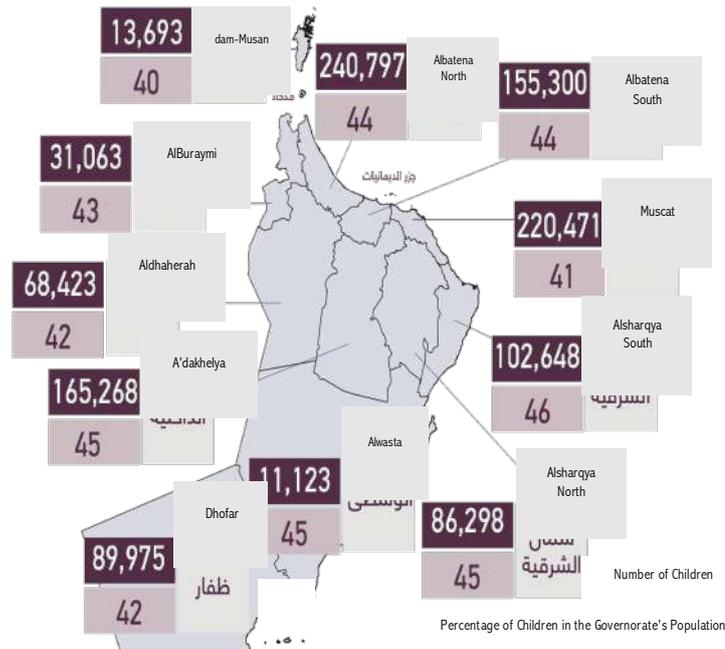
**Figure 2.3** *Number and Percentage Distribution of Children (0–17) According to the* 2020 Census (NCSI, 2021, p:5).

The services provided to children in Oman include all of the basic aspects that children need in any society to achieve a decent life. Thus, the services are aimed to help children grow up in an ideal, healthy atmosphere that prepares them to be active adults in the future. The following points summarise the services and care provided to children in Oman.

### 2.5.1. Children's Rights

The Sultanate of Oman has emphasised responding to global efforts to support human rights, for example, by ratifying the Declaration and the World Convention. Oman has also worked to institutionalise the response by establishing the National Human Rights Commission in 2008 after ratifying the Children Right Convention (CRC) in 1996. The government also translated this by the promulgation of the Child Act on 19 May 2014 after a series of efforts, as the National Human Rights Committee (2015) pointed out. However, such efforts and legislation remain to be implemented in the institutions of education, as well as in their policies and perceptions. In fact, the activation of child rights must be reflected in the minds of those who are responsible for the care and education of children.

Despite global interest in children's rights, Omani society displays very little interest by comparison, particularly in the perceptions of people connected to the country's nurseries, such as teachers, parents, and the children themselves. In the case of the children, some researchers have confirmed the importance of focusing on the study of individual perceptions from the subject's point of view (Casas et al., 2006)

The topic is especially pertinent given the increasing need for nurseries as a result of the increasing number of children in Oman, where the number of kindergartens has grown, as well as the number of children which be 49,640 in the academic year 2017–2018 (NCSI, 2108). Actually, this number supports the need to make prepared nurseries. In addition to the perceptions, professionals, qualifications, and understanding of children rights of their employees. Related to this case, Smith (1996) contended that poor conditions that lead teachers to reduce their emotional interaction with children ultimately have a negative effect on children's well-being. In contrast, good conditions for teachers, such as training, qualifications, salaries, and incentives, lead them to create a positive impact on children.

Other researchers have reported that attention to children in nurseries, along with improving their condition, led to the treatment of some social issues or ills (Connolly & Doolan, 2007; St John & Wynd, 2008) that potentially resulted from poverty, abuse, or lack of awareness. These expectations have also found support in theories related to learning and children's psychological, social, and cultural development that focus on the importance of relationships and the rights of children in terms of connection and care in all of the places where they participate.

Oman ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 9 December 1996 (*Official Gazette*, 1996); however, the potential for some laws to conflict with the principles of Islam posed a roadblock to enacting them. One example is found in some of the details of Article 21, which is related to the adoption of children, differing in the details of its implementation in Islamic law in terms of its existence, its support, and its different name (*Official Gazette*, 1996). Thus, the law created two models of care, alternative care and temporary care, which are implemented by the Ministry of Social Development.

According to Article 1, Clause G of the law, alternative care refers to the services provided to a child temporarily or permanently deprived of his natural family, such as an orphan or child whose father or parents are unknown. This service is provided through a care home, the kafala system, or foster families.

In contrast, temporary care is a new form of care posed within the framework of child protection. This term refers to the care and rehabilitation services provided to children exposed to violence, exploitation or abuse. Children receive such care through a specialised type of house established by the Ministry of Social Development.

Previously, the concept of care in Oman was limited to alternative care, making the provision of temporary care a major development in this area. In fact, the latter kind of care is essential for putting the Child Law into practice, as it provides for rehabilitation and treatment centres for children who fall victim to violence, abuse or exploitation. That treatment may be limited to aspects of criminal responsibility without achieving the necessary care for the child.

There were also criticisms of the acceptance of Article 12, which deals with the child's right to expression (Tekin, 2015). Nevertheless, one of the main articles of the Omani Child Law was developed to include the following: the right to participate, express an opinion, and express in a framework consistent with the rights of others, public order, public morals and national security while giving him full opportunity to express his views.

Debate has been ongoing regarding implementing legislation in a way that balances the need to avoid contradicting Islamic Sharia with the need to start implementing and defending children's rights. In the interest of full implementation, Oman resolved that a new law for the Omani child would be legislated by Royal Decree No. 22/2014 on 19 May 2014 (*Official Gazette*, 2014). This step represented an important leap for the Omani child while simultaneously enhancing Oman's global reputation in the field of care and defence of children's rights.

### 2.5.1.1.   Child Rights in Islam and the Omani Context

The rights of the child, with the associated concepts and fundamentals, are universally accepted, with a well-recognised impact for the benefit of children. However, the characteristics and contexts of cultural, social and religious societies must also be taken into consideration when discussing this notion and grounding legislation and laws related to child protection on the principles of Islamic law. In reality, this approach does not detract from keeping pace with the development of societies and global laws. In the book *The Orientalist*, Said (1987) accused the West of promoting inaccurate representations of perceptions of life among Arabs and Muslims, especially regarding the laws related to family relations and the rights of a family's members. Contrary to Western expectations, the Islamic religion in this context pays close attention to the rights of children, women, and the elderly.

For example, the proper application of these rights does not abolish the role of the guardian in directing and guiding the child when exercising these rights within the framework of the prevailing beliefs and social custom (Article 3). However, this text should not be a reason to stray from the law's requirements in favour of the prevailing beliefs or customs. The matter must be controlled by the authorities concerned with implementing this law, along with the judicial authorities. Some customs may actually impede the child's enjoyment of his rights and prevent him from actively participating in his society, which contradicts this law. Accordingly, for example, the law recognises in Article 65 that children who are victims of violence, abuse or exploitation by their parents or other people are to be placed in a temporary care home – as described earlier – by the decision of the public prosecutor based on the recommendation of the child protection representative. Furthermore, these children are also returned to their guardians in the same way after the reasons for the removal from the home and its effects have ceased and after the guardian has pledged in writing to care for the child appropriately.

In general, Islam prohibits the oppression of women, children and the elderly in all forms, whether physical or moral, such as insult and exploitation, even in war. On the contrary, Islamic belief guarantees honour and dignity to all human beings (Aludain, 2000). According to Abdulrazzak (2014), children's rights are sacred in Islam and cannot be

violated. Arfat (2013) described how the child in Islam enjoys family rights before his birth; furthermore, his legitimate rights continue after his birth, persisting throughout every stage of his life. Children have the right to parentage, proper upbringing, guidance and counselling, education, financial protection, emotional rights, social interaction, fair and equal treatment between the sexes and between children and adults, security, nationality, and other rights. Thus, the individual's rights in Islam do not conflict with the principles and rights promoted by international organisations; rather, both sources pour into the same stream aimed at preserving for the child a decent, just, secure and stable life. In this vein, the Sultanate of Oman has sought to consolidate the rights of the Omani child as an Arab, Muslim, and international child.

The concept of children's rights was supported by the signing of the Human Rights in Islam by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in 1990, which included articles related to the rights of the child, such as Article 7, which guarantees various rights for children, including the right to education, health, and material and moral care (OIC, 1990). Subsequently, in 2005, the Charter of the Rights of the Child in Islam (CCRI), which is binding on all member states that have signed it, was signed. This document contains multiple rights for children, including family cohesion, freedom, right to life, education, health, personal freedoms, equality, ensuring an adequate standard of living, justice, protection, caring for disabled children, defining parents' responsibilities towards their children, and protecting refugee children, and even goes into such detail as exercising rest times correctly (OIC, 2005). Oman is among the member states that have signed and adhered to this charter.

Accordingly, after Oman signed these regional and global agreements and charters, it became necessary to enter them into force and implementation. This necessity reflects Westra's (2014) assertion that as long as there is a stipulated law for children, the practices become possible. That said, Oman has already issued the Child Law, which came into effect on 19 May 2014, which includes the information presented in the following section (*Official Gazette*, 2014a).

### 2.5.1.2.　Omani Child Law (*Official Gazette*, 2014b)

The Omani Child Law establishes a foundation by defining the basic concepts contained in its articles, thus providing keys to reading its texts and avoid any confusion or interference in the meaning. For example, the Child Law defines a child as

*"a person who has not completed eighteen years of age".*

This notion is consistent with the definition in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Of course, the Child Law presents numerous such definitions in the interest of clarity.

The law is structured around four main clauses.

- o General rights of the child.
- o Child protection from violence, exploitation, and abuse.
- o Providing care for the child deprived of his natural family and the disabled child.
- o Establishing committees and giving the status of a judicial officer in order to achieve the two previous requirements.

Table 2.2 summarises the most prominent aspects of the rights of the child mentioned in the Child Law.

**Table 2.2**

*Rights of Omani Children According to Omani Law. Source:* Official Gazette *(2014b)*

| No | Right | Description of right |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Civil rights** (Articles 6–13) | <ul><li>Have the right to life</li><li>Have protection from violence and exploitation</li><li>Be registered in the birth records</li><li>Obtain citizenship</li><li>Be attributed to their parents</li><li>Enjoy care</li><li>Express their opinion in various ways orally or in writing through art or any other means</li><li>Know and use innovation and creativity</li></ul> |
| 2 | **Health rights** (Articles 14–24) | <ul><li>Access to absolute state of preventative healthcare measures</li><li>Free state-sponsored medical care for mothers before and after childbirth</li><li>Banning of advertising of junk food and other nutrition hazardous to the health of the child</li></ul> |
| 3 | **Social rights** (Articles 25–35) | <ul><li>Survival, growth, and education in a cohesive and stable family; the state guarantees them the enjoyment of this right by all available means</li><li>Considering the separation of the child from their family, the law states that they have the right to maintain personal relationships and direct, regular contact with their parents</li><li>Permission to establish nurseries in government agencies, the private sector, and central prisons</li></ul> |
| 4 | **Educational rights** (Articles 36–38) | <ul><li>Obtain free education in public schools until the completion of secondary education</li><li>Basic education, grades 1–10, which is compulsory for every child</li></ul> |
| 5 | **Cultural rights** (Articles 39–42) | <ul><li>Establish special libraries and clubs for children in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman</li><li>Determine what should be offered to children in cinemas and public places</li></ul> |
| 6 | **Economic rights** (Articles 43–50) | <ul><li>The law refers the responsibility to the guardian for the care and development of the child's finances in accordance with the provisions of the Personal Status Law</li><li>Prohibit economic exploitation of the child, such as begging</li><li>Prevent the use of children in businesses or industries that may harm their</li></ul> |

| No | Right | Description of right |
|---|---|---|
| | | safety, health, or moral behaviour |
| | | • Minimum working age of 15 for children in Oman. However, it is possible for children to engage in certain agricultural, fishing, industrial, administrative, and handicraft work, provided that the work is within the same family. In addition, this work will not impede the child's education or burden their health or development. The working hours permitted for them must also be taken into consideration |
| | | • It is possible to enrol a child above the age of 15 in institutes and centres for education and vocational training and other similar bodies, that is, completing the 10th grade, within the framework of the same law stipulating that post-basic education is not compulsory for the child |
| 7 | **Rights of disabled children** (Articles 51–53) | • All of the rights stipulated in this law are without discrimination between them and other children |
| | | • The state guarantees the care and rehabilitation of disabled children in accordance with the provisions of the Law on the Care and Rehabilitation of the Handicapped (Royal Decree No. 63/2008) |
| | | • Encouraging the conduct of research related to disability and disabled persons in order to contribute to and plan care, raise awareness, and strive to reduce disabilities, especially hereditary ones |
| 8 | **Rights to protect children from violence and exploitation** | • Prohibit the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups |
| | | • Prevent child abuse or persecution, such as kidnapping, rape, coercion to engage in sexual activity or anything related to prostitution, or use in the slave trade in all its forms |
| | | • It is not permissible, according to the law, to grant a driver's license to a child |
| | | • Ban the sale of tobacco, alcohol, and other dangerous substances to children |
| | | • The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for implementing work to protect children from exploitation, violence and abuse, such as forming such committees as "Child Protection Committees" to receive any complaints or reports of any violation of children's rights |
| | | • Every person has the right to report any incident of violence, exploitation, abuse, or violation of their rights or against any child |
| | | • Legal institutions in Oman are responsible for implementing the provisions of this law. Articles 66 to 76 provide penalties for all of these crimes against children. |

### 2.5.2. Childcare in Oman

The extent to which the law covers all aspects of children's lives and needs is clearly observable. Additionally, noticeable attention is paid to the authorities concerned with implementation, such as the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the MOE, as well as the judicial authorities. The following part of the discussion reviews some of the services that children enjoy in Oman.

### 2.5.2.1. Children's Health Care

With the progress in providing services at all levels after the renaissance of the modern country of Oman in 1970, health services also provided evidence of progress. In 1987, the implementation of maternal and childcare services were implemented ensured raising the health level of mothers and children. The following services are examples of the health care a child receives in Oman.

- Paying attention to the mother during pregnancy and discovering mothers at risk. In 2019, 99% mothers received care during pregnancy (Ministry of Health, 2019). Direct care is given to mother and baby until 2 and then 6 weeks after birth. In addition, care is provided to the child until school entry.
- Providing services for spacing childbirth and organising childbearing. According to the prevailing social culture, Omani society currently calls for more children and an increase in the size of families.
- Paying attention to vaccinating children, considering that vaccination is an essential means of preventing previously spread diseases in society. The immunisation programme in Oman has achieved a large prevalence, as the percentage of children who received vaccinations exceeded 99% in 2019 (Ministry of Health, 2019).
- School health services: This programme, first implemented in 1990, is conducted in cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the MOE. A recent report from the Ministry of Health (2019) indicated that 94.8% of schools had school health clinics, in which the Ministry of Health provided health services to tropical students,

including supporting their physical, psychological and social needs and providing them with necessary health services, ensuring the health and safety of the school environment.

### 2.5.2.2.    Social Welfare

Social care is provided to children by the Ministry of Social Development through the Family Development Directorate, which provides a variety of services to different groups of children in need of social care (Ministry of Social Development, 2021). Table 2.3 provides more detail about these services.

**Table 2.3**

*Social Welfare Provided to Children in Oman*

| No | Institution | Target category of children | Services |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Childcare centres | Orphaned and non-parents' children | Taking care of them, and solving children's social, educational, and psychological problems |
| 2 | Al-Wafaa centres | Disabled children | Daycare system five days/week, paramedical services (NCSI, 2021) |
| 3 | Social security | Parents with limited income | Financial aid, housing lands, building free homes, and providing scholarships for their children in internal and external private universities (Omanuna, 2021) |
| 4 | Supportive rehabilitation | Disabled children | Care for disabled children with cerebral palsy and motor disabilities; ages 3–14 |
| 5 | Child protection | All children | Child Protection Committees distributed in all governorates of Oman to protect children from abuse and rights violations. Free Child Protection Line operates 24 hours a day to receive reports of children being abused, or experiencing violence or exploitation to provide urgent services to them. |
| 6 | Al-Wefaq Hall | Children separated from one or both parents | Maintain direct contact on a regular basis with one or both parents through court decisions or permits |
| 7 | Child protection delegates | All children | Distributed in all the governorates to implement the provisions of the Child Law |
| 8 | Team of trainers in the field of child protection | Members of the community | Training and educating members of the community on various aspects of child abuse and protection mechanisms |
| 9 | Childhood benefit within the Social Protection Law | All children under 18 | Monthly amount determined by the government for each Omani child (*Official Gazette*, 2023) |

### 2.5.2.3. Education for Children (Education System in Oman)

Education for children in Oman begins with daycare centres (serving ages 6 months–3 years) which are paid and not obligatory. Nursery, the next stage, comprising KG1–KG2 (ages 3–6) is often paid and part of it is free. School education (ages 7–18) follows; it is free but also compulsory in the first and second cycles (Grades 1–10). Free and not compulsory post-basic education (Grades 11–12) is also available. Higher education in government universities, colleges and institutes is also free, and scholarships and scholarships from the state for a large segment of young people, especially those with low incomes or belonging to the families of receiving social security services in private internal colleges and universities. Study abroad is also available in universities around the world. Children's education in Oman can be divided into several stages:

- o Daycare centres
- o Nurseries
- o School education, further divided into the following: Basic education (1–10), which includes two stages, the first cycle (1–4) and the second cycle (5–10), then post-basic education (11–12).

The following sections provide further detail about each of those stages.

#### - Children's Day care Centres

These centres are private educational and social institutions with tuition fees that parents must pay. The Ministry of Social Development, represented by the Department of Child Affairs – Child Upbringing Institutions Section, is responsible for supervising these different types of nurseries, following up on the procedures for establishing and licensing them, and providing and evaluating technical support for the programmes and activities offered to children in these centres. Founders must meet established health, technical, and educational specifications and requirements in order to obtain a permit to open the centre. These facilities accept children from 6 months to 3 years old. In 2020, the number of day-care centres in Oman reached 326, reporting enrolment of 933 children, a decrease of 89% compared to the enrolment in 2019 of 8,301 children (NCSI, 2021).

This decrease seems explainable due to the spread of Covid-19 and the ban on working in a number of institutions, including children's day-care centres, to preserve people's health and safety. In addition, 56% of nurseries are located in Muscat, the capital (NCSI, 2021), which makes sense because it is the capital and many mothers are employed, thereby needing to send their children to day-care centres. Statistics also indicated that 7 out of 10 children in these centres were Omanis and that the percentage of children in day-care centres aged 3 years and under constituted 3.3% of the total population in the same category for the year 2019; in addition, the total staff (supervisor, educator and administrator) in these centres numbered 2,413, 74% of whom were Omani (NCSI, 2021). This is evidence of an increase in the number of children at this age. It is also an indication of the start of Omani women to work in such professions after they were specialised in foreigners, especially Filipinos. The following discussion provides additional details to clarify the situation of day-care centres for children in Oman.

- **Nurseries**

Before the 1970s, Oman had no nurseries, but some children were sent to mosques to learn the Holy Quran. Since 1970, when the modern state began in Oman, interest in education has gradually exhibited remarkable growth, both in general and in terms of nurseries. In general, nurseries belong to the private sector, and parents pay a fee for their children to attend. Nurseries vary widely according to the institutions that supervise them. Table 2.4 lists the types of nurseries in Oman, along with their supervising authorities and recent enrolment numbers.

**Table 2.4**

*The Type of Nurseries in Oman. Source: NCSI (2018)*

| No | Kind of nursery | Authority | No of children in 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Child Corners | Omani women associations | 713 |
| 2 | Child's Growth Houses | Voluntary civil organisations | 1764 |
| 3 | Memorising the Holy Quran | Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs | 809 |
| 4 | Defence nurseries | Ministry of Defence | 1160 |
| 5 | Police nurseries | Royal Oman Police | 644 |
| 6 | Most nurseries | Private sector, licensed and supervised by the Ministry of Education | 69,824 (2020) |

The increasing number of children registered in nurseries has sparked a corresponding increase in the MOE's official interest in them. A crucial development was the introduction of a national nursery curriculum, which was developed in 2002 and implemented for the first time in 2004 (Fathi, 2016).

In academic year 2008/2009, the MOE assumed the responsibility of technical supervision of all nursery schools and centres after they had previously been supervised by various government institutions, as shown in Table 2.4. The Ministry also assumed full responsibility for private and international schools providing early childhood programmes (KG1–KG2), including issuing licenses and appointing teaching, technical and administrative staff (Education Council of Sultanate of Oman, 2021). This move may actually be useful in standardising policies related to curricula and teacher qualifications and competencies. The MOE is also responsible for implementing the national standards for preparing children before schooling. Additional functions include accurately monitoring the number of enrolled children, the number of teachers, and the appropriateness of this in each nursery school. The MOE also oversees the number of teaching hours and the availability of facilities and resources required to ensure the quality of service provided to children.

Another programme, called preparing classes, has also been established, first appearing as a component of public schools in 2004 in the Dhofar Governorate in the south of Oman (Al-Hinai, 2018). This programme was created in response to the need to serve those people speaking a local dialect differing significantly from the Arabic language in remote areas of this governorate. As there were no private nurseries in these remote areas, these children experienced difficulty adapting to the school and the Arabic language in primary school. Classes were initially implemented with funding from the private sector and parents, provided that the service would be free of charge to the children in order to prepare them linguistically, educationally and cognitively for primary school. The female teachers were volunteers from the same regions.

Following the success of the experiment in the Governorate of Dhofar, the programme was expanded to other remote areas in the mountains and desert of Oman (Al-Hinai, 2018). In 2004, the MOE adopted the idea of preparation classes to be applied in other remote

villages in different regions without access to private nurseries. The Ministry also appointed some graduates of the Sultan Qaboos University to serve in those locations.

Due to the government's interest in developing the nurseries and childhood education sector, the Childhood Education Department was opened in the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University, drawing from the graduation of qualified teachers to fulfil this role. The department opened in 2006 and annually graduates approximately 25 teachers. However, the project was not implemented effectively in that only two batches of female teachers who had graduated from this department were appointed in public schools. Because kindergarten is not part of the formal educational ladder in public schools. There is no need for these female graduates in schools. On the other hand, private kindergartens do not give a suitable monthly salary to these teachers, which leads some of them to work in private international schools. However, batches are still graduating from this department (Al-Qaryouti, personal communication, septemper12, 2020). In 2007, Sultan Qaboos University established a Child Care Center (CCC) on the campus. Its programmes and facilities have been designed according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards to create a rich learning environment. For example, children are taught in it according to a bilingual system (Arabic–English). He is affiliated with his Department of Early Childhood Education (ECED) at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University (Tekin, 2016). These programmes allow the department's female students to undergo field training in this centre to gain practical experience.

Generally, nursery education is not an official part of the education system in Oman, and it is not compulsory. For those reasons, it is regarded as a part of the private education sector. Nevertheless, as shown in Table 2.5, 92% of Omani children in first grade had experienced learning in nurseries. This high proportion arguably confirms community members' awareness of the importance of nurseries for their children.

**Table 2.5**

*Number of Children who Enrolled in Nurseries and the 1ˢᵗ Grade in Oman in 2019–2020.*
*Source: NCSI (2020)*

| Number of children | Nurseries | | | | 1ˢᵗ grade | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **The sector** | Public | % | Private | % | Public | % | Private | % |
| | 2,704 | 3,2 | 67,120 | 96.8 | 64,016 | 84.2 | 12,035 | 15.8 |
| **Total** | 69,824 | | | | 76,051 | | | |
| **92% of the Omani children in the 1ˢᵗ grade were learning in nurseries.** | | | | | | | | |

- **Nursery Building Specifications.**

Among other types of guidance and regulations, the MOE has established specifications for the nursery building. Furthermore, all such requirements must be implemented in order to obtain a permit to work in the facility. These requirements are as follows:

- The nursery must be close to the children's places of residence to facilitate their access.
- The area should be environmentally safe and away from sources of pollution, such as factories.
- The nursery must be located on the ground floor or in an independent building and away from the public street in order to ensure the children's safety.
- It should have a sufficient area, and the building should be attractive to children and have facilities that meet their various needs.
- The facility will include the classrooms, break room, reception room, administration office, kitchen, the storeroom, and bathrooms (all supplies offered in all facilities must be in proportion to the size of young children)
- The classroom must contain attractive and comfortable colours for children, with good lighting and ventilation.
- The outdoor playground will be divided into two parts. The first will be covered with tiles and then covered with foam mattresses to protect children from potential dangers while playing and falling. The other part will have a dirt-based surface that is used for games, such as climbing games and a sand basin.

Given these conditions, we note the extent of care to establish kindergartens that take into account children's safety, their needs for entertainment and play appropriate for their cognitive and physical development. This is done by creating the appropriate environment for their sizes, abilities, and interests.

- **Curricula Approved for Nursery Schools in Oman**

MOE specialists developed a special Omani curriculum that was approved in 2002 to be applied in nurseries. The curriculum consists of 12 educational units: My Nursery, My Body and Me, My Family, My Clothes, My Residence, The Book, Animals, Food, The Environment, Sand, Water, and Communication and Transportation. In 2017, an additional curriculum was adopted to create more options and diversity in the educational field for children. The Aghareed a'tofolla (Childhood Songs) curriculum, designed by an Egyptian company, comprises 13 units: Nursery, My Body, My Food, Animals, Plants, Water, Environment, Time, Health, Transportation, Professions, Explorations, and Space.

The following additional curricula, Bawakeer for monolingual and bilingual schools, are typically used in international schools. Through which language skills, sports activities, scientific activities, computer and technology, ethics, and citizenship are studied (Alm, 2018). This curriculum was designed by the International Childhood Company in Saudi Arabia in 2017 to serve the following areas: acquisition of knowledge, thinking and critical thinking skills, language and communication skills, civic education, health, environmental issues, economics, and global awareness (Bawakeer, 2021). In addition, the Montessori curriculum, which was approved in 2017, includes mathematics, sensory skills, daily life activities, extra-curricular activities, such as swimming, music, art activities, sports, field trips, Islamic studies, cultural subjects and natural sciences, and language (Montessori Oman, 2021). The nursery has the right to choose curriculum approved by the MOE and commensurate with its vision.

Notably, Montessori education was applied in Montessori schools in Oman before that. When a school or nursery wishes to provide any educational curriculum that is not implemented by the Ministry, it must send a letter requesting accreditation to the Department of Educational Programmes in the General Directorate of Private Schools,

which includes a full description of the educational curriculum to be implemented, to obtain approval for implementation.

- **Daily Programme Nursery Schools in Oman**

This section provides two models of the daily schedule of the nursery day, one in a regular nursery (see Table 2.6) and the other in a bilingual nursery (see Table 2.7), representing the prevalent programmes usually featured in all nursery schools in Oman.

**Table 2.6**

*Daily Programme in a Regular Nursery Classroom. Adapted from an Interview with Ayshaa Al-Maamari. Source: Personal communication (January 24, 2022)*

| Session | | KG1 & KG2 | Time period (minutes) | Activities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Welcome children | 08:00–08:30 | 30 | Receive children, prepare them for school day (for each student individually). |
| 2 | Morning session | 08:30–09:00 | 30 | Various introductory activities, including the Qur'an and songs (those in the curriculum). |
| 3 | Mealtime | 09:00–09:20 | 20 | Meals served to the children in the dining hall. |
| 4 | First educational session | 09:20–09:45 | 25 | Children engage in individual or group activities, such as drawing or lessons in Islamic education and the Arabic language. |
| 5 | Second educational session | 09:45–10:25 | 40 | Learn skills and concepts in maths, numbers, or citizenship. |
| 6 | Corner share | 10:25–10:45 | 20 | Children are distributed in the educational corners in an orderly manner; each child goes through most of the corners in one day. |
| 7 | English lesson | 10:45–11:20 | 35 | Learn letters, numbers, and some words in English. |
| 8 | Last meeting | 11:20–11:45 | 25 | Teacher tells stories or children sing and dance together. |
| 9 | Farewell and getting ready to go home | 11:45–12:00 | 15 | Prepare children's belongings and bags and get ready to go home. |

**Table 2.7**

*Daily Programme in a Bilingual Kindergarten. Adapted from an Interview with Al-Barakah. Source: Personal communication (December 1, 2021).*

| Session | | KG1 & KG2 | Time period (minutes) | Practices and activities |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Welcome children | 07:30–08:00 | 30 | Receive children, prepare them for the school day (for each student individually). |
| 2 | First educational session | 08:00–08:30 | 30 | Various opening activities, including Quran reading and songs (those in the curriculum; Bawaker). |
| 3 | Outdoor arena period | 08:30–08:45 | 15 | Practise exercises and sports to motivate children to start the school day. |
| 4 | Mealtime | 08:45–09:15 | 30 | Meals served to the children in the dining hall. |
| 5 | Educational activities session | 09:15–09:45 | 30 | Practise various activities, such as painting, manufacturing, farming, and installation. |
| 6 | Second educational session | 09:45–10:15 | 30 | Implement part of the units in the curriculum, each day of the week, alternating between Arabic, mathematics, and Islamic education. |
| 7 | Last meeting | 10:15–10:30 | 15 | Implement various activities, such as teacher telling stories or children singing; review work conducted by children in other lessons. |
| 8 | English language class | 10:30–11:00 | 30 | Introduce same concepts that children learned in Session 6, but in English. |
| 9 | Mathematical or educational concepts in English | 11:00–11:30 | 30 | Implement mathematics, science, and computer subjects in English. |
| 10 | Period for educational activities in English | 11:30–12:00 | 30 | Various individual activities, such as drawing or crafting from the available tools. |
| 11 | Last meeting in English | 12:00–12:15 | 15 | Perform various activities in English, such as teacher telling stories or children singing, along with dancing. Prepare pupils to receive parents and leave school for the day. |

Tables 2.6 and 2.7 similarly reveal that the nursery programme in both types of private schools, regular and bilingual, is concerned with children playing and having fun, along with learning and practising skills. The children's nutrition is also included in their care. However, it is also evident in both types of nurseries that a heavier emphasis is placed on knowledge, as the time for educational periods appears to be much greater than the time for outdoor play, exercise, feeding periods, and last encounters. The half-day format, ending at mid-day, seems to allow for appropriate time for the child to endure while remaining able to comprehend and concentrate.

- **Teaching Strategies Used in Nurseries (Educational Corners)**

Reviewing the daily programmes of nurseries highlights the inclusion of educational periods in which the curricula established by the Ministry are taught, as previously described. However, the MOE focuses on educating children in nurseries according to the educational corners system, referring to the system used in induction classes that are applied in some public schools.

The educational corners approach takes place in a large hall that is divided into corners with low partitions. Dedicated spaces are allocated for practising an activity and equipped with furniture and tools related to the purpose of the activity. The organisational scheme enables children to move and work independently or collectively in an interesting way.

The corner themes include reading, cognitive games, planning, research and exploration, artistic expression, acting, cube, and computer.

  o The names of the corners change according to the method used in the nursery. Thus, in some nurseries, educational corners are distributed based on the curriculum established in the nursery, such as a corner for Arabic language, mathematics, science, Islamic education, social studies, and English language. In another scheme, the following six corners are defined according to specific aims: planning, cognitive games, search and explore, artistic expression, construction and demolition, and representation (Al-Hinai, 2018).

- **Nursery Staff**

According to the MOE's (2021) specifications, the nursery staff consists of the following positions.

  o **Principal:** Omani, with a bachelor's degree in education or child education. She may be non-Omani, but in that case, she must hold a master's degree in education or a bachelor's degree in child education.

- **Assistant Principal:** This individual assists the principal in carrying out the administrative and technical work of the nursery. Additional duties include acting on the behalf of the Director in the event of her emergency absence.
- **Coordinator:** This staff member organises the children's administrative reports and their documents. Another task involves organising the administrative ceremonies entrusted to this individual by the Director.
- **Main Teacher:** This teacher should hold a general diploma or above; in addition, she will have taken qualified courses in the field of nursery school. She carries out the activities in the class.
- **Assistant Teacher:** She assists the teacher in carrying out classroom activities and providing services to children.
- **Cleaners.**
- **Health Supervisor:** The MOE requires the presence of a permanent nurse in the nursery or a health visitor (paediatrician or nurse) at least once a month.
- **Psychological or Social Worker:** MOE requirements also specify that a nursery must have onsite a psychologist or social specialist or both. This staff member is concerned with following up children psychologically and socially and addressing any problems they may encounter, to maintain their mental health.

Generally, teachers in Oman's nurseries do not hold a professional degree from a college or university. Instead, they depend on short workshops that introduce them to necessary topics before they commence their work in the nurseries. Teachers who work in these nurseries only receive preparation through in-service training, which may result in a lack of the necessary core knowledge, skills and experience to carry out their jobs efficiently.

The MOE (2021) provides various training and refresher courses, such as the training programme for the formation of the national team for the training of nursery teachers and refresher courses on the application of the developed Omani curriculum. However, in a study of nursery teachers in Oman, Al Yazidi (2007) discovered that nursery teachers in Oman were not selected on appropriate grounds, finding that 56% had accepted the job not because they wanted it but because there were no other opportunities. Furthermore, they had not received the special preparation that would have qualified them to work in nurseries. In an interview for the current study, Al-Qaryouti informed me that nursery

teachers in Oman who held a bachelor's degree in the field were transferred, becoming nursery supervisors, with the aim of supervising nurseries and working to help nursery teachers who held a general diploma to develop the foundations of education and teaching methods (personal communication, September 12, 2020).

These revelations raise the possibility that Omani nursery teachers' lack of academic experience may impose a direct influence on the issue of the current study. Thus, questions arise as to how deeply the factor of the teacher's level of preparation, experience, and even motivation (if being a nursery teacher was not her first choice of occupation) might affect the ease with which children move from kindergarten to first grade without problems or obstacles, among the other factors identified in the study.

## - Schooling System in Oman

The educational system in Oman includes two main sub-systems: the public education system and the private education system. The latter contains different types of schools and their systems. While both the public and private sectors operate under the supervision of the MOE, the systems they employ are different. Teaching and caring for children in daycare centres and nurseries mostly fall into the private category. In contrast, the care of children, along with other services, such as health, care for the disabled, and other family services provided for childhood, are often governmental. If found in the private sector, it is optional for those who have the ability to pay.

## • The Public Education System

Education in Oman before 1970 was restricted to Qur'an schools and three public schools with 900 students. However, beginning in 1970, the Omani government began to pay attention to education and expand it in all urban and rural areas of Oman, even remote locations in the middle of the mountains. The number of schools grew to 207, and 55,752 students were enrolled in 1975 (MOE, 2023). School numbers continued to burgeon, along with the number of students, which increased in all areas of Oman, including both males and females, reaching 935, with 4,487,97 students (MOE, 2023). However, in the face of this rapid and noticeable expansion in quantity, there have been calls from the country's

local development plans based on the reports of international organisations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank, to develop education to ensure quality as well as quantity (*Muscat Daily*, 2013).

In 1998–1999, a reform plan was implemented covering all levels of education in Oman (MOE, 2023). The new plan promoted education based on developing the student's educational needs in terms of knowledge, skills and values that would enhance the student's handling of life in the present and the future. This reform covered all components of the educational system, including the school system, curriculum, assessment and teacher training.

The educational system has two stages. Basic education also features two stages, consisting of a first cycle and a second cycle. The first cycle includes Grades 1–4, and male and female students learn in the same classroom in independent schools. All of the teachers in the first cycle schools are females. Children begin first grade at age 6. The second cycle includes Grades 5–10, and males and females are taught separately in independent schools. Female educators teach in schools where girls are taught, while male educators teach in schools for boys.

The second stage is post-basic education, which includes Grades 11 and 12. It offers basic and optional subjects and contributes to preparing students for a career and higher education by supporting communication, planning and problem-solving skills. At the end of Grade 12, students take a national examination to obtain a high school diploma (equivalent to A levels in the United Kingdom; Basic Education, 2016).

- **Private Schools in Oman**

Forms of private schools in Oman vary and are distributed in all regions of the country. Some focus on childhood education, such as Quranic schools and nurseries. Among private schools, education is provided from KG to fourth grade or, alternatively, from KG to 12. These schools can be classified into five types: Quranic, nurseries, monolingual schools, bilingual schools and international schools.

a. **Monolingual Schools:** Although they are private, they offer the same MOE curriculum that is applied in public schools for all grades, spanning KGs–12. Children are admitted at age 3.5 in KG1 and at 5.5 years in Grade 1 of primary school. These schools can teach other curricula, except for the Islamic Education Curricula, after obtaining MOE approval. The teaching of other languages, such as English, French, and German, is also allowed (MOE, 2008; Shura Council, 2016).

b. **Bilingual Schools:** These schools also teach the MOE's curricula, except for mathematics, sciences, and information technology (IT), which are taught in the English language. KG–12 education is offered. These schools can either apply their own curriculum or use one of the curricula approved in a centralised list provided by the MOE (ISAAN, 2013). Such schools can also offer international programmes for students from Grades 9–12 with a mandate to teach Islamic education curricula. (MOE, 2008).

c. **International Schools:** These schools, which may be sponsored by global institutions, are also under the supervision of the MOE. Spanning the educational stages from KG–12, they implement international curricula and programmes at all educational levels under the management and supervision of international educational institutions recognised by the DGPS in the MOE. In these schools, students can take international exams, such as IGCSE, IB and A-Levels. However, the schools must also offer curricula for social studies, Islamic education, and Arabic language for Omani students. Since the official language of instruction in them is often English, international schools are a potential choice for foreign students (MOE, 2012).

Among the ideas explored in the current study was whether the transition of children from independent kindergarten to first grade in a private or public school would differ in terms of ease for the transitioning students. Of especial interest was the possibility of determining the quality of experience of younger learners studying in private schools who moved from kindergarten to first grade in the same school. The answers to these questions are included in the discussion of the study results.

Based on the issue of interest, concerning the transition of children from nursery school to first grade, the following sections will outline the school context in the first cycle (Grades 1–4). The discussion will also focus further on details related to first grade to clarify the

differences and similarities between the child's experience in the nursery and, subsequently, in primary school.

- **First Grade in Public Primary School in Oman**

The duration of study in general education schools is approximately 9 months, interspersed with a half-year vacation. The duration of study in basic education schools is approximately 180 days, divided into two semesters as follows: the first semester (September–December), the semester vacation in January, the second semester (February–June), and the end of the school year vacation (July–August). The duration of a lesson in general education schools is 45 minutes in Grades 1 to 9. Classes take place 5 days a week, and each week features 40 lessons (MOE, 2021).

- **Curriculum**

Children in Grade 1 in primary school learn academic subjects via intensive lessons comprising 40 lessons per week (MOE, 2021). Study subjects are classified into three areas according to the curricula issued by the MOE. The first field contains Islamic education, Arabic language, and social studies, while the second field comprises science and mathematics. Other individual skills subjects include physical education, music, life skills, and art education in addition to the English language. The first and second fields each have one teacher who covers multiple subjects; in addition, the rest of the subjects each have their own teacher. Teachers must hold, at minimum, a bachelor's degree in education. Table 2.8 lists the number of weekly lessons.

Each subject has separate books (MOE, 2021). Specifically, the subjects of Islamic education and the Arabic language each have four books per school year, divided into the study of two books in one semester. Regarding science, mathematics and English, each subject has two basic books and two activity and exercise books, with one book taught in each semester. Life skills has one book that is covered in two semesters. The remaining subjects of physical education, music and technology have no books but require the student to take notes in a notebook. Assessment activities and short questions provide an

evaluation system consisting of an assessment activity and short questions for each subject at the end of each semester.

**Table 2.8**

*The Number of Lessons for Each Subject for the 1ˢᵗ Grade in Public Schools. Source: MOE (2021)*

| Subject | Lessons | Subject | Lessons | Subject | Lessons | Total lessons |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------------|
| **English** | 5 | Mathematics | 7 | Art | 2 | |
| **Islamic** | 6 | Science | 3 | Music | 1 | 40 |
| **Arabic** | 12 | Physical Education | 2 | Life Skills | 1 | |
| **Technology** | 1 | | | | | |

**Table 2.9**

*The Daily Routine Program for First Grade Children in Public Schools in Oman. Source: MOE (2021)*

| The activity | Time period | Length (in minutes) |
|--------------|-------------|---------------------|
| **Morning assembly** | 07:10–07:25 | 15 |
| **First class** | 07:25–08:10 | 45 |
| **Second class** | 08:10–08:55 | 45 |
| **Third class** | 08:55–09:40 | 45 |
| **Fourth class** | 09:40–10:25 | 45 |
| **Break** | 10:25–10:50 | 25 |
| **Fifth class** | 10:50–11:35 | 45 |
| **Sixth class** | 11:35–12:20 | 45 |
| **Seventh class** | 12:20–01:00 | 45 |

It appears from Tables 2.8 and 2.9 that children experience a great shift from the previous programme that they were accustomed to in the nursery to a much more intensive programme in the first grade, containing seven academic sessions, each one lasting 45

minutes. In the middle, there is a short break of only 25 minutes. Accordingly, a huge effort is demanded of the children to adapt to this new situation.

- **Staffing in First Cycle Schools**

The first grade is the first stage in the schools offering the first cycle (Grades 1–4; MOE, 2021). The functional staff in the school consists of the following personnel:

- **Teachers** include the teacher for the first field (Islamic education, Arabic language and social studies) and the second field (science and mathematics), along with individual teachers who instruct students in English, physical education, drawing, life skills, music, and technology.
- **The First Teacher,** who is considered the supervisor of the teachers of his subject/field in the school, is responsible for coordinating the teaching of the subject and for discussing with teachers the various issues related to it.
- **The Administrative Supervisor** is responsible for following up on various matters related to administrative and financial aspects, student discipline, transportation, and the maintenance of school facilities.
- **The Learning Resource Centre Technician** prepares learning resource centres and computer laboratories in schools, configures them for children, repairs faults, and maintains and develops equipment.
- **The Social Specialist** studies the social and psychological aspects that affect the achievement of learners, identifying the challenges they face and guiding them to effective methods in order to overcome them.

All technical and administrative staff working in the first cycle schools (1–4) have been feminised in order to provide a sense of psychological security for children as they move from the nursery or home where they receive care from their mothers or a nanny or a female teacher. The aim is to gradually lead the child by the hand to the next stages of their growth.

For each subject in the first cycle, there is a first field supervisor, a second field supervisor, and a subject supervisor (MOE, 2021). They are followed by the first supervisor in the

educational district. At the ministry level is the general supervisor of the subject, who undertakes the planning and development of the educational supervision process through field practice and according to the described episodes. In addition to a senior administrative supervisor in the educational district, there is a general administrative supervisor at the ministry level who undertakes planning for the administrative supervision process.

- **School Building**

Public schools are mostly modern buildings. They are designed in the form of a square, which includes the classrooms and the rest of the facilities, such as the principal's office, the assistant principal's office, the social worker's room, library, canteen, teachers' rooms, learning resource centre (a centre that contains computers and various other audio learning resources and the visible next to the reading resources). Bathrooms are the four sides of the square. In the middle of the building is a large open courtyard, which is typically covered with umbrellas because the weather is often hot and the sun is scorching. Children spend the morning assembly as well as the break time inside that square. Thus, the school principal merely needs to stand at the door of her office to be able to survey the entire school facilities. This school building has a large outdoor school yard where children can go out in break and at home time, as well as in the physical education class when the weather permits.

- **Comparison Between the State of Children in Nursery School and First Grade**

Table 2.10 compares different aspects of the situations of children in Oman in kindergarten and primary schools. Careful scrutiny of the data presented in the table can provide a clearer picture of the conditions affecting children's transition from kindergarten to first grade.

**Table 2.10**

*Comparing the State of Children in Nursery School and 1ˢᵗ Grade in Oman*

| | Nursery | Grade 1 |
|---|---|---|
| **Type: private/public** | All private | Private and public |
| **Curricula** | Various curricula, but all are presented in small units that revolve around the child and their surroundings, such as me and my body, my family, my clothes, my residence, the book, animals, food, the environment, sand, water, and communication and transportation. | - Three books for the first field: Islamic education, Arabic language, and social studies<br>- Two books for the second field: science and mathematics<br>- Skills subjects: physical education, music, and art education<br>- One book for English language. |
| **Staff** | - Principal<br>- Assistant principal<br>- Coordinator<br>- Main teacher<br>- Assistant teacher<br>- Health supervisor<br>- Social specialist or psychologist | - Principal<br>- Assistant principal<br>- First teacher<br>- Different teachers for each subject<br>- Administrative supervisor<br>- IT hall technician<br>- Social specialist<br>- Psychologist. |
| **Teacher** | - Main teacher<br>- Assistant teacher | - First field teacher (Islamic education, Arabic, and social studies)<br>- Second field teacher (science and mathematics)<br>- English teacher<br>- Physical education teacher<br>- Art teacher<br>- Music teacher |
| **Daily programme** | - First 80 minutes: welcome children, do free activities, and mealtime<br>- Next 25 minutes: perform individual or group activities, such as drawing or lessons in Islamic education and the Arabic language<br>- One long session lasting 40 minutes: learn skills and concepts of maths, numbers, or citizenship<br>- Next 20 minutes: children distributed in educational corners in an orderly manner.<br>- Last 35 minutes: tell stories, or sing together, dance, and prepare for home time | - 40 lessons per week<br>- 7 academic sessions daily, each lasting 45 minutes<br>- 1 25-minute break |
| **School building** | - Administration office<br>- Reception room<br>- Classrooms with attractive and comfortable colours for children, good lighting and ventilation<br>- Break hall<br>- Kitchen<br>- Storeroom                -<br>Bathrooms in each classroom (considering the size of the supplies)              - Two outdoor playgrounds: one is covered with tiles, then covered with foam mattresses with big games as slides and swings, with another dirt part for games, such as climbing games and sand basin. | - Staff rooms<br>- Library<br>- Canteen<br>- Classrooms<br>- IT Hall<br>- Open, shaded central courtyard<br>- Large, empty outdoor yard |

Table 2.10 reveals that, in general, the environment of children in KG2 in Oman differs in all respects from the first-grade environment. The only common factor is that the employees at both levels are women, most of them Omani. Other than that similarity, the children transition into a completely different environment, moving from a classroom full of games, colours, and services that are reachable for them to a formal school devoid of games and separate services. First-graders must also deal with approximately six female teachers after having a single teacher in KG2 who was close to everyone, along with an assistant who provided them with all of the help they needed in their day, including using the bathroom, eating, and taking care of their belongings.

Furthermore, the bag contained one book divided into units in KG2, in contrast to a first-grader's bag filled with six books, six notebooks, and other items. Sessions also differ greatly, as the child is obliged to attend seven academic classes in the first grade, each lasting 45 minutes, with only one 25-minute break during the day. By comparison, the kindergarten schedule is pleasant, relaxing, and inviting, providing an intimation of the potential trauma of an abrupt transition without preparation or consideration of the child's feelings. These stark differences are worth keeping in mind while reading through the following chapters, which discuss how the children expressed their thoughts in their drawings and conversations, as well as exploring the stakeholders' perceptions of the topic at hand. How can this be placed in global contexts and its applications in this field?

## 2.6. Summary

This chapter reviewed the general context of Oman, geographically, politically, economically, and educationally. It clearly shows that the overlapping among these factors provides a great opportunity to develop the educational system quantity and quality. The Omani government believes in investing in education as a medium in making a stable country and building a better future for Omani generations. Abiding to the development plans over five decades results in consolidating the right of children for a better education in Oman in all stages.

However, the kindergartens, which are regarded by the researcher worldwide as vital for children, are not included in the public education system. As a result, the children safer in their transition from KG2 to first grade. It appears that this issue is required a deep investigation to understand how this process is important? and what are the benefits of studying it in an educational system is under continues reform and development especially under implementing a new future vision called Oman 2040.

The next chapter will discuss the theoretical framework on which this study was built. Then, the fourth chapter reviews previous studies related to the issue of children's transition from KG2 to first grade. This is to lay the foundation on which the study's methodology and tools will be built later.

# Chapter 3
# Theoretical Framework

## 3.1. Introduction

According to the literature, the concept of experience has been subject to different theoretical perspectives. The present study relies on specific theories to understand how Omani children interpret their experience during their transition to the first grade. The first theoretical concept entails boundary objects, which are related to needs, as ascribed by Akkerman and Bakker (2011) to Vygotsky (1978) and CHAT (Hogsnes, 2015). The second is Dewey's (1974) concept of experience. Boundary objects, which exist in and between different settings, play a role in motivating children to continue constructing their experience in the new environment. Therefore, the objects that children experience have an integral part in their transition from one setting to another. According to Vygotsky (1978), boundary objects function as both tools and signs to help children act and master themselves in and across settings.

Dewey (2005) characterised experience in terms of different features. The first principle associated with experience is continuity; thus, experience depends on previous experiences, meaning that what children experienced in the nursery should continue when they move to first grade. Dewey's second principle of experience is interaction, which is related to social and cultural practices, requiring connection to both objects and the use of objects in different settings. According to Fabian (2007), the transition from nursery will oblige children to experience a new physical environment characterised by different demands concerning academic content and working methods. The possibility that new demands might create insecurity for children who lack continuity of experience is one idea underpinning the current study to explore in the case of Omani children.

In fact, when I searched through the educational literature for a theory on which to build my dissertation, I was looking for theories related to children and how their experiences, attitudes, and behaviours could be built and supported in their transition from nursery to first grade from all of the circumstances surrounding them. Among the theories I came

across was attachment theory, which is a psychological model used to explain how humans can build and maintain emotional bonds with their caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). This theory was initially developed by John Bowlby, and then continued by Mary Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 2015), where she presented the following four types of attachment: insecure avoidant attachment, secure attachment, insecure ambivalent attachment, and disorganized attachment. The first three were defined by Ainsworth's Strange Situation test, while the fourth was defined later by other researchers (Ainsworth et al., 2015).

This theory is typically used to understand relationships in infants, children, and adults. It focuses on the early attachment experiences between children and their caregivers, and how these bonds and relationships affect their later social, psychological, and behavioural development (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Therefore, it is more relevant to the need to provide emotional security for the child (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

In contrast, CHAT theory, which began with Vygotsky (1978) and was later developed by Engeström (1987), focuses on the boundary objects with which the child interacts, as well as on the influence of cultural, historical, and political dimensions and the environmental conditions surrounding the child on their behavioural and educational development (Hogsnes, 2015). On the other hand, Dewey's theories of experience, interaction, and continuity of experience support the child's understanding of the boundary objects surrounding them from their teachers, friends, systems, classroom, and school environment, and how to sustain them in future contexts when needed (Dewey, 2005).

Accordingly, it seems clear that attachment theory is ideal for understanding the emotional aspects and relationships of caregivers. In contrast, CHAT theory and Dewey's (2005) theories are more suitable for the nature of the current study, which seeks to understand the comprehensive needs of the child during their transition from nursery to the first grade. These enable analyses in light of the social, cultural, and historical needs, the policies used, and the systems applied that form the vocabulary of the environment surrounding the child. Accordingly, these theories extend beyond only emotional needs to encompass those necessary for developing the skills required for the transition stage.

Therefore, the following discussion begins by exploring the two theories' history, growth and important components related to the current study. Then, I will try to carry out the intersecting and analogous roads on which I will build my analyses and interpretation.

Moreover, I will implement the concepts from the two theories on the study case (transition from nursery to primary school). Finally, I will analyse some practices and experiences of some countries in the children's transition from nursery to primary school.

## 3.2.  CHAT Theory

The practice framework provided by the CHAT is one of the most important approaches to analysing any professional work (Julkunen, 2013), as it includes different dimensions that are defined and influenced by each other. In addition to being affected by its environment represented in the dynamics of power, culture, money, and history. Thus, CHAT can help researchers track and analyse complex and evolving professional practices (Foot, 2013).

Many Western researchers have adopted the CHAT framework as a theoretical system that can be applied in multiple disciplines and perspectives. Engeström (1999) introduced developmental dimensions to the theory that were broad, adaptable, and applicable, leading to its popularity with researchers in Europe. Along these lines, Nussbaumer (2012) noted the increasing use of CHAT in educational research in a review encompassing more than 1,577 educational studies published between 2000 and 2009 that employed CHAT in nursery to Grade 12 settings in America and Europe. Some of the research Nussbaumer examined used CHAT in different situations to study a current or future educational issue. Among the results, 129 articles were found to apply the theory in the contexts of educational policy, childcare, university-related materials, and other topics related to nursery–Grade 12 standards, in addition to explorations that considered education in general. Table 3.1 presents the categories identified by Nussbaumer according to what emerged from this study.

**Table 3.1**

*Categories of 129 Found Articles Related to CHAT. Source: Nussbaumer (2012, p.41)*

| Category | Number of articles |
|---|---|
| Partial use of CHAT | 10 |
| Commentary/opinion | 22 |
| CHAT used by authors for basis of own model | 5 |
| Theoretical only | 6 |
| Pedagogy and teaching practice | 34 |
| "Activity" only; no CHAT | 8 |
| Teacher education | 10 |
| Themes, curriculum, system-wide K-12 effort | 11 |
| Foreign languages | 2 |
| Qualified articles | 21 |
| Total | 129 |

Research in the United States features less use of CHAT than is the case in Europe. Nevertheless, researchers in various fields have found this framework useful for construction or evaluation. For example, educational researchers have applied CHAT in the development of thinking, professional practices, teaching development, and curriculum development at all levels of education (Cole, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007).

Every word in the spelled-out form of the acronym CHAT – cultural–historical activity theory – has a connotation that bears consideration when analysing professional activity in any research endeavour. Culture refers to the belief that people have habituated. Their behaviour reflects the values and customs they have lived through and influenced that represent the culture of their society. Every society's culture is present in all of its historical stages, making it necessary to observe people's behaviour at some point in time while considering the historical paths of their society during the analysis (Engeström, 1999). Lastly, activity refers to the combined actions of a group of people that change and are influenced by the surrounding culture and history. Thus, applying CHAT in research can clarify the understanding of human activity (Foot, 2013).

### 3.2.1. CHAT: Historical Growth

Activity Theory (AT) is another name for CHAT, though the latter term sees the most use among researchers. The theory generally provides an approach that describes a link

between simulation, imaginable situations, and reality that needs to be shared with material objects and human beings. Such ingredients interact in an expected future model or a tailored outcome of activity (Nussbaumer, 2012). The CHAT has undergone several developments over three generations of educational and research history, with each generation dependent on the findings of its predecessor. The following sections summarise each phase of development of this theoretical framework.

- **The First Generation**

In 1978, Vygotsky formulated the concept of mediation based on his studies in child development, establishing the first generation of CHAT. According to Vygotsky's idea of mediation, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, people react to an agency according to the signs and tools around them, and these interactions result in the desired goal. Engeström (2001) added the labels S for stimulus, R for response and X for complex and medium action. Leont'ev (1978) described a collective activity consisting of individuals in a community and dividing the work among them within the Vygotsky model, making the work systematic. In particular, Leont'ev (1978) posited a hierarchy in explaining cognitive and physical processes, along with historical–cultural traditions. Furthermore, Leont'ev (1978) focused on the motivation and the activity done by actions programmed to achieve an intended goal, as well as the automatic operations that take place because of unspecified circumstances and the tools used (Nussbaumer, 2012).
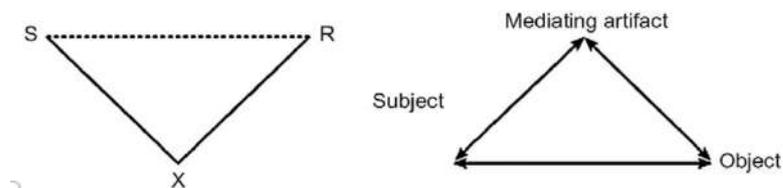


**Figure 3.1** *First-generation CHAT. Source: Engeström (2001, p. 134)*

- **The Second Generation**

Engeström's work predominates the second generation of CHAT with contributions based on Vygotsky's mediation concept of learning with others using artefacts. Specifically, Engeström explained the interaction of people's thinking processes in their societal context using artefacts, especially in production activities. Thus, Engeström successfully integrated the first generation of CHAT into his created ideas by way of the interrelationships between the individual and his community, context, history, the interaction processes, the situation and the activity, as clearly shown in Figure 3.2's illustration of how CHAT works as a system. As the figure reveals, the individual or participating groups who respond to the activity are the subject, while what motivates them to participate represents the goal. In
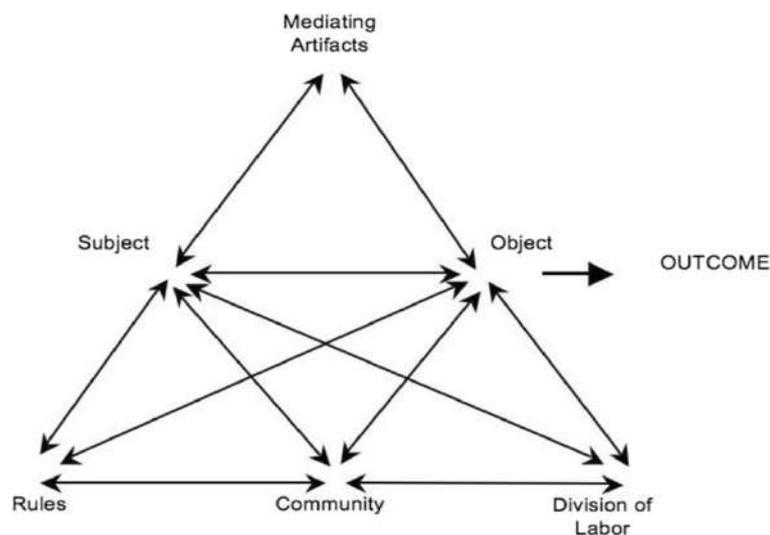


**Figure 3.2**

*Second-Generation CHAT. Source: Engeström (1987)*

this depiction, the tools used, whether physical or psychological, are the mediator between the subject and the goal. As for community, it is the social and cultural group to which the individuals belong. All such contents interact within the rules or social norms. In addition, this activity consists of work and tasks divided among the participants in the system (Cole & Engeström, 1993). Consequently, CHAT represents a framework that enables scholars to understand and frame the interrelationships between all parts of the studied system.

- **The Third Generation**

Following the establishment of the second generation of CHAT, Engeström continued to adjust the model by developing activity systems consisting of several systems that interact with each other to facilitate interaction with tensions and contradictions in order to encourage collective learning by change. These changes launched the third generation of CHAT (Engeström, 2001). Figure 3.3 displays the workings of the third-generation CHAT system. Subsequently, researchers formulated several definitions of the activity concept reflecting Engeström's presentation, including Roth's (2007) assertion that the analysis of the behaviour of a human action in an activity depends on Leont'ev's unit of activity, actions, and processes. However, the effects of previous experiences and surrounding environmental conditions on human action and behaviour during its activity must also be considered due to the potential to lead to unconscious actions. Therefore, researchers must direct the operations to achieve the procedures properly in order to be able to achieve the desired object.
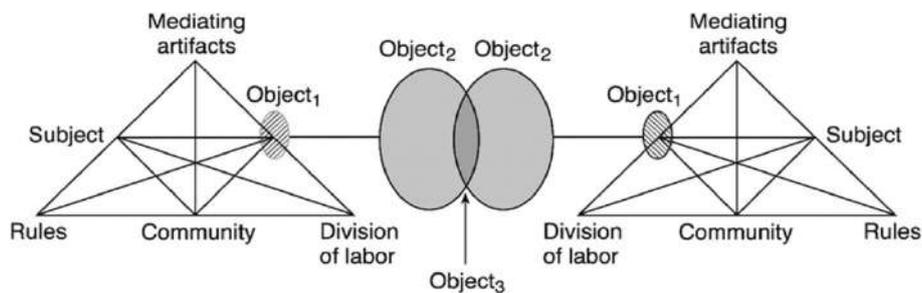


**Figure 3.3**

*Third-Generation CHAT. Source: Hardman (2015)*

Although CHAT is distinguished by the bilateral and tripartite interrelationships between its six contents, its analytical strength lies in understanding the activity as one integrated unit. Consequently, the practitioner or analyst must focus on identifying other extraneous components, overcoming the clear and explicit to be able to familiarise himself with the parties of the activity. Nevertheless, the presence of six independent, interacting, and complementary components makes the model ideal for analysing multiple relationships within a single activity in different time periods. For example, applying a specific

procedure makes it possible to introduce a subject of those who are directed towards achieving the same object with the main subject. Therefore, they are considered members of the activity community. In addition, members of the community within the activity system can exchange their roles while taking into account the need to specify those roles to facilitate dealing with the data applied to different time periods. Overall, quantitative methods are best for research and practices based on CHAT as they will reflect developments and sometimes unexpected occurrences (Koszalka & Wu, 2004).

This actually applies to my current study. As interactions in influencing the issue of children's smooth transition from kindergarten to first grade require consideration of several inputs, such as stakeholders from educational policy makers, teachers, school principals, educational supervisors, and curriculum developers. In addition to understanding the goals set. As well as the role of parents. Let us not forget the surrounding environment, whether it is the school, including its interactions, or the community that surrounds the schools. Below is a more detailed explanation of how to benefit from the CHAT model in the current study.

## 3.3.  Interpreting the Current Study in Light of CHAT

In CHAT, the elements used for an activity are viewed as a unit of analysis. Specifically, this unit is the minimum participant activity that is directed towards achieving a collective goal influenced by the cultural milieu (Engeström, 1987), representing the characteristic that makes valuations so valuable. In addition, considering the internal tensions and contradictions between the elements of the measured activity can lead to the transfer of knowledge. According to CHAT, each activity includes several elements that interact in the activity, including subject, tools, society, rules, division of work and purpose (Kuttii, 1996).

The basis of every activity is to achieve a goal, whether mental or physical. Position refers to an individual or group. An incentive, which is needed to achieve the goal, is provided by using tools, such as training, community, technology, ideas, concepts, and the people who implement them. The rules determine the course of action in an activity. Lastly, the work is divided among the community members participating in the activity. All six elements of

activity affect and are affected by each other. Furthermore, they are affected by social, cultural, and historical factors, such as the previous knowledge of people (the subject), general education policies, and financial support to provide the tools required to implement the activity. Any activity can be affected by other parallel activities in the same context. Therefore, the activity is characterised by transformation and dynamism, as well as moved by a stimulus influenced by the history and culture in its surroundings (Koszalka & Wu, 2004).

Accordingly, education in the light of the CHAT model interacts in a continuous process with the environment and community members. Learners (subject) build knowledge and skills (objective) based on their historical and cultural context. The process also involves using tools and media, such as technology, teachers, training, and curricula, to engage the learner in the learning process to build knowledge and skills affected by the community context, culture and history. Thus, the interaction that will take place during the activity between all of these elements will produce knowledge and skills in the learners.

### 3.3.1. Study Framework Based on CHAT

**Figure 3.4**

*Elements of Current Study through CHAT Theory Framework*
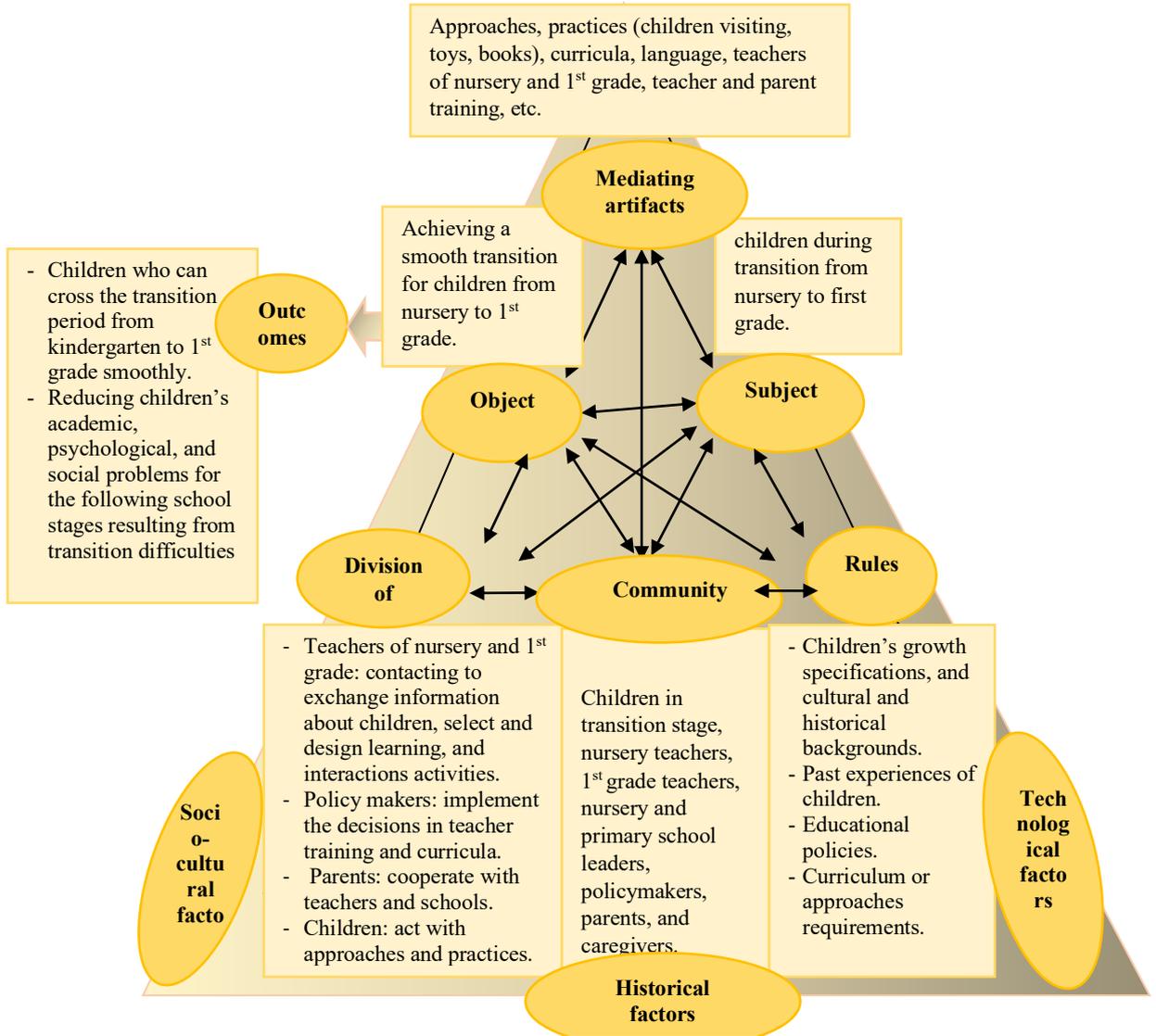


The following discussion explores each of the elements related to an activity in more detail. All of these elements and their interrelationships according to the CHAT framework are illustrated in Figure 3.4.

- **Subject**

According to Cole and Engeström (1993), the subject is the individual or groups of individuals involved in the activity. In the current study, therefore, the subjects are the children during their transition from nursery to first grade.

- **Object**

Cole and Engeström (1993) defined the object as the motivating influence behind subjects' participation in the activity. Depending on those approaches, achieving a smooth transition for children from nursery to first grade is the object of this study.

- **Community**

A community is the social and cultural group that subjects are a part of, with explicit rules or social norms that regulate and influence behaviour (Cole & Engeström, 1993). The community in this study encompasses children, nursery teachers, primary one teachers, nursery and primary school leaders, policy makers, parents, and caregivers. Their interaction consists of communication between parents and the kindergarten and school, as well as parents and their children. Additional interaction involves kindergarten and first-grade teachers and takes place between each other and between teachers and parents. The last type of interaction included in the current study represents that between educational policy makers and all of the mentioned parties and their needs.

- **Mediating Artefacts**

Mediating artefacts or tools are symbols, signs, and conceptual understandings that serve as physical and psychological tools, mediating activity between the subject and the object (Cole & Engeström, 1993). In the current study, mediating artefacts are identified as language, children visiting, toys, books, teacher training, parent training, and other helps.

- **Division of Labour**

The division of labour defines how tasks and responsibilities are shared among system participants as they engage in the activity (Cole & Engeström, 1993). In this study, the relevant labours are divided as follows:

- Teachers of nursery and first grade: Contacting one another to exchange information about children, select, design learning, and interaction-related activities.
- Policy makers: Making decisions about teacher training and curricula.
- Parents: Cooperating with teachers and schools.
- Children: Acting in accordance with approaches and practices.

- **Rules**

According to Huang and Lin's (2013) definition, rules are the proper procedures and regulations of interactions that are acceptable to the subjects and, therefore, have cultural properties. In this study, the proportional rules for the transition process include children's growth specifications, their cultural and historical background, past knowledge, children's previous experience, education policy, and child rights.

- **Outcomes**

The outcomes from this process include the following:

- Children will be able to go through the transition period from kindergarten to first grade smoothly.
- Children's academic, psychological, and social problems resulting from the difficulty of transition will be reduced in the subsequent school stages compared to current levels.

All of these elements and their interrelationships according to the CHAT framework are illustrated in Figure 3.4.

### 3.4. Dewey's Theories

The origin of thinking from Dewey's point of view reflects some doubt or perplexity. That is, one must be exposed to a problem that is exciting and stimulating in order to begin to ponder possible solutions. Thus, people with similar past experiences may give more appropriate suggestions and solutions to others who share the same background. However, for a person who does not have relatable previous experiences, interpreting current experiences results in confusion rather than stimulating thinking to find solutions. The main principles of Dewey's theory of experience are interaction and continuity.

#### 3.4.1. Interaction in Dewey's Theory

Interaction, the first principle of Dewey's theory, portrays experiences as the result of the learner's interaction with the surrounding environment. In addition, it is one of the investigators of effective teaching. Interaction in the educational context can appear as an important feature during dialogue and communication between the teacher and the learner. In addition to the internal factors of the student called (objective) by Dewey. He thinks that this objective is part of the environment. In addition, this objective is affected by the person's attitudes, perceptions, past experiences, beliefs, and habits. In this light, Dewey (1997) identified the influences on the student's adaptation in school in the form of three main points: the mental habits and attitudes of persons around the student, the academic subjects, and the educational goals to be achieved. Therefore, according to Dewey's (1998) view, interaction provides a balance between factors affecting experience and objectivity (the internal conditions of the individual). In other words, any experience of a person will naturally be affected by the interaction between these two factors during an interaction between a person, the subjects, and other people. Dewey (1998) confirmed this idea by claiming that experience "is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between the individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (p. 16). This characteristic makes each person's experience special and spatially complex.

### 3.4.2. The Continuum in Dewey's Theory

The continuum principle is Dewey's other hypothesis. According to this concept, the current knowledge presented to the student is based on what the student already knows in addition to the availability of the necessary resources to impact learning. In other words, educators build upon something that has happened to a person, such as a student, considering it a new experience in a suitable way to bring about new learning (Dewey, 1998). Dewey described the human in terms of being re-formed as a result of the experiences he has gone through, leading to his accumulation of habits, perceptions, emotional responses, sensitivity towards things, behaviour, and appreciation. Consequently, these acquired components influence a person's reactions in future experiences.

Accordingly, experience is like a permeable organism that takes from the past and its experiences to shape paths to the future for the formation of new experiences. Consequently, a series of experiences is created that are educationally effective in forming a cohesive bridge in which events and experiences develop to make an achievement (Fishman & McCarthy, 1998). Dewey (1998) asserted that any experience leading to disfigurement or that does not induce continuous growth in experience is a deceptive experience. The theory of experience includes a means of measurement, the experience value scale, based on the importance of recognising the cumulative relationships that lead to the creation of something meaningful and the continuity that they achieve (Dewey, 1998).

According to Dewey (1997), an experience worth studying is one that is continuous. Therefore, the author warned against useless observations. In his view, observations that take place far from the core of the problem will be scientifically ineffective in the school setting.

### 3.4.3. Interaction and Continuity Combined

The principles of interaction and continuity determine the quality of experience, according to Dewey's (1998) definition of the concept. In explaining the quality of an individual's

experience using Dewey's theory of interaction and continuity, Carver (2001) emphasised that this quality requires attention to the contribution of experience to the development of an individual's habits (continuity) in addition to focusing on the direct nature of the individual's communication with his surrounding environment (interaction). This process leads to an understanding of what it means by uniting interactions and continuity to provide a significant measure educationally as well as improve the value of the student's experience (Dewey, 1998). Accordingly, one reason why an educational experience might fall short could lie in the failure to adapt the materials to suit the student's requirements and abilities (the principle of interaction). Thus, educators must keep the future firmly in mind during the development and implementation of any educational phase (the principle of continuity; Dewey, 1998).

In addition, Dewey (1998) added the term collateral learning to indicate what the student learns on the margins without the intention of the teacher or outside the curriculum and the specific goals. Negative examples of this phenomenon include boredom and annoyance with the teaching method or the school atmosphere. This is what constitutes a permanent position for the student that pushes him to learn or resist learning (Dewey, 1998). This is Dewey's call for educators to pursue student discovery and problem-solving approaches to help them build their own continuity and interaction with the curriculum. Such a mindset also achieves the principle of continuity by linking the student's life with what is inside and outside the school. Thus, the student will be provided with skills related to discovery and application instead of training and receiving knowledge. When educators apply this strategy, their students become interested in the curriculum and begin to apply the knowledge they acquire more than merely committing the information to rote memory (Dewey, 1998). Figure 3.5 explains such relationship.
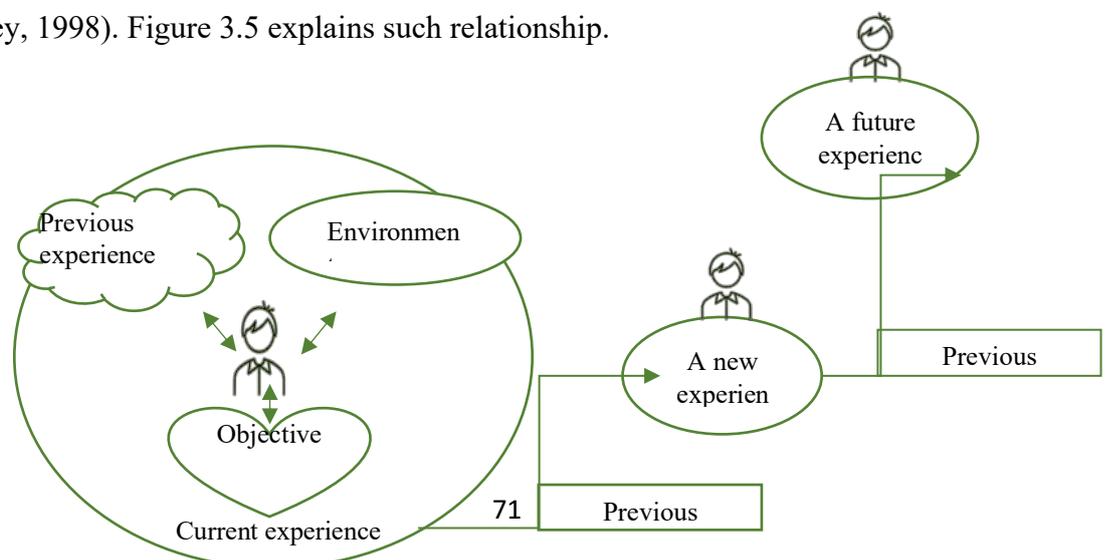


**Figure 3.5** *Dewey's Theory of Interaction and Continuity*

## 3.5.  Interpreting the Current Study in Light of Dewey's Theories

Emerging from the previous discussion of Dewey's vision is the understanding that a child's experiences are affected by his/her past experiences. Accordingly, the child's experience in the first grade is influenced by his previous experiences in nursery as well as home. This phenomenon, which guarantees the continuity that Dewey underscores, means that the child has opportunities to use past experiences to build current experiences. Dewey warned against interrupting this experience by not finding common elements and reciprocal relationships between the child's previous experiences and current situation (Dewey, 2005).

From Dewey's (2005) point of view, experiences are social. It is also within cultural interactions and related to objects and their use in various settings. Thus, during their transitions, children seek to balance their accumulated experiences and recent.

Starting school for children represents a challenging phase in their lives. The experience has both positive and negative aspects. In other words, it provides a new arena for gaining new friendships and learning about new environments and conditions, but it can also output a feeling of insecurity (Dockett & Perry, 2007). From another perspective, Hogsnes and Moser (2014) strongly recommended taking into account the philosophical continuity of the transition of children, which is related to the continuity of academic curricula and methods of work.

Accordingly, Einarsdóttir (2013) emphasised the necessity of cooperation between institutions in this context, given a child's accumulation of various past experiences. Early et al. (2001) described the role and importance of the teacher during this stage in terms of the teacher's competence and experience regarding the characteristics of the transitional stage. Teachers' ability to apply appropriate strategies that enhance the probability of success and facilitate the process will enable children to move across the border from kindergarten to school by acquiring new skills and practices as influential agents in their practices (Hedegaard, 2007).

## 3.6. Boundary Objects and Continuity Based on the Previous two Theories

Vygotsky and Dewey are important theorists in the educational world whose shared ideas related to activities, learning, and development. However, there are some differences between their ideas in some aspects. The discussion in this section will seek to shed light on some of them in this context. For example, the two scholars differed in their view of social-historical tools. Dewey saw the role of social history and the tools produced during it as flexible, allowing the tools to be used in current experiences. In contrast, Vygotsky proposed that these tools have been developed throughout history and permanently influence the social community of the child or student. In terms of experience and culture, Dewey theorised that a child's experiences help shape its thinking, while Vygotsky saw experiences as the raw material for thinking. The authors' interpretation of human inquiry also differed in that Vygotsky emphasised the necessity that a dominant mentor should design an activity to help a child achieve the goal, while Dewey saw the child as independent and able to achieve goals by doing the activity. All differences aside, both of these theorists have provided a scientific theoretical basis that many educators and researchers still rely on (Glassman, 2001).

For both Dewey (2005) and Vygotsky (1978), children's interests and past experiences must be taken into account through pedagogy, where the focus is on the objects and strategies of teaching and educational activities and their design. Admittedly, the term "boundary objects" is specific to CHAT, having first appeared in Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Akkerman & Bakker, 2011), but it has a clear role in Dewey's (1974) theory, as well. The importance of boundary objects lies in understanding and clarifying the role of objects and components of institutional systems in engaging children and stimulating their interaction while considering continuity.

Vygotsky and Dewey saw objects/objectives somewhat differently. In particular, Dewey (2005) defined objects as tools that children could use. In contrast, Vygotsky's (1987) emphasis lay in regarding these objectives as signs and tools that could affect the psyche of the child, helping him interact and develop self-confidence during the settings. While the two theories differ slightly in their descriptions of this concept, the difference does not constitute a contradiction.

In the current study, my focus has centred around knowing the needs of children during their transition to primary school. Gaining this knowledge entailed identifying boundary objects as tools and concepts that facilitate the process of adaptation in their interactions with others while helping them participate cognitively and skilfully in the experiences emerging in the new environment. Including objects in practices, cultures, and customs that encompass nursery and school is essential, providing an incentive for the child to deal with it (Carr, 2013). These boundary objects, as seen by Star and Griesemer (1989), act as a bridge that facilitates the transition process for their enjoyment of effective power because they have a common identity across cultures, along with the flexibility to bring about adaptation to new conditions. They maintain continuity.

## 3.7. Summary

This chapter reviewed the theoretical framework on which the current study was built. The theories chosen included the boundary objects in Vygotsky's (1978) CHAT and Dewey's (1974) theory of experience. The chapter described the three stages of the historical development of CHAT found in the educational literature in some detail, followed by a discussion of the possibility of applying CHAT's concepts in the current study by establishing a practical framework based on CHAT's precepts. Regarding Dewey's theories, the current study drew heavily from Dewey's principles of interaction and continuity. This theoretical foundation supported the development of a framework to guide an implementation in light of the data collected in the current study. Finally, I developed a unified framework to explain the components of the study issue in accordance with the selected theoretical frameworks.

In light of the theories discussed in this chapter, the concept of boundary objects is applied in the present study to identify the motives and needs (tools) that are experienced by Omani students during their transition from nursery to first grade. Fabian (2013) described boundary objects as including such articles as family photographs and children's toys in addition to young learners' experiences and events related to social and philosophical conditions in which they participate and interact with others. Corsaro and Molinari (2000) expanded on this idea in their contention that the objects children bring to school include activities linked to both social and philosophical conditions, such as literacy activities.

These activities, called "priming events", comprise activities in which children attend prospectively to ongoing or anticipated changes in their lives. Additionally, Cosaro and Molinari (2005) stressed that children's social representations arise from their experienced activities other than thinking about social life.

In the present study, boundary objects are understood as concrete objects, such as events, activities, and experiences that Omani children drew on, as well as their related narrations associated with these objects, as their school transition created demands for children in terms of understanding and their relationship to knowledge, along with their sense of self as learners and competent actors (Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2019). These demands represent objects containing events, activities, and experiences associated with the social and philosophical contexts that the children wished to continue when they moved to first grade. Figure 3.6 illustrates the process of identifying boundary objects or mediating artefacts in the transition of children from nursery to first grade in the context of continuity.
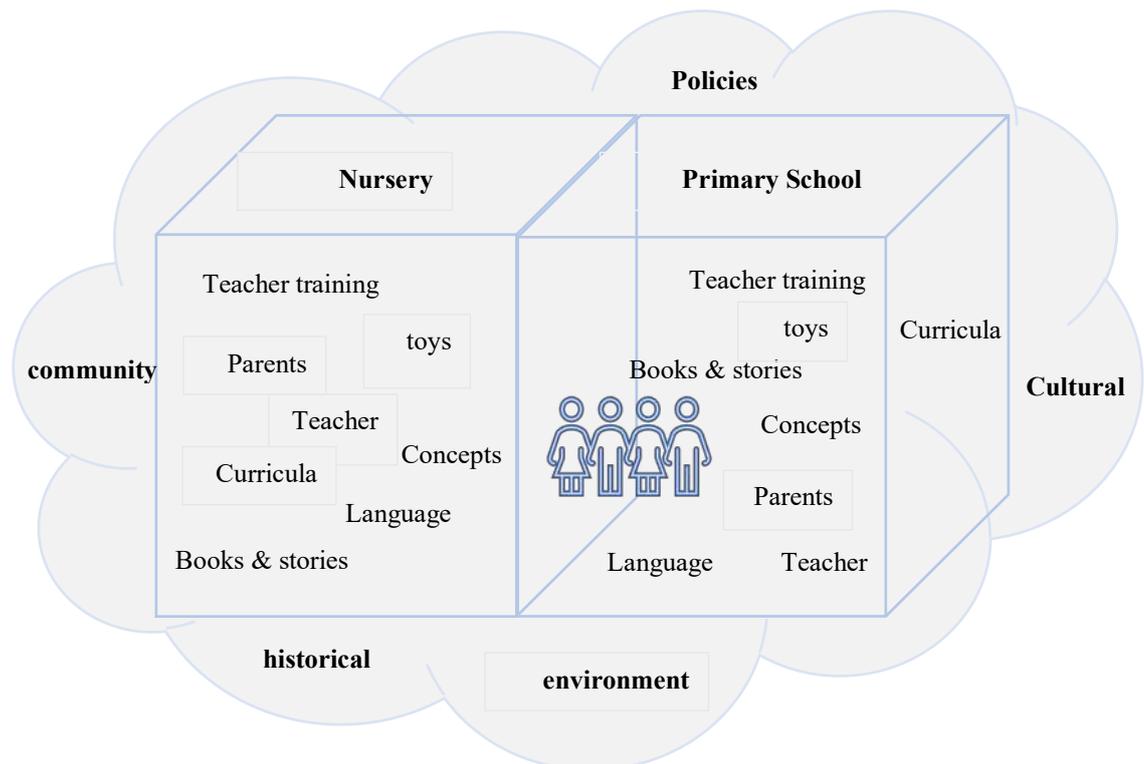


**Figure 3.6** *Objects Boundary or Mediating Artifacts in Transition of Children from Nursery to 1ˢᵗ Grade Regarding Continuity*

### 3.7. Boundary Objects and Continuity in some Countries' Practices and Experiences of Transition Prosses for Children from Nursery to Primary School.
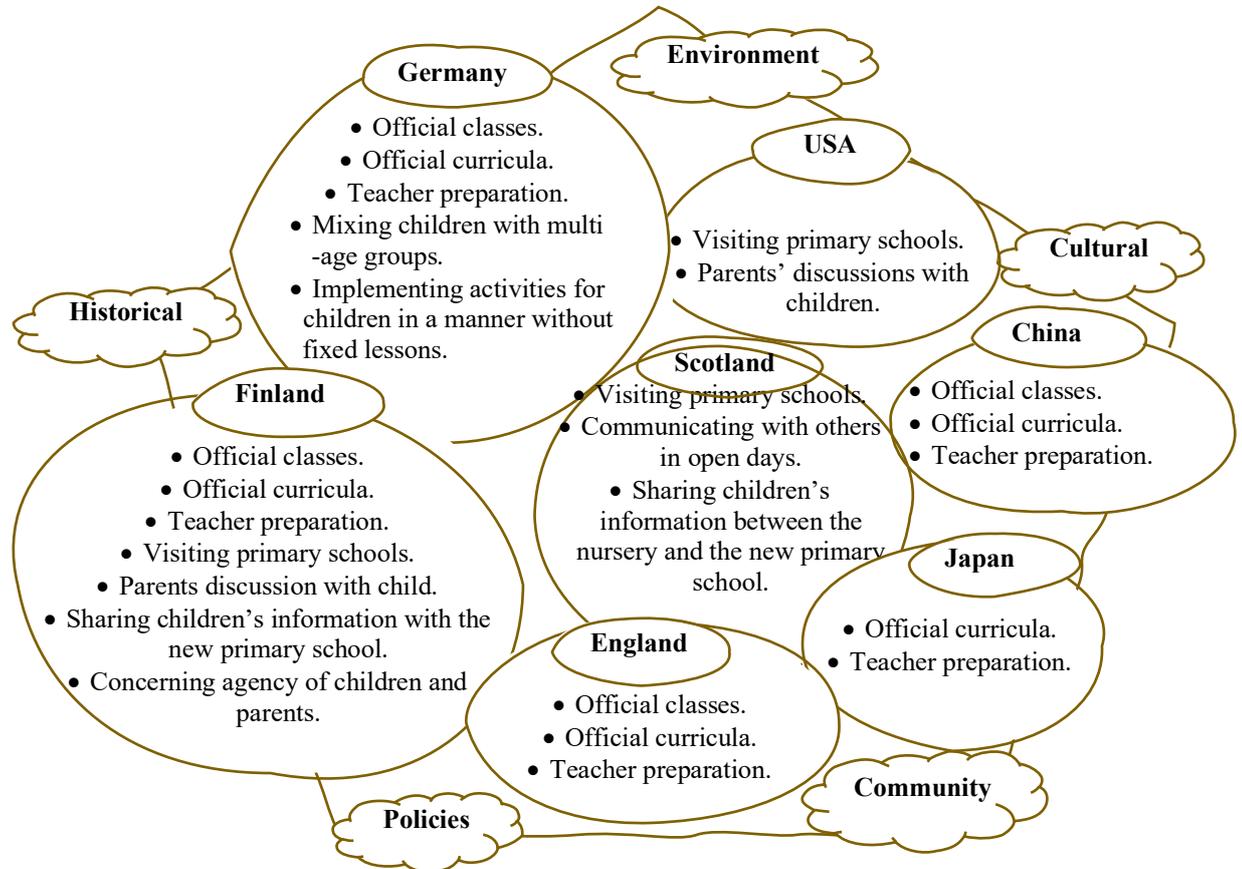


**Figure 3.7** *Boundary Objects and Continuity in Some Countries' Practices and Experiences of Transition Prosses for Children from Nursery to Primary School*

The experiences I uncovered in some countries around the world made it possible to determine some of the boundaries on which the transition process depends, as presented in Table 4.2 children's transition, p. (95). From it and the concept of boundary objects in Figure 3.6 make it possible to identify some of the boundaries used in these countries. Figure 3.7 summarises them.

Finally, the above guided the development of the methodological framework for the current study. The picture has become clear about the inputs and pillars of the transition process from kindergarten to the first grade of primary school. What tools will I need to explore such information? The topic has also become clearer about what can be focused on in designing interviews for stakeholders, in addition to what is required of children so that the picture of the current situation in Oman becomes clear compared to what exists globally. This will become clear in the next chapter.

# Chapter 4

# Empirical Evidence and Practices in Children's Transition

## 4.1. Introduction

Children's transition from nurseries to first grade or from a familiar school to a new school denotes an essential shift for them as well as their families. In this context, children's development, learning, and well-being are influenced by their transition experiences. Schools must engage with parents or caregivers and children in effective ways that enable and connect them to a smooth transition (Boylan, 2024). A smooth transition requires adapting to a new school setting. Love et al. (1992) noted that the transition process includes actions and activities performed at school to identify and address any gaps that may occur between nursery and primary school. Budniewski (2007) highlighted the importance of this time in a child's life, asserting,

> *"The transition to a new school can set the tone for children's future school experiences."*

This critical impact stems from the new demands associated with this sensitive stage, including a new school environment, new academic requirements, new friend groups and new teachers (Pianta & Cox, 1999). In this context, the greater the ability of the child to adjust, the healthier the child's outcome will be. Thus, pursuing a smooth adaptation promises the benefit of healthier children in all psychosocial and academic aspects.

Each year, the children entering primary school feature different ranges of knowledge and previous experiences, such as knowledge, skills, and previous interactions with the new school's environment, as well as a child's life at home. These individual levels of acquired knowledge and experience can affect children's development in the primary school. Another factor affecting children's adjustment involves the availability of programmes aimed at helping them develop the required skills and behaviours before entering a public school, such as being a good friend, play-time behaviour, and how to participate and work together with other children in addition to learning effective communication skills, such as using other people's words to inform them of the child's feelings and thoughts.

In 1992, Love et al. cited findings from the National Transition Study in the United States that facing the increased academic requirements at the primary school level posed the greatest difficulty for the most children compared to any other transition period. The associated demands relate to children's fulfilment of primary school expectations for their behaviour, the need to adapt to the length of the school day compared to nursery, and their interactive relationships with other children. Other factors include children's acceptance of school rules and regulations and their ability to adapt to the size of the classroom.

In 1996, the National Center for Early Development and Learning conducted the Transition Practices Survey in the United States to examine teachers' practices aimed at facilitating young learners' transition from nursery to primary school, along with the problems they faced (Budniewski, 2007). The survey results revealed that 52% of children successfully transferred to primary school, while 48% faced problems ranging from medium to serious. The educators' responses also underscored their interest in developing children's skills to guide them to follow a teacher's directions. Other factors emphasised in the findings were the importance of social development, self-expression, physical health, and curiosity for children during the transition to primary school (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Making the transition process easier requires cooperation throughout the transition process among all of the educational partners involved in children's care, including but not limited to the children's teachers in nurseries and primary schools. In addition, the community, parents, and caregivers, as well as the children themselves, should contribute to preparing children to get through this stage easily (La Paro et al., 2000a, 2000b; Yeom, 1998).

The international literature offers evidence from research conducted in different countries concerning many varying types of transitions, which has had a significant effect on the scholarly understanding of transition. Prior studies dealing with practical contexts related to the transition from nursery to primary school have taken place in China, Japan, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and Scandinavian nations, in general, as well as one study that focused on measures taken in Finland, in particular, revealing the influence of different cultural situations.

## 4.2. Transition Situation Around the World

Implementations of children's transition from KG2 to the first grade have taken various forms across the world. For instance, when there is governmental interest in this issue, official implementation is adopted, which tends to be based on developing programmes and studies, and paying attention to all of the transition's constituent parts, from curricula, teacher training, forms of classroom environments, and the involvement of stakeholders. This type of implementation exists in Finland, Japan, China, Germany, and England. There are countries where there is official interest, but implementation is not mandatory, so implementation is limited to certain activities and cooperation efforts between the school and parents or caregivers without addressing the curricula or adopting the official form of implementation, such as what exists in Scotland, the US, Australia, and Mexico. There are countries where there is no mention of the issue of children's transition to primary school (e.g., Sudan, Lebanon, and Jordan), meaning that there are no indicators of programmes, curricula, or even implementations. Likewise, GCC countries make no mention of this transition issue, but they pay significant attention to nurseries as an important stage in preparing children for primary school.

Therefore, it is not possible to provide a balanced comparison with unified standards to show the similarities and differences between the implementations followed to support the issue of children's transition from KG2 to first grade. Nonetheless, in this chapter, I will present a general picture of the state of transition in various global contexts, divided according to cultures and geographical locations as follows: Western countries (United States, Europe), Latin America (Mexico), East Asia (China and Japan), Arab countries (Sudan, Jordan and Lebanon), Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC; Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar). Lastly, Oman will be placed among all these contexts. The chapter concludes by summarising the issues related to the transition from nursery to primary school based on all of information presented.

### 4.2.1.　United States

Generally, in the United States, the educational system consists of Grades K–12 (Study in the States, 2020). There are two types of nurseries, public and private. Laws and regulations differ in each state, even in terms of defining the requirements associated with compulsory education and the age at which formal education must begin.

The available literature contains much information on the issue of transition in the United States. Prior studies include discussions of a variety of personal and academic aspects related to the importance of early intervention in the transition of children, which includes the factors involved in creating a healthy environment for children to learn (Berlin et al., 2011; Perry et al., 2014; Rosenkoetter et al., 2009; Schulting et al., 2005). In a national longitudinal study conducted in the United States, Schulting et al. (2005) analysed activities designed to facilitate the transition process and their impact on children in 992 schools. According to their findings, children from schools that implemented those activities demonstrated better academic levels at the end of the school year. Such activities, which covered many aspects related to the children's transition, included organising for the children many visits to their eventual primary school before the transition occurred, conducting awareness sessions for parents and caregivers, and providing open houses to increase social interactions.

Research reveals that implementing activities directed at facilitating the transition process has contributed to reducing children's behavioural problems when they attend school, as well as helping them integrate into the school environment and comply with its laws to a better degree (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Despite this positive evidence, the implementation of transition activities has not been universal, nor has the nation's education system institutionalised such practices where their interest in studies and the highlighting their importance.

In 2007, Budniewski described various practices in U.S. schools and homes, such as parents visiting the new elementary classroom, meeting the school principal and taking a tour around the school. At home, parents might talk over expected events with their

children, such as what to expect the first day in school, how to deal with new friends and classmates, and meeting a new teacher and learning in a new classroom.

### 4.2.2. Europe

Generally, the most important experiences that my research found in educational literature were in Europe, whether research or practical. Here I will review several experiences, but not limited to them.

#### 4.2.2.1. United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, there are several distinctive experiences, as they include several educational systems. Here I will present the experiences of England and Scotland, as they are the two most distinguished experiences.

- **England**

When children in England reach 4 years of age, they move from the nursery to a reception class in primary school. At age 5, most of these children then transfer together to the first-year class within the same school. This practice provides for the gradual transition of children between stages. The programme and its objectives were set between 1997 and 2010. According to Brooker (2007), the English education system set a global precedent in establishing this programme. However, the change met with some opposition due to the requirement that children must begin formal education at such an early age in contrast to the free education based on play and social interaction offered to 4-year-old children in Europe and other countries around the globe. Critics worried, for example, that children in England might not achieve the desired goals of the programme due to their young age (Rogers & Evans, 2008).

According to Rogers and Evans (2008), the implementation of the entry phase included the application of the Curriculum Guidelines for the Foundation Stage (CGFS). to achieve a distinct and consistent shift in early education for children during the transition phase, resulting in gradual and studied growth.

The new curriculum developed for children in 2008 covered the stage of childhood from birth to age 5. However, David et al. (2011) cautioned that education in England continues to focus on academically preparing children for formal education. Thus, education is directed by the teacher and pays little heed to children's agency, which enables them to learn through play and social interaction. In other words, the methods employed in reception class resemble primary education.

- **Scotland**

In Scotland, national and local policies have influenced both the systems being put in place to facilitate the transition of children from nursery to first grade and the perception of transition from one school to another. Implementation differs from one school to another but is based on the Scottish government's early years framework, which recommends the characteristics of transition programmes to achieve effective applications. Individual schools are allowed to establish their own practices with guidance from the framework. Bryce and Humes (2018) summarised the features of effective transition programmes as follows:

> *(1) partnership working between sectors with clearly defined induction arrangements; (2) in line with legal obligations, supporting children with additional support needs within a multiagency, child and parent partnership framework; (3) effective parental involvement and communication, including several formal and informal opportunities for parents and children to visit the new school; (4) effective curriculum planning to ensure continuity in learning based on thorough knowledge of each child; (5) effective leadership, ethos and shared vision in nurseries and schools to improve transitions for the child; and (6) implementing active learning approaches and encouraging children to have more agency for their learning.* (p. 284)

Accordingly, some of the associated applications in schools used to facilitate transition for children to primary schools are introductory days, open days, mutual visits between nurseries and primary schools, and sharing children's data and information with the primary school to which they will move (Bryce & Humes, 2018). In addition, primary schools hold meetings for parents before the transition period to inform them about the transition will proceed for their children and how to participate to provide support for children in a successful transition. The Scottish Excellence Curriculum, spanning the

period from age 3 to early elementary school, thus provides an excellent opportunity for a learning experience marked by continuity in each child's educational, emotional and social development while facilitating the transition from one stage to the next (LT Scotland, 2011). Scottish children typically transition from the nursery to the primary school at age 5. Even though the Scottish government has issued a policy to guide the process, highlighting the importance of the topic, few researchers have explored schoolchildren's transitions and the inter-relationships between various groups needed for its success in the Scottish context (Bryce & Humes, 2018).

The Scottish Curriculum for Excellence is structured into four levels of education. It begins with the Early Level, which is designed to prepare children aged three to six for the transition from pre-school to primary school (Dunlop, 2018). Successful planning and implementation of this early education stage is therefore key to ensuring a smooth transition. Further to promoting children's sense of security and relaxation in a new environment, there is also a focus on supporting parents or caregivers. Moreover, the need for shared understandings between teachers and stakeholders at both levels cannot be overlooked when planning and implementing. There is an attention on learning through play and curriculum continuity (Burns, 2022). Education authorities across Scotland are actively promoting play education in early years classrooms in primary schools (Education Scotland, 2020), with practitioners and teachers attending professional learning events to build strong partnerships between ECEC settings and primary schools (Dunlop, 2021). However, Dunlop (2021) found that the approaches to excellence in early childhood education and in P1 are delivered differently, which creates a disconnect in educational practices. This also applies to curriculum planning. She found that there was a disconnect experienced by children starting in P1. She sees the need to open a third space that allows for negotiation and collaboration between stakeholders and teachers in both stages. While Smyth and Privalko (2022) add that protecting children from poverty and deprivation may have greater protective effects on school transitions than the importance of parental or caregiver involvement in home learning.

### 4.2.2.2. Germany

Nurseries in Germany follow the welfare system, while primary schools employ the educational system. In this context, Huf (2013) described a "traditional gap" between nurseries and primary schools, which operate under different systems in training teachers and their employees. "The Introduction of a School-Entry Phase" was implemented in all 16 German regions in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. This programme, which was not compulsory and did not prepare children for school, differed markedly from the curricula in formal education. The system contained in the programme is based on openness in terms of awareness and educational application and involves activities for children that are carried out in an integrated manner without fixed lessons, which are distinguishing features of ECEC in Germany (Leu & Schelle, 2009). However, Griebel and Niesel (2009) criticised the gap between nurseries, school entry and primary education as complicating the transition process of children.

The German programme under consideration represents an attempt to deal with the crisis imposed by a sudden transition from nursery to primary school; in this light, some primary schools have adopted the "entry-to-school stage". Specifically, schools form mixed age groups with pupils from the first and second years while promoting flexibility in terms of the time that children can remain in this stage, based on their individual abilities, personal aptitudes, and skills. Accordingly, the transition period may last from 1 to 3 years, depending on the child (Huf, 2013).

Although this programme differs from previously discussed transitional approaches in the feature of mixed ages, it does not completely depart from children's experience of a new, unfamiliar beginning, a new school environment, new groups of friends and a new teacher. Nevertheless, half of the children have been shown to move easily from the first group to the third. Some are able to join the first grade, while others remain behind, continuing their training in the presence of newly arriving children, which leads them to a more linear transition later (Huf, 2013).

### 4.2.2.3. Scandinavian Countries

Moreno and Dongen (2006) noted that the importance of continuing early education for preschool children has been recognised as a major process in education, as reported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. A crucial component is the availability of appropriate curricula for the early education stage in addition to the correlation and sequence of curricula between nursery and primary school that recognises the importance of the impact of the transition stage and its contents on children's futures. The report also described Denmark and Sweden as currently implementing curricula for this purpose and, thus, successfully promoting children's social and emotional development, as well as academic development to a lesser degree.

- **Finland**

In 2000, Finland added a preschool year to take place before primary education, representing a transitional year between nursery and primary school. In 2015, this year was considered mandatory for every 6-year-old child. The Finnish government's structural policy made preschool education compulsory upon transferring from nursery school to enable all children to develop appropriate learning capabilities. Accordingly, the National Education Council developed the basic curriculum for preschool and basic education stages in 2014. The main goal of this development was to form a continuum and a coherent chain of education between the stage of care and early childhood education in nurseries, education in the transition stage, and education in the primary stage. This chain is intended to support children's development throughout their transition in a systematic, structured manner. Furthermore, the changes in Finland's curricula and regulations have been based on the agency of children as well as their requirements during the transition period (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

Finland's preschool and primary school teachers cooperate and practise sharing knowledge and responsibilities to bring about alignment and continuity. The transition is also discussed with the child and parents. Overall, the aim of ECEC and pre-primary education is to support the child's independence, self-conduct and to provide the skills for children to learn. As one transitional practice, children visit the school shortly before the start of the

school year, depending on local stakeholders; during this visit, they may meet with their new teacher. The Finnish National Board of Education Curriculum has direct responsibility for developing the curricula used in ECEC, preschool and basic education. The pertinent pedagogical methods rely on theories of social constructivism, especially Vygotsky's works, along with various applications of teaching methods, such as Fröbel, Malaguzzi, Montessori and Vygotsky. However, all educational materials must be based on the country's "national curriculum framework".

Teachers are free to use the educational approach they deem appropriate while adhering to the general national framework. Additionally, the teacher, student, and student's parents cooperate to create a special curriculum tailored to the student's needs. The prevalent teaching methods featured in the Finnish curriculum are learning methods using play, with cooperative, experiential and practical learning activities, investigative learning activities, outdoor learning activities, multimedia learning activities, embodied learning activities and educational documentation.

In 2016, Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture established a high-level national forum to develop a teacher preparation programme aimed at building educators' knowledge and skills to deal with this stage and its requirements in terms of curricula, teaching methods, and other associated educational components. In addition, the basic curricula of pre-primary education were harmonised with the curricula of primary education, making it easier to build a communication bridge between the two stages. Since January 2013, when ECEC became part of Finland's educational policy, the pre-primary and the primary education curricula have become compulsory. Lastly, the teaching practices and philosophies between the two contexts in the Finnish education system are constantly evaluated in order to ensure that children have a proper transition to primary school (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

### 4.2.2.4. Latin America

Few studies on the transition process in Latin America are available. This region has many educational conditions, policies, and rules regarding children's ages for formal education and other issues, depending on the economic and social inequality among the various

countries (Nelson, 2011). While international reports have highlighted the general ineffectiveness of educational systems in Latin American countries (UNESCO, 2014), some researchers have noted an increase in the number of enrolments in primary education in these countries (Valverde & Näslund-Hadley, 2010).

- **Mexico**

In 2006, Urbina implemented a transitional intervention programme in a preschool centre in Mexico City. The programme aimed to assess children's skills in academic areas such as reading, writing and mathematics. The researcher also evaluated children's social and emotional skills, such as social interaction, problem-solving, recognition of others' feelings and self-regulation. Based on the research findings, an intervention programme was developed and then implemented with children, teachers, parents and caregivers. Programme components included a range of activities to eradicate illiteracy in children, an open-door policy, and sessions for parents and caregivers. In addition, the programme offered visits for nursery children to primary schools, along with other activities. The results showed positive indicators in all destinations where the children demonstrated improvement both academically and socially. The programme also successfully developed teachers' skills for dealing with the transition phase. They also realised the importance of the stage and the need for future implementation of these types of activities in the future (Garcia, 2014).

### 4.2.2.5.    Australia

In Western Australia, 88% of children who turn 4 on 30 June of the school year attend school (ABS, 2023). These schools are free and non-compulsory for children. In Australia, an Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) has been developed that covers the curriculum and education programmes. However, it does not tell teachers what or how to teach, but rather provides a general framework and examples of what to achieve. The framework is based on three elements: principles, practices, and learning outcomes. While the framework does not give specific transition instructions, its content instead focuses on a smooth transition where the child is developed and prepared academically for the later primary school stage (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). The

Australian curriculum is therefore aligned with EYLF, which focuses on building primary school curricula around key learning outcomes that priorities literacy and numeracy (ACARA, 2020). In Australia, there are some programmers to train and support teachers in how to work with transitioning children, such as through high-quality verbal interactions, collaboration, engagement and enjoyment in learning, and creating new curricula. In addition to developing the Family and School Partnerships to promote and guide partnerships between families and schools (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020), programmes have been designed in Australia to meet the diverse transition needs of children, teachers, and families, including those from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or non-English backgrounds, as well as those with special educational needs. Examples of such practices or transition programmes include: family social activities, parent sessions and workshops, information about the stage and its backgrounds, orientation days, buddy programmes, school tours, introductions to teachers for children and families, and personal contact between all stakeholders before the start of school (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2025).

### 4.2.2.6.    East Asia

East Asia includes several countries with diverse educational experiences, but here I chose China and Japan as examples of what exists there.

#### - China

Preschool education in China is a service provided by the government; however, private nurseries are also available, with the government's blessing, as a result of the increasing needs of children. Nevertheless, the government's stated goal is to universalise preschool education by 2020. In the case of both government and private preschools, the central government formulates laws, regulations, and development plans while leaving the issue of coordination and setting specific policies for preschool education to provincial governments (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016).

Chinese education features three phases of early childhood programmes for children under the age of 6: daycare centres, nurseries and pre-primary programmes. Daycare centres, where caregivers are trained as "nurses" rather than teachers, cater to children under the

age of 3. Nurseries, which care for children aged 3 to 6 years old in addition to providing educational preparation, offer full-day programmes (Zhong, 1989). Various forms of nurseries exist; some are governmental, while others are established by individuals with government authorisation. Still other nurseries are created by neighbourhood committees or established in work units, which are government-run societies in work areas where workers and their families live, which can be organised around a factory, college, or the like. According to Cleverley (1985), children in Chinese nurseries are divided into small groups according to their ages: small (age 3), medium (age 4), and old (age 5).

An alternative type of early childhood programme is a pre-primary class, a part of the primary school offering a half-day programme that takes place in the year preceding the first primary grade. These classes focus on preparing the child for the first grade academically, using the same teaching methods as those used at the primary level (Vaughan, 1993).

In 2015, the Zhejiang Provincial Education Office Bureau outlined its guiding principles for transitional education for children from nursery to primary school based on the belief that the nursery could not provide knowledge content commensurate with the knowledge provided by the school, leading to knowledge deficits. However, the guide issued with this directive did not suit the cognitive abilities required of children in primary school (OECD, 2016).

- **Japan**

Japan has struggled for more than a decade to address issues associated with children's transition from nurseries to primary school, which educators have labelled the "first grader problem." In response, the Japanese government created the consultative council for research and inquiry on the smooth transition of children from ECEC to primary school. Among the council's tasks have been reviewing the primary education curriculum and researching how to promote a child's smooth transition to the primary stage (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan [MEXT], 2016).

In response to the government's awareness of the importance of making improvements to childhood education, the consultative council revised the School Education Act in 2007. In addition to reviewing the curriculum for nurseries and the national curriculum for daycare centres, a plan was implemented to develop the course for nurseries in 2009 and a new course for primary schools in 2011. In addition, the council issued a new step in 2015 to include some first-grade subjects related to nursery content. Consequently, an approach to the curriculum was developed in kindergarten that centred around developing a basis for creative thinking and an independent way of life based on the assumption that childhood education leads to the development of a foundation for life and learning during primary school and beyond. To complement this process, the curriculum methods for primary education were aimed to encourage children to effectively demonstrate their capabilities and create a new approach to school life based on learning and development through play and the life they practised in nursery (MEXT, 2016).

Local governments have promoted teacher and child exchanges between primary schools and nurseries, as well as between nurseries and daycare centres to facilitate transition processes and support the formulation of transitional curricula based on a report by the consultative council titled *The Seamless Connection Between Early Childhood Education and Primary Education*. Meetings for responsible supervisors and others in education councils were also held in every governorate and city to support these transitions for children and promote the targeted practices. The provincial and municipal governments' education councils are responsible for formulating basic policies and support measures related to the transition. In turn, each school organises and implements its own curricula for this transition based on these policies and measures. Additionally, to provide children with equal opportunities for early childhood education, municipalities often waive nurseries' fees depending on the parents' circumstances, setting fees according to the family's income to reduce the latter's economic burden. Furthermore, the fee for a second child is halved, and tuition is free for the third child (MEXT, 2016). In addition, teachers are in constant communication with parents so as to understand the specific needs of each child, thus providing continuous support to the child at this stage (Team GIIS, 2023).

### 4.2.2.7. Arab Countries

Data on early childhood in Arab countries are difficult to find, which can be attributed to several reasons, including the domination of early childhood education by the private sector. Therefore, governments are likely to encounter difficulty in obtaining complete data from that sector. For the purposes of research, searching for academic reports entails other limitations, such as social and political opposition to revealing information about specific population groups, reducing the amount of available data from areas controlled by these groups. However, some data are available from international organisations, such as UNESCO and UNICEF. The following discussion covers three Arab countries (Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan) in order to provide an indication of the status of childhood education and the status of the transition phase in general terms (UNESCO, 2006).

- **Sudan**

In Sudan, Sheikh Babiker Badri, a supporter of women and their rights, established the first nursery in the 1930s. In Sudan, two types of early childhood education programmes are provided: nurseries and Quranic schools or Khalwas. The aim of Quranic schools or the Khalwas is to teach the holy Quran and the Arabic language while omitting other social and cognitive aspects. These schools are mostly located in rural areas. However, the government has sought to increase the number of other nurseries around the state.

In 1983, civil war in Sudan led to the destruction of many schools. In response, UNICEF came to aid Sudan by providing a training centre for early childhood teachers, which provides 6-month training courses in child development, art, music and the production of educational materials. Furthermore, the number of the Khalwas is higher than nurseries (UNESCO, 2006).

According to the available data, Lebanon and Sudan have made a notable improvement in the percentage of enrolment in primary schools between 1998 and 2003. In contrast, Jordan has seen limited improvement, possibly due to the application of new curricula in Lebanon in addition to including nurseries in the government-run public education system and

provided education freely. Consequently, most of the children in Lebanon who have entered primary education have been enrolled in nurseries.

- **Jordan**

In Jordan, childcare services for children under age 4 have remained limited, with most of them located in cities and urban areas. In 2006, 72% of the total programmes provided for children were concentrated in urban areas and served the children of middle- and high-income families. However, Jordan's MOE has also sought to establish some nurseries in remote areas so that children living there could obtain an education (UNESCO, 2006).

- **Lebanon**

In 1946, the Lebanese government determined that 3-year-old children could go to nurseries. Currently, children first become eligible to attend primary school at age 5. However, the government did not include nurseries in its public-school system until the 1970s.

From the 1970s to the end of the 1990s, international and local non-governmental organisations worked to establish and sponsor institutions for child education for Lebanese children and Palestinian refugees. That was after the civil war in Lebanon.

In general, nurseries currently located in Beirut, the country's capital, are mostly private and provide better education than their government-run counterparts. While enrolment rates fluctuate in the countryside, government nurseries have the highest percentage of children since they represent the only educational option in such regions (UNESCO, 2006)

-  **Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCC)**

Education experiences in the GCC countries differ from those experiences in other Arab countries. Here I will present three Gulf countries: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, then I will focus on the regime in Oman. The difference between them and the rest of the Arab educational systems will become truly clear.

- **Kuwait**

Interest is growing in developing nurseries and increasing the number of children attending them in Kuwait. While nursery attendance is not compulsory, nurseries are free for all Kuwaiti children. Nurseries are located either in governmental independent buildings or affiliated with private or international schools as part of the school building that contains all grades of KG–12. All children in the age range of 4–5 years are eligible for nurseries. Every class in a nursery features a main teacher and an assistant, both of whom must have a bachelor's degree in childhood education or psychology and social studies.

The government nursery curriculum depends mainly on the principle of freedom in the classroom. In addition, learning by playing is a key focus in all of its applications. In contrast, the private sector features two types of nursery schools: bilingual (in which teaching takes place in both Arabic and a foreign language) and foreign language only. Each type of private school has its own structure, curriculum, and independent policy. In most such schools, the curriculum is semi-formal, centring around teaching writing, reading and knowledge. In terms of cost, the MOE in Kuwait has the authority to determine tuition fees for children.

According to Alotaibi (2011), Kuwait's Minister of Education Modhi Al-Hamoud told the *Kuwait News* that Kuwait attaches great importance to "the nursery stage", and this sentiment finds support in statistics revealing that Kuwait spends more on nurseries than many other countries worldwide, with an average annual expenditure of $11,158 per Kuwaiti child according to 2007 statistics (MOE, 2009, p. 11). Al-Otaibi also emphasised that 96% of children in Kuwait attended nurseries (Alotaibi, 2011).

In a similar vein, Munsoor (2020) quoted Musaeid Al-Haroun, the Undersecretary of the Minister of Education, who described the purposes and benefits of nursery education in Kuwait's education system as follows:

> *"Achievement in 'the nursery stage' aims to provide the child with some motor skills by using senses, some social experiences, simple concepts (knowledge) and behavioural values in dealing with individuals. In addition, giving children religious values in a comprehensive development process (physical, mental, social, and emotional). Considering this, the curriculum nurseries are designed to prepare children for the transition to the primary school. That is because of what is proven that the children experiences gained in the nursery stage represent basic experiences that are indispensable in the elementary school then."*

In this description, the undersecretary underscored the knowledge contained in these curricula, intended to prepare a foundation that teachers could build upon later in the primary stage.

- **Qatar**

Education in Qatar includes five stages: pre-school, elementary (1–6), intermediate (7–9), secondary (10–12) and higher education. Only the primary and preparatory stages are mandatory (General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2009). In general, education in Qatar is free for all five stages.

In 2001, the results of a comprehensive evaluation of education revealed that education in Qatar from K–12 was rigid and did not meet basic educational needs. Educators' primary focus was on students remembering the information they were taught, relying basically on rote memorisation (Rand Qatar Policy Institute, 2007). The results also highlighted poor teacher training and relatively low salaries for educators, as well as inadequate classroom equipment and student overcrowding. In 2002, the Qatari government realised the weakness of the educational system and initiated a comprehensive reform movement called Education for a New Era (EFNE), placing students at the centre of the educational process based on practice and thinking (Brewer et al., 2007).

The concept of education in Qatar has become based on decentralising education and transforming all schools into independent schools that are funded by the government

(Ellili-Cherif & Romanowski, 2013). In other words, each school has the freedom to define its educational philosophy and operational plan but must submit annual reports to the government. Although education is administered by the MOE, parents are free to choose any school for their children (Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, 2007).

Thus, Qatar has made great efforts and established a substantial budget to develop K–12 education (Jaafar, 2011). In addition, parents have a choice between enrolling their children in these schools or selecting other private or international schools. Although the latter are not free, the government is obligated to pay the fees instead of the parents. These schools also include Grades K–12 and have their own independent policies and regulations, just like any international school.

- **Saudi Arabia**

There are four types of nurseries in Saudi Arabia. The first three types are governmental, private, and applied government, with the latter category referring to nurseries affiliated with the Education Administration, which train female student teachers. It also implements workshops and training courses for other nursery teachers. The fourth type of nursery school is attached to nursery training centres where teachers in all regions of Saudi Arabia are trained on new curricula. Nursery training centres also prepare studies related to childhood and nursery education (MOE, 2017).

Nursery age in Saudi Arabia ranges from 3–6 years. The first nursery was established in 1975 in Makkah, followed by more nurseries after the success of the experiment was established. In 1988, a government order was issued to conclude cooperation agreements between the local institutions responsible for education, the Arab Gulf Programme for the Support of United Nations Development Organizations and UNESCO to develop and support the development of nurseries. This mandate resulted in the design of special curricula and filling nurseries' needs in terms of educational equipment and means; in addition, training centres were established for local leaders to train Saudi teachers (Alhazmi, 2016). Subsequently, a programme for childhood department was established at King Saud University in 1996, from which approximately 250 teachers graduate each year (Alshanwani, 2012).

Despite governmental efforts to expand and upgrade nurseries, these educational entities still suffer from problems that may affect the level of quality of service they provide. Most notable is the work of non-specialised nursery teachers (Al-Hamed, 2007). There is also a lack of teacher training as well as a lack of educational tools needed by the teacher to carry out lessons (Al-Khathila, 1999). In addition, the increasing number of children has led to numbers exceeding the current capacity of nurseries, thus necessitating the expansion of buildings and building additional facilities (Al Beez, 2008). Statistics from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2018–2019) have estimated the number of nurseries in Saudi Arabia at 1,259 and the number of children enrolled at 209,480. In addition, the number of primary schools has reached 17,235, enrolling 6,501,053 students. From these figures, it can be seen that only about 3.2% of children enrolled in primary school are enrolled in nurseries (Ministry of Planning, 2020).

Thus, Saudi Arabia is currently experiencing a shortage in the number of nurseries despite researchers' advocacy of the importance of these schools. According to Al-Ghamdi (2010), Saudi children need to go to nurseries to provide them with social trends and basic linguistic and knowledge skills that will prepare them for primary school. In addition, Shumann (2007) and Obedat (2012) confirmed the nursery's role in qualifying Saudi children to enrol in primary school, protecting children from experiencing a sudden and perhaps jolting transition from home to school.

### 4.2.2.8. Oman Among all these Contexts

At the beginning of the 1970s, an educational renaissance took place in Oman, considering quantity and quality in developing education. Educational development included both private and public entities. In general, school education in Oman is free from Grade 1 to Grade 12, and higher education is also free. In contrast, although Oman offers several types of kindergartens, all of them are private, requiring parents to pay fees to enrol their children in them. Nonetheless, approximately 81% of Omani children enrol in kindergarten (NCSI, 2019, 2020).

Extensive details about Oman's educational system and kindergarten education are available in Chapter 2 (Study context) of this thesis at section 2.5.2.3. (p. 37).

## 4.3. Overview: Practices and Various Implementations and Strategies for the Transition from Nursery to first Grade

**Table 4.1**

*Practices, Implementations and Strategies for Transition from Nursery School to 1ˢᵗ Grade*

| State | | | Programmes, Practices, and Implementations |
|---|---|---|---|
| **USA** | | | Children visit the new elementary classroom, meet the school principal, and tour the school. Parents discuss expected events with their children at home. |
| **Europe** | **UK** | **England** | Children move from nursery to a reception class in primary school. Then, most will transfer together to the first-year class in the same school. Specific curricula are used. Teachers specialise in this stage. |
| | | **Scotland** | Some applications in schools aim to facilitate young children's transition to primary schools, such as introductory days, open days, mutual visits between nurseries and primary schools, and sharing children's information with the primary school to which they will move. Teachers are trained. |
| | **Germany** | | The programme "The Introduction of a School-Entry Phase" has been implemented. Curricula reflect formal education. The system is based on openness in terms of awareness and educational application. Activities for children are conducted in an integrated manner without fixed lessons. This intermediary stage features mixed age groups, combining pupils from the first and second years who help each other. Teachers are trained. |
| | **Finland** | | A mandatory year before primary education ("transitional year") has been implemented. Children visit their new school shortly before the start of the school year, with the timeframe depending on local stakeholders, and they may meet the teacher beforehand. There is a "national curriculum framework" specific to this stage. Parents and children participate in the transition process as agents. Teachers are trained. |
| **East Asia** | **China** | | There is a pre-primary class which is part of the primary school, comprising a half-day programme that occurs the year preceding the first primary grade. Classes focus on preparing the child for the first grade academically, using the same teaching methods as those used in the primary level. Teachers are trained. |
| | **Japan** | | Local governments have promoted teacher and child exchanges between primary schools and nurseries, as well as between nurseries and day-care centres. The aim is to facilitate transition processes and work on formulating transitional curricula for first-grade subjects related to nursery content. Consequently, an approach to nursery curriculum was developed focusing on establishing a basis for creative thinking and promoting an independent way of life. The driving force is the assumption that childhood education leads to the development of a foundation for life and learning during primary school and beyond. |

To this point, the chapter has provided an extensive review encompassing various experiences in countries worldwide related to the issue of children's transition from kindergarten to first grade. A general summary of the most prominent of these experiences and strategies is presented in Table 4.1.

## 4.4.  Summary

This chapters shows different practices and policies related to children's transition from nurseries to primary school worldwide. Some European countries adopted officially sponsored applications. Likewise, Japan presents a promising example of a country that has considered the issue of transfer a national issue and worked to solve it with an official effort. in both the United States and Australia, where scholarly interest in the topic of children's transition to primary school has attracted many researchers, implementations have been neither official nor mandatory. Unfortunately, children's experience in Latin America differs greatly, in the negative sense, from the current situation in Europe and the United States. Nonetheless, a few modest experiences indicate the success of applications in the transition to primary school. However, the issue of children's transition to the primary stage is almost completely neglected in the Arab countries. The Oman's situation is closer to that the Arab contexts, where there is interest in and expansion of childhood education, more work and development are needed. The issue of moving to primary school has also received almost no attention at the public level.

All of this evidence confirms that the issue of transition is a general problem that is not confined to a specific country. Rather, all children are affected in terms of their right to experience education and to move from one stage to another in an easy and deliberate manner that supports the attainment of educational aspirations for children at every educational stage. Table 4.2 summarises the big issues that I extracted.

**Table 4.2**

*The Status of Children's Transitions from KG2 to the 1st Grade across the World.*

| State | | | Research | Implementations statues | Age of children | Name and entry statues |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| USA | | | Good | Not official | 6 | No transition class, but KG2 is public |
| Europe | UK | England | Good | Official | 4 | Reception class is public |
| | | Scotland | Few | Official | 5 | Implementations, curricula in public schools |
| | Germany | | Good | Official but not compulsory | Mixed ages | School-entry is public |
| | Scandinavia | | Good | Official | 6 | Implementations, curricula in public schools |
| | Finland | | | | | Transitional year is public |
| Latin America (Mexico) | | | Poor | Modest experiences | - | None |
| Arab Countries | Sudan | | Poor | None | 5–6 | None |
| | Jordan | | | | | |
| | Lebanon | | | | | |
| GCC Countries | Qatar | | Poor | None | 6 | None, but KGs are public |
| | Saudi Arabia | | | | | None, but good progress in expansion of KGs |
| | Kuwait | | | | | Non, but KGs are public |
| | Oman | | | | | None, but good progress in expansion of KGs |
| East Asian | China | | Few | Official | 6 | Pre-primary classes are public |
| | Japan | | National interest | Official | 6 | The issue named "first grader problem". Add courses in both KG2 and 1st grade. |
| Australia | | | Few | Not official | - | None, but some implementations. |

# Chapter 5

# Research Methodology

## 5.1. Introduction

The design of any research depends on the theory adopted or the nature of the questions formulated to collect the information the researcher needs. Numerous design possibilities provide the researcher with the flexibility to choose the most suitable method for the research to fulfil the research goals without being bound by a specific method (Harding, 2013).

Snape and Spencer (2003) described qualitative research as a method that reveals details from individuals who are deeply involved in social issues. One benefit of qualitative research is the flexible nature of its design, which results in a richness of data and potential analysis methods. The gist of qualitative research relates to the opinions of the participants, reflecting their accumulated experience in terms of the subject under study. As the main character in the interview, the researcher plays multiple roles: the developer of the interview questions, the interviewer who extracts the responses, and the analyst. Thus, the flexibility and sophistication of qualitative research design allows the researcher to be flexible during the application of his research (Crewell, 2012).

The nature of the current study entails exploring the opinions of those involved in the issue of children's transition from nursery to the first grade. The participants' perspectives may cover a wide range of ideas, including concepts, experiences, personal applications, and their implications. Thus, adopting qualitative research methods for the purposes of the current study was both appropriate and useful.

Qualitative research features various methods of collecting data. Qualitative methods used in the current study included children's visual narration, observation, and interviews, both

semi-structured individual interviews and focus group sessions. The choice to use interviews in this investigation aligns with Gill et al.'s description of this approach as the most common tool used in qualitative studies, especially in the areas of health, marketing, and academic research (Gill et al., 2008).

## 5.2. Interviews

Interviews are important tools for uncovering or understanding concepts or phenomena. Rather than issuing concepts that can be generalised to a group of people, a study that relies on interviews is more capable of conveying the participants' voices on the topic under investigation (Reeves et al., 2015).

Brinkmann (2014) stressed that it is necessary to prepare for interviews in advance, and to read educational literature to build sound interviews based on correct concepts in the field of study. Further to familiarising oneself with how to formulate questions and conduct interviews, Illing (2014) added that the interviewer must be fully informed as to the interview tools and devices used, and choose a suitable place that is quiet and comfortable. It is vital to obtain ethical approval from the relevant authorities, as well as informed consent from the interviewees themselves. In addition, it is necessary to ensure that the following points are carried out when proceeding to conduct a qualitative interview.

- Preparing an editable interview guide, testing the questions.

Qualitative interviewing requires the respondent to feel that the questions are important to them – that is, that they will benefit from discussing them. Therefore, carefully selecting interviewees who are related to the study issue is crucial for the researcher to find interactive respondents who can enrich the results of the study (McGrath et al., 2019). It is also necessary to test the interview questions on one or more people to ensure the clarity of the concepts presented, the correctness of the language, and the soundness of the formulation of the questions so that they are understandable to the recipient. Indeed, it is preferable to use simple language so that it is clearer to all levels of participants (Krag, 1993).

It is also necessary for the interview questions to be sequential so that the researcher begins with a general question by asking, for example, about the name, profession (and the length of time within it), or how they came to their profession. Once done, the research questions can be delved into and concluding questions asked, such as whether the participants has any suggestions on the studied issue or additions that were not mentioned throughout the interview (Nimmon & Stenfors-Hayes, 2016).

- Building a friendly relationship with the participants during the dialogue.

The interviewer–interviewee relationship is highly important, as it builds the participant's trust towards the researcher, which makes the former more comfortable during the dialogue and in expressing their opinions on the issue under study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, even if there is no prior relationship between the researcher and the participant, the researcher can write a brief, focused formulation of the interview topic and send it to the participants in order to familiarise them with the topic. Moreover, dealing with the participants in a friendly and cheerful manner, in addition to having appropriate communication skills, bolsters this relationship (Bell, 2014).

- The interviewer is a participant in the data-creation process

In interviews, the researcher is the one who collects the data as a primary tool, meaning that they must be unbiased in their opinions and not influence those of the interviewees. Indeed, they must not force their opinions on others when discussing any point. Rather, they are a participant who allows others to express their opinions, even if they differ from the opinion of the researcher interviewer (Lingard & Kennedy, 2010).

- The interviewer is more of a listener than a speaker.

The researcher or the person conducting the interview must be able to actively listen and express interest. They should not monopolise the flow of the conversation and talk more than the participant, as doing so can prevent the aims of the interview from being reached.

Even moments of silence and the interviewer's lack of talking may give the participant space to think and motivate them to continue speaking, especially when they feel that the researcher is genuinely interested in interviewing them. Moreover, the researcher must be active in the interview and seek to ask follow-up questions (Giger, 2017).

- Writing notes in a timely manner.

Poland (1995) emphasised that the data collected during the interview should be transcribed using a recording device or other tool as soon as possible after the interview, since the interview would be fresh in the researcher's mind, and that all of the words heard should be transcribed, taking into account pauses for thought, laughter, or expressions of sadness that appeared during the conversation, and recording all these emotions in order to achieve clarity and the real form of the dialogue. Transcribing the interviews allows the researcher to make comparisons and identify the similarities and differences between the participants' opinions.

- Analysing interviews early.

The difficulty of interviews lies in the huge amount of data that may be in the hundreds of pages. However, this difficulty is also a strength in that it entails a vast repository of rich data, which encourages the researcher to engage with and analyse the data, as described by Miles (1979). Therefore, it is worth determining a method for analysing interviews and a theoretical framework in advance according to which the questions were developed in order to facilitate identifying the issues arising from the interviews and discussing them to generate significant results and conclusions.

Semi-structured interviews afford researchers greater flexibility in their dialogue. They can prepare one question or several, with the remainder of the dialogue occurring naturally and freely, thereby allowing the researcher to delve into each participant's specific case (Laksov et al., 2017). Alternatively, the researcher can change some of the pre-prepared questions according to the interview's dialogue direction, despite preparing the number of questions required for the interview, which were included in the interview guide (Lingard & Kennedy, 2010).

Interviews can be categorised into types depending on their purpose, function, and other characteristics. Among these types are group, focus, structured, unstructured, semi-structured, in-depth, informal dialogue, test, historical CV, and advisory interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Another type of interview relies on collecting information using available technological methods, including fax, e-mail, and other electronic programs (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998), in addition to social media programs currently in use, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and online questionnaire design sites. Table 5.1 illustrates the differences between the four commonest types of interviews used in academic research.

**Table 5.1**

*Common Types of Interviews Used in Academic Research. Source: Adapted from Wellington (2015)*

| Semi-structured | Unstructured | Structured | Focus groups |
|---|---|---|---|
| May be used for large samples | Improper for larger sample | Suitable for small sample | Suitable for large samples |
| Standardised questions asked in specific order | Open- ended and unstandardised questions asked without set order | Mix of closed and open questions asked in any order | Open-ended and unstandardised questions asked without set order |
| Mostly controlled and guided by interviewer | Interviewer has less control and effect | Control is more on the side of interviewer | Open discussion with the researcher as a guide and mentor |
| Allows no, or less, flexibility to obtain details | Allows more flexibility to gain full details | Permits sufficient flexibility to elicit more detail and clarification | Allows more flexibility to obtain rich details |
| Responses are pre-set, simple and short | Responses are provided with in-depth detail and with more explanation | Responses are obtained with a balanced explanation | Responses are provided with in-depth detail and more explanation |
| Less time consuming | Very time consuming | More time consuming | More time consuming |
| Easier to analyse | Difficult to analyse | May be difficult to analyse | Difficult to analyse |

### 5.2.1. Choosing Interviews as One of the Methods for the Current Study

The design of the current research reflects CHAT and Dewey's principle of continuity from his theory of experience. These frameworks help explain the information the participants provided regarding the research issue; in particular, the children's responses came from their previous experiences and the results of the influence of cultural and historical reality in their lives. In general, choosing the interview method for a means of gathering data aligns with Silverman's (2000) description of this research tool as providing the researcher a way to collect both internal experiences comprising respondents' feelings and perceptions and the external reality represented by the situations and events that they are exposed to at the same time. To address the need to uncover facts in depth and with originality in this investigation, I adopted semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions (Newby, 2014).

#### 5.2.1.1. Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews emerged in the 1950s as a component of market research aiming to gather consumer opinion. Several decades later, this interview type drew the attention of scholars in the field of education, which had predominantly featured quantitative research methods before the 1980s (Krueger & Casey, 2009). In contrast to the quantitative approach, focus group interviews are concerned with collecting qualitative data. This type of interview takes place systematically in a group meeting with several individuals related to the issue of the study and can be formal or informal as the situation requires. In addition, the researcher presents the study interventions to the respondents in a very specific way in this format (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

More specifically, a focus group can be described as an interview that is carried out by a researcher or professional interlocutor who possesses the skills that enable him/her to enact the role of a guide and director of dialogue, in which a group of people related to a research topic in different job positions participate. If the topic for discussion has been determined in advance, it is possible to generate qualitative data from the outcome of these focused discussions (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Conducting focus group interviews is subject to various conditions and limitations. For example, interviews should be repeated to compare the opinions of the participants until the credibility and the required truth are controlled. Between four and 10 individuals should participate in a focus group, so that the benefit achieved is better, as well as saving time, effort, and money. The interviewer acts as a mediator and, thus, possesses several skills, the most important of which is to be a good and active listener. Another necessary characteristic is the ability to intervene at the appropriate time to direct and enrich the dialogue in a way that does not interfere with the flow of the participants' discussion. The interviewer should also have the ability to summarise the discussion that took place, enabling the participants to arrange their thoughts and understand the interactions and information that emerged from everyone's input regarding the issue (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Focus group interviews, like any other research tool, have received criticism for excluding the participants' feelings. Another problem involves the possibility that some participants will convey information they believe the other group members want to hear rather than their true opinions. The risk of such disinformation can be reduced or revealed by applying certain activities (Krueger & Casey, 2009) to reveal the reality of the participants' situation. Multiple authors (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) have suggested that the data and results from this type of interview are unreliable, which may be the case for all qualitative data collection methods. However, adopting multiple ways to obtain the data can solve this issue and may raise the quality of the data that have been obtained. Furthermore, the ability to generalise the study findings may suffer if a kind of bias is introduced as a result of someone dominating the dialogue and thus highlighting his point of view as the correct one, which complicates the task of summarising and interpreting the data (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). However, a skilful mediator will be able to control the distribution of dialogue and make everyone participate evenly to ameliorate this problem. Another solution is to include triangulation as part of the chosen data collection methods (Cicourel, 1974; Krueger & Casey, 2009). This is actually what I did as a researcher and interviewer. I distributed the questions according to the specialty and position of each participant. I set aside time for him/her to express his/her opinion so as not to occupy the time of others. I did not allow anyone to interfere with or interrupt

another's opinion. In addition, I used several other tools (detailed in this chapter respectively) to ensure the accuracy of the data for each tool.

### 5.2.1.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Compared to other interview types, semi-structured interviews, including open interviews, in-depth (ethnographic) interviews, and participant observation, can provide more in-depth and richer data due to their qualitative nature (Lofland, 1971). Semi-structured interviews are one of the individual methods in qualitative research methods (Newby, 2014). According to Arksey and Knight (1999), this type of interview probes the knowledge, feelings and beliefs of the participants. Thus, if applied correctly, this method supposed provides the researcher with rich, detailed information on the topic under study. Under this approach, the general structure of the interview is maintained while providing sufficient flexibility (Johnson, 2001). Although semi-structured interviews focus on specific achievement points in the interest of a pre-determined goal, they also allow for the discovery of new phenomena related to the issue of study as a result of flexibility and allowing the interviewee a kind of freedom to express his opinion (Kvali, 1996).

Since the current research sought to uncover and understand the concepts, applications, and effects associated with children's transition from nursery to first grade, the selection of semi-structured interviews, which are typically used to uncover beliefs, knowledge and applications, was appropriate (King & Horrocks, 2010). Despite its weight, it is characterised by flexibility that gives the research a richness of information as a result of speaking freely and the ability to change the course of questions when necessary. However, this characteristic can also be a drawback since such flexibility offers the potential to complicate any comparison between participants' responses to the same question. In addition, the participants' dialogues may diverge into separate and different points. Thus, the researcher must balance his skill in controlling the reins with using flexibility in order to maintain the path towards the target points that are meant to be highlighted (Cohen et al., 2000).

### 5.2.1.3.    Interview Questions

The process of formulating questions for focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews is quite similar in structure (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Questions must be open-ended while focusing on people's experiences and knowledge. Consequently, it is not prescriptive (Seidman, 1991). Nevertheless, Fontana and Frey (2000) specified that the interviewer in all cases should be friendly and a good listener. In the interviews I conducted, I started with general introductory questions to break the ice, then gradually moved to more specific questions to reveal the main objective of the interview. Next, I asked questions aimed to unveil the credibility of the statements made by the participants indirectly. I tried to not express my personal views on the issue under discussion and took all opinions seriously. In addition, I chose the appropriate language for the participants during my interview with them. Figure 5.1 illustrates the progression of the interview questions I implemented.

**Figure 5.1**

*Steps Range for the Interview Questions*
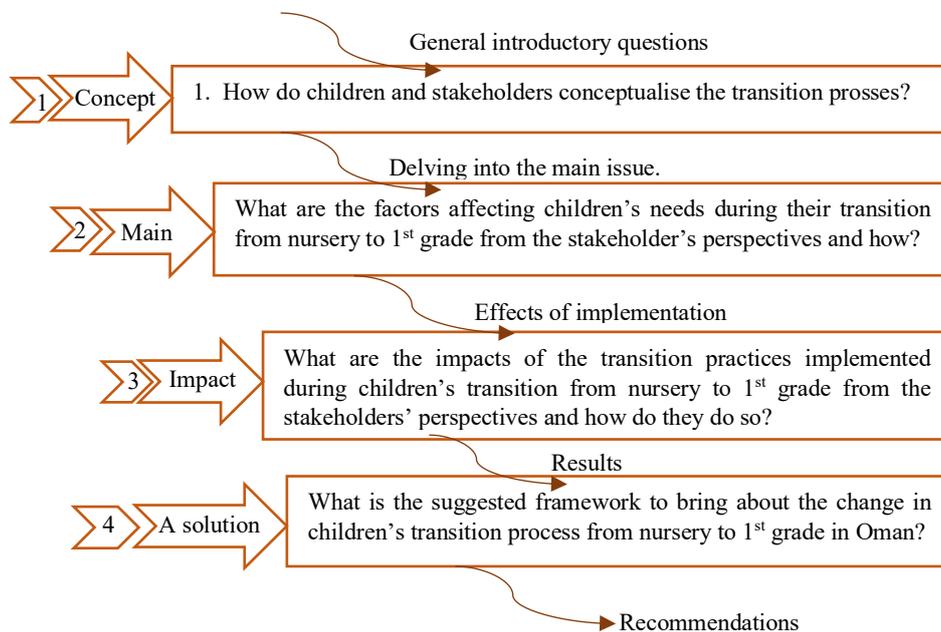


In terms of interview structure, each main question represented a main goal in the study; consequently, several sub-questions branched from the main question according to the

need of each question. Furthermore, these sub-questions in the table represent only guidelines that were translated into questions that would be accessible to the interviewees and were intended to be based on their experiences, according to my impressions from the focus group interviews.

### 5.2.2. Implementing the Interview Methods in the Current Study

Initially, I conducted a group interview with the intended and unintended sample of all groups identified in the study population as the main method, which enabled me to explore the opinions, backgrounds, and perceptions of the participants on the research topic. Desvousges and Frey (1989) suggested the use of focus group interviews as a preliminary exploratory method for a researcher's endeavour, for example, to define the research problem and its limitations, test a specific methodology in the research, and determine the most effective respondents for the research. In addition, this type of interview is characterised by flexibility, allowing the participants to express their opinions and control the flow of ideas themselves; in contrast, the researcher plays the role of guide and instructor only. This step also revealed to me the common knowledge and cultural backgrounds of the participants, as well as the clarity of individual differences of opinion (Grbich, 2012). Through group discussions, participants can listen to each other's opinions, which may encourage them to rethink their individual experiences, as explained by King (2004). This contributed to the enrichment of the individual semi-structured interviews later. In addition, focus group interviews save time, researcher's effort, and money in exchange for more varied and in-depth information (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Subsequently, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 of the stakeholders, including nursery teachers, first-grade teachers, nursery directors, primary school principals, nursery supervisors, primary school supervisors, first-grade curriculum developers, nursery curriculum supervisors, and parents. After taking the accepted ethical approvals, I set dates for the individual interviews. The location and format of each interview was determined within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, ranging from the possibility of holding face-to-face, in-person interviews if the situation allowed to using Zoom, Google Meet, Sky or other platforms as appropriate for each person. All participants preferred to engage in the interview process via Zoom as the most familiar

choice and to protect against the spread of Covid-19. This option also afforded the participants flexibility in terms of time and location. All participants consented to audio-recording the interview, and three of them consented to audio-video recording.

Although I had originally planned to create another focus group to discuss the data collected from the individual interviews, after reaching the preliminary results, along with understanding the realities of the situation and existing obstacles, I chose instead to identify areas needing improvement and tackle the proposed development of a framework to improve the transition of children from nursery to the first grade based on the initial collected results. My initial plan was based on evidence pointing to focus groups as one of the best ways to create policies, assess issues, and guide decision-making (Fontana & Frey 2000; Krueger & Casey, 2009). However, in the individual semi-structured interviews, the interviewees expressed comprehensive opinions and suggestions and even described applications in some schools. Those who participated in these interviews had attended the original focus group; I invited them to undergo the subsequent individual interviews in order to go in-depth with them one-on-one after the general presentation of the topic. Of course, I added other people to them. In reviewing the data collected, I perceived that meeting with the same people in a concluding group session would be redundant, considering the exhaustive nature of the information they had already volunteered, including solutions and suggestions, that I had recorded and collected.

## 5.3.  Observation

Observation, as defined by Berg (2004), is a qualitative research method used to find direct, natural situations to form a true view of the characteristics and components of those situations that represent behaviours or activities in their immediate contexts. The observation technique represents a major tool in social and educational research as part of the development of ethnographic methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). In particular, this tool enables researchers to engage in close observation of the situation of the issue under study, the course of events, and the activities practised, as well as the surrounding circumstances, while documenting their observations in the form of notes.

### 5.3.1. Types of Observational Methods

Observation takes different forms depending on the role of the observer or researcher in the particular observation process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described four types of observation as follows:

- **Complete Participant:** In this type of observation, the observer participates without revealing his identity. Therefore, this approach may sometimes be considered unethical, especially if it is used for enforcement on minors.

- **Participant-Observer:** The observer is a participant in the research and appears in his original identity.

- **Observer-Participant:** Here, the primary role of the observer is observation, while his secondary role is research. Therefore, he tries to immerse himself in the situation while also taking into account the behaviour of the observers.

- **Complete Observer:** In this case, the observer is not completely involved in the research and conducts the observation process in a crowded place, for example, or through a bottle, making the observer invisible to those on the other side being observed.

Table 5.2 summarises the four types of observations, as explained by Ciesielska et al. (2018), explaining the types of observations and clarifying the situations when each type would be the best choice.

**Table 5.2**

*Comparison of the Four Main Types of Observations. Source: Adapted from Ciesielska et al. (2012, p. 51), referred to in Ciesielska et al. (2018)*

| Type | Participant | Direct | Indirect | Non-participant |
|------|-------------|--------|----------|-----------------|
| **How?** | Observing from an insider perspective, as an active participant of a group or organization. It requires full (but temporary) cultural immersion while sustaining an analytical mindset | Active observing of unfolding events so as to record behaviour in the environment where it naturally occurs. Usually requires some immersion in the field of study, but not necessarily in the culture itself | Research through collecting information, such as through videos or written descriptions of events. Moreover, the use of self-ethnography, and remembering events and environments in order to analyse them | Observation from an outsider perspective without interacting with subjects of an observation. The researcher may take the position of an "alien" from a different planet or reality in order to achieve a distance from the well-known |
| **When?** | Useful when insider's point of view is important and when access to tacit knowledge must be acquired | In-depth understanding of a social group or an organisation, but from an external/ independent perspective | Useful when direct observation of when the event naturally occurred is not possible | Useful when observing a well-known reality, for example, a public place, and there is a need for regarding it from an entirely new perspective |

In the current study, I chose to apply observation as a participant-observer. I explained my identity to everyone, including the participating children. Specifically, I was in the field as an observer of the behaviours and actions of all the individuals who represented the study sample in the reality of their normal school day, and I would not interfere in their work or try to change anything that happens. Therefore, my chosen observation method fit the direct category according to the classification of Ciesielska et al. (2018), as shown in Table 5.2, as the behaviours effectively took place in front of me. I also recorded acts that occurred while I was observing in the field. Therefore, the information was profound because it was real, coming from young children who were not good at acting in order to show another image, even if the teachers or the principal tried to do so.

### 5.3.2. Conducting Observation

Before observation can be implemented, the locations and places of observation must be determined according to the type of issue and field of research (Hammersley & Atkinson,

2007). For the purposes of the current study, I identified the desired locations as nurseries and first cycle schools (Grades 1–4) in public and private schools. Once these locations had been identified, it was necessary to obtain official approvals from authorities, such as the university to which I belong as a PhD student and the MOE in my country, Oman, where I intended to implement my study. Next, I sought the approval of the school principals, parents of children, and teachers of the classes in which I planned to carry out the observation.

Another prerequisite to implementing this type of study is the need to gain familiarity with the laws and regulations of the places where the observation will be carried out, as well as the general nature of the activities, events and actions that are usually practised in those places so that the observer is not surprised or faces difficulty in adapting to the places of implementation (Spradley, 1980). Subsequently, during implementation, it is necessary to take into account Arvastson and Ehn's (2009) advice about the importance of time management, identifying things in the surrounding environment, such as furniture, tools, the active people in the place who will be the subject of observation, and the interactions between the people being observed, which appear in their behaviour, actions, and movements. Another consideration is the accustomed routine that is characteristic of the observed places. All of these considerations must be kept in mind during the observation process to allow the observer to control the accuracy of his observations to the greatest degree possible.

### 5.3.3. Rationale for Using Observational Methods

The use of observation enables the researcher to obtain data in real time and in its natural state in order to avoid stereotypes presented by respondents in interviews or questionnaires administered by the respondent (Debby et al., 2010). Memory limitations may interfere, or factors may interfere after the event or experience, leading the respondent to express a stereotype according to the general contexts of the topic, far from the momentary experience that the researcher lives while applying the observation.

Participants in field studies – regardless of the type of participation, whether engaging in an interview or drawing, as was the case in my current study – may provide information

that may be tainted by selectivity, perhaps due to the researcher's orientation and the styling of his questions. As mentioned, memory limitations may also come into play, especially in children. In addition to providing a more logical picture for later implementation that is based on observing behaviour for a sufficient period, observation also reveals stereotypes, as participants usually present more stereotypical and usual views of what reality actually is. In this light, direct observation can yield a clear and accurate view of the interactions and behaviours of everyone involved in the case under examination; thus, in the current study, observation encompassed students, teachers, a social worker, and the school principal (Cotton et al., 2010).

### 5.3.4.  Analysis of Observational Data

Among the difficulties facing the researcher in using observation as a tool is how all these many and varied observations will be analysed and how to deal with a multitude of included details. Another challenge is posed by the potential influence of the participants' behaviour on the observing researcher. Addressing these issues necessitates finding a method that will resolves these questions and help the researcher analyse the data in a logical, scientific way that will achieve the goals of the research. Thus, in my study, I adopted the "grounded theory" model proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to analyse the data collected through observation. This technique entails comparing recent data collected from observation with data previously coded by other methods, such as the stakeholder interviews and children's visual narration in the current study, in order to identify similarities and differences. Such comparisons can clarify the meaning of the categories reached, as well as identify subcategories, with the possibility of describing possible links between them. This is a type of triangulation in data collection. In summary, the chosen approach made it possible to organise the collected data according to previously defined codes, distribute them, and then find the excess of it that could be supportive of more issues that emerged that were not present in the previous contexts of the interviews and children's drawings.

Observation is often used as a supportive technique, known as triangulation, to confirm or negate the data collected through other methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, or surveys (Lorime, 2016).

## 5.4. Visual Methods for Children

The first studies of children's drawings appeared in the late nineteenth century (Thomas & Silk, 1990). From that point onward, children's drawings gained the attention of psychologists for more than a century (Sully, 1896). This device has been applied in several areas, including indicators of development in children (Aikman et al., 1992; Goulomb, 2002; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1967), as well as serving as tools in paediatric clinical treatment (Rubin, 1984) and as a research tool (Stiles et al., 1987).

As part of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) study "Children's Participation: The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care", Hart (1997) included advocacy for engaging young people in research related to politics, economics, education, urban planning, urbanism and the environment. This idea resonates with Baresford's (1997) assertion that conducting thorough research is a matter of ethics when engaging children in order to discover their opinions during a scholarly investigation. Further confirmation is found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child in that children have the right to express their views on any matter that concerns them, and it is necessary to listen (Matthews et al., 1999). Within this context, Hart (1997) focused on data collection methods that would be best suited to children at an early age.

Overall, the literature highlights two approaches that have been commonly applied to research focused on children. The first approach entails gathering data about how children experience their world from an adult's input, as the child is regarded as incapable, unreliable and incomplete (Barker & Weller, 2003). Contrariwise, the second approach considers children as acting subjects who are "experts" in their own lives, capable of expressing the meaning of their experiences in the world through their own words.

### 5.4.1. Rationale for Using the Drawing Approach

Numerous researchers have described drawing as a powerful and distinctive communication tool in which children express social and cultural symbolism (Anning & Ring, 2004; Barker & Weller, 2003; Dockett et al., 2010). The use of drawing coincides

with an increase in the use of visual approaches in scientific research (Butler-Kisber, 2010), especially in relation to researching children's perceptions of their own experiences (Harcour & Einarsdottir, 2011). Since this approach supports recognising children as experts who are able to articulate what they think and what they need, this type of research has attracted the interest of psychologists, educators, and artists alike (Wood, 2005).

Wang and Burries (1997) labelled the visual approach as the best method for subjects who are either unable or not confident enough to express themselves linguistically. In other words, visual drawing facilitates the articulation of children's feelings, experiences, and meanings. Furthermore, this method increases children's active participation in a research activity, resulting in more subtle data about the issue under investigation (Mauthner, 1997).

Adams (2006) described several functions of drawing, noting that the technique helps people communicate their thoughts and feelings to others and highlighting its usefulness for ideas to be implemented. Hall (2015) emphasised that drawing provides a strong language of communication between those who paint and those around them. Thus, recent decades have witnessed a remarkable increase in research related to childhood. At the same time, scholars have focused on the fact that children are truly active members of society and recognised the possibility of recording their opinions and hearing their voices. As part of this shift in perspective, research has moved from research about children to research with children (Christensen & James, 2000), representing two approaches with notable differences (Harcourt, 2011). Specifically, the former approach calls for the researcher to analyse the drawings individually and render final generalisations as a result of his personal interpretation or present the results in the form of statistics. In this case, the child's role ends with finishing the drawing and giving it to the researcher. Consequently, the researcher's description reflects motives from the researcher himself and his background as an adult (Mayal, 2000). The latter type, which I see as richer and more creditable is interested in researching with children, stands in sharp contrast. Hope (2008) described research with children in terms of "the journey", considering drawing with children as a journey towards drawings, beginning with the basic context of the subject of study, paying attention to the child's personal opinion, providing the appropriate place and time to carry out that trip, and allowing the child to accompany the researcher as a

classmate on this journey. Along the way, the child will be able to master the topic; this approach will also involve the young subject in verbally expressing what was drawn.

However, some scholars have suggested the need to combine visual drawing with other methods, either written or oral. Driessnak and Furukawa (2012) discussed offering children the opportunity to explain what they mean by their drawings or using the drawings as prompts for further conversation. By asking children to explain their drawings, the researcher encourage them to recall certain experiences associated with the situations they have drawn (Gross et al., 2009). Salmi and Kumpulainen (2019) called this approach sociocultural and dialogic, considering children's sense-making as a dialogic process encompassing social, cognitive, affective, and personal dimensions within cultural contexts. The process of experiencing is mediated by symbolic means – not only by artefacts but also by social institutions, practices, relationships, and geographies. On this basis, children's experiencing is configured via the interaction of emotional, intellectual, and ontological dimensions in cultural contexts. Of interest to the current study are numerous prior studies' reports that the way children experienced the transition and adjusted to a formal instruction environment predicted their future school engagement, academic achievement, and psychosocial adjustment throughout the primary school years and beyond (Burt & Roisman, 2010; Kragh-Müller & Isbell, 2011; Lee & Bierman, 2015).

Following the sociocultural approach, this study proposes that children's experience of their life worlds occurs through their engagement in everyday activities that, in turn, are influenced by their motives and needs. Motives are culturally mediated and signify what is meaningful and important for children (Fleer, 2014; Hedegaard, 2014). According to Brooker (2008), during a transitional period, children experience changes in their own environment as well as having to adapt to a new social environment. Therefore, transition in the present study is considered a social process. In addition to studying the children's ability to perform, conform and learn in the new setting, this mindset also requires studying the different contexts experienced by the child (Brooker, 2008; Lam & Pollard, 2006). In this vein, the current study aims to identify the children's sociocultural motives and demands of transition to first grade in Oman, mandating a "careful consideration of their participation in social activities, their social practices and routines and their interaction with adults and other children" (Huf, 2013, p. 63).

### 5.4.2. Suitable Drawing Type for the Age of the Study Sample (Children Aged 6-7 Years)

Punch (2002) recommended that researchers, in working with children, should maintain a friendly attitude, practise good articulation and aim to enjoy the experience. Engaging in art suits the competencies young people possess, making the drawing method the most appropriate approach to data collection from and with children, especially those of primary school age. Children are likely to consider drawing fun and not as disturbing as a written or verbal test. Drawing can also provide a method for making comparisons between different cultures since children's artwork can be translated into any language adopted by the researcher (Stiles & Gibbons, 2000). Dealing with children via their drawings, representing the language in which they can express themselves without the need to speak or write, centres the focus on the child in the case being studied. This technique also supports the consideration of children as people of value and upholds their right to convey their opinions on an issue that concerns them as legitimate for them (Greene & Hill, 2005). Luquet (1913) argued that children between the ages of 5 and 7 years can produce a drawing that can be categorised in terms of *"transparency"*, which takes place during the stage of the child's intellectual realism. In other words, children's drawings may reach the realism that surrounds them. Another feature of children's drawings worth considering is that they can take many forms, including *"visual metaphors; concept mapping (mind-maps); imaginative responses; and realistic depictions"* (Bland, 2018, p. 344).

The particular drawing approach a researcher selects is dependent on the type of data sought, along with the age range of the children in the study sample. Concept planning or mind maps are appropriate for collecting data that require critical thinking, especially in research involving young people (Freire, 1998). In contrast, the type of drawing that depends on freedom of expression fits data centred around demonstrating imagination and creativity (Young, 2007). Walker (2007) believed that children aged 7–9 are able to develop a drawing language as represented in the symbols and organisational rules of space and time. Children's drawing is a complex process in which the body, thought, and emotions combine to form a drawing that expresses what the child wants to express (Cox, 1993). These processes are reflected in the formation of various symbols and signs that are included in the concepts, representing ideas that the child wishes to communicate to those

around him (Kress, 2010). Over time, the use of free drawing increased as a tool to collect data from students to find out their views on improving and developing schools and school performance for data collection (Carrington, 2007, Labitsi, 2008; Lodge, 2007; Pehlivan, 2008; Schratz & Steiner-Löffler, 1998; Yuen, 2004).

### 5.4.3. Ethical Issues

Any researcher who chooses the drawing method as a tool for collecting data with children must take into account the ethical implications related to its use and should design their research accordingly in terms of the chosen data collection method and subsequent analysis (Mitchell, 2006). In this vein, it is helpful to consider the necessity of interacting with children before and during drawing in order to achieve anthropologically correct data collection (Leeds, 1989).

Ethically, when adults deal with children during the process of researching a topic, the researchers have an obligation to build a friendly relationship with the targeted children. (Morati & Harcourt, 2012). Furthermore, adults, representing the strongest party in this interaction, should carefully consider how to introduce themselves to the children and explain the process as it unfolds in proportion to the latter's age in a way that satisfies the children's understanding (Christensen, 2004). In describing ethical behaviour in research, Walford (2008) strongly advised obtaining informed consent from participants before they take part in the research. However, Huf (2013) warned of the difficulties that accompany obtaining consent when data is obtained from children. From the perspective of Christensen and James (2008), the challenge mainly lies in the power differential between children and adults.

- **The Ethical Process in the Current Study was as Follows:**

Generally, I considered the main principles of the Concordat in all aspects of my research. The first was honesty in my consideration of its objectives, intentions, and results. Second, I observed integrity in recording references and gathering and documenting information and data from others. Third, I adhered to the prevailing research rules and standards, using appropriate tools and following the correct protocols for extracting, interpreting, analysing,

and publishing results. Fourth, I showed care and respect for research participants and supervisors. Regarding the ethical procedures, I adhered to the following steps:

- Ethical approvals for implementation:
  - Completed the required ethical approval forms at the University of Glasgow.
  - Finalised the required forms for ethical approvals in Oman, mandated by the Ministry of Education, which oversees the sector in which I conducted the study.
  - Developed the necessary tools and established their requirements (PISs & Consent Forms), which included:
    - Three interview protocols:
      - Focus group interviews
      - Parent interviews
      - Stakeholder interviews
    - Three PISs:
      - Focus group participants PIS.
      - Parents participants PIS.
      - Stakeholder participants PIS.
    - Consent Forms:
      - Stakeholder consent form
      - Parent consent form
- Translated the interviews, PISs, and approval forms into Arabic, the language of implementation, and had these tools reviewed by academics and specialists at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman.
- Searched for and engaged a variety of relevant interview participants. Some accepted directly, while others declined, requiring me to find alternatives and communicate to obtain their consent.
- Adhered to the main Concordat principles across all aspects of the research, as detailed above.
- Ensured correct practices in obtaining legal consent from all participants. They were informed about their voluntary participation, their right to withdraw without repercussions, and parents provided special approval for children's participation.

- Interviews were conducted on Zoom as chosen by the participants. For children, consent forms were sent home through nurseries and the implementation was conducted within nurseries and primary schools with the same sample.

- Communicated with schools to obtain the principals' and parents' approvals for working with children. Some parents initially found it challenging to understand the purpose and methods of the study, and difficult to accept their children being recorded. As such, I contacted them individually to clarify requirements and obtain their consent.

- Implemented a suitable way for children to provide consent without directly asking for their participation. I provided parents with a guidance sheet that emphasised voluntary participation, withdrawal rights, and anonymity. Parents signed informed consent forms after reviewing this information.

- Conducted introductory visits to the children to build rapport and help them feel comfortable. I took the children's verbal consent for drawing and discussion in a way appropriate to their age and level of understanding.

- Obtained informed consent from parents, teachers, and the management of nurseries and the primary school before starting. Children had the right to withdraw at any point during the implementation.

- Tried my utmost to build a friendly atmosphere to ensure that the children enjoyed the activity and were comfortable articulating their thoughts.

- To observe emotions and body language, I video-recorded children as they discussed their drawings. Although I anticipated potential challenges, such as discomfort with cameras, I sought informed consent from both parents and children, and aimed to integrate myself with the children through initial visits. During these visits, I used my smartphone to take group photos and casual videos to familiarise them with the equipment. These recordings remained confidential and were stored securely on my University of Glasgow OneDrive, to be deleted after the designated retention period.

- I preserved confidentiality by directly collecting children's drawings and video recordings, using pseudonyms to anonymise their identities. Each parent only knew the results concerning their own child, and pseudonyms were used in the second focus group, with school names and locations omitted.

- I maintained a friendly relationship with the children. Acknowledging the power dynamics as an adult researcher, I carefully introduced myself and explained the research process in child-friendly language, ensuring it aligned with their understanding.

- No real names were used in the analyses or results – with codes assigned, as per the parents' requests. Moreover, I avoided mentioning specific schools or locations, instead referring to the general area (e.g., Muscat).

- I encrypted all recordings and stored them securely on the university's platform and my computer. For focus groups and interviews on Zoom, I logged in using my University of Glasgow email, encrypted files immediately after sessions, and deleted any copies saved locally.

- Data could be shared with external collaborators via secure methods, such as Microsoft SharePoint or the university's OwnCloud service, secure file transfers, or portable storage media with encryption. I avoided peer-to-peer sharing for data accessibility, depositing it in the university's Data Repository if necessary. I also aimed to publish articles in relevant scientific journals in cooperation with my supervisors.

- Upon the analysis and conclusion, data would be presented as a doctoral thesis, which the University of Glasgow could display on its website for future researchers. Data would remain accessible on the university's platform for the specified 10-year period, per protocol, available for reference if needed for additional study processes.

- **The Ethical Process of the Stakeholder Interviews**

Regarding the ethical consent of the interviewed stakeholders, I first provided them with a guiding sheet about the nature of the study, its objectives, the importance of their participation, and their rights as participants, such as the freedom to voluntarily participate, the ability to withdraw at any time, the choice to mention their names or positions, and the option not to record audio or video. Each participant signed an informed consent form after reading this guide sheet. Further to this, oral consent was granted at the beginning of each individual or focus group interview.

In terms of the use of Zoom for the semi-structured interviews, due to the spread of COVID-19, I sent each interviewee a link via email and asked them not to share the link with anyone else so as to maintain confidentiality and security. I followed the same method for the focus group, additionally informing everyone about the presence of people from different positions, the use of the waiting room function on Zoom, and the setting of a password for entry. All of these precautions helped make the interviews safer. Moreover, while taking consent, all participants pledged to adhere to confidentiality requirements, where none of the interview content or data would be shared with external parties. In the event of any sudden intrusion, the interview was terminated immediately, and the relevant information security authorities at the university, as well as in Oman (i.e., where the interviews were held), were informed.

Interviews lasted between 60–80 minutes. The participants occasionally felt bored or upset about a particular discussion. Some felt embarrassed, as they were affiliated with the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for providing services to children, so the discussion sometimes contained criticism or dissatisfaction with the services provided. I, as a researcher, tried to create an atmosphere of comfort and fun. Moreover, the conversation was kept informal so as to reflect the dialogues unofficial nature. In cases of boredom, could stop and take a break. The participant had the option to postpone the dialogue or even withdraw from it. They were also free to answer as they wished.

Due to the study's relation to a general educational issue, the opinions received from the participants were public information and could not be classified as confidential or sensitive. It was not related to personal, health, or emotional information. Thus, the risks from such data collection were low. On the contrary, the developmental goal regarding an issue concerning their children was a motive for them to participate and enrich the study with their experiences and knowledge. Regarding data archiving, all data were saved in a timely manner in a secure location provided by the university, and opinions were presented without names or positions at the request of the participants – of which each participant was made fully aware.

One of the concerns of focus groups was that one person might dominate the conversation or that one participant may stop talking, perhaps due to job positions – for example, one being a general manager and another a simple employee in the institution. This was exactly

what I faced when the kindergarten teacher appeared shy because she was the lowest-ranking person in the group, and consequently was hesitant in expressing her opinion. I would ask her a question related to her role or ask her to comment on something someone else had said on a point related to her work and experience. In addition, a high-ranking Ministry of Education official was reserved in offering his opinions, possibly out of fear that they would be held against him. However, I repeatedly assured him that what was said in the discussion was confidential and would not be shared, and that opinions would be expressed without mentioning names or job positions. I asked questions to encourage him to speak. Furthermore, I sometimes provided specific opinions to prompt them to discuss the topic and share their points of view as a way of enriching the conversation.

- **The Ethical Process of Children**

In this study, instead of asking children to participate or not take part in the research, I chose an alternative way for children to provide their consent. Specifically, I introduced myself as a researcher who was not familiar with what children did in nurseries and told them I wanted to know what they would do when they moved to first grade. In other words, I chose a stance where I would be informed by the children rather than informing them. In addition, I told the children that they could choose not to participate at any point.

In addition to talking to the children about the study approach and their right to withdraw if they wished, I obtained informed consent from the children's parents as well as the teachers and management of both nurseries and the primary school before beginning the research process. Furthermore, I committed to following the ethical guidelines for conducting education studies in Oman. In particular, these guidelines require researchers to apply to the Technical Office of Research at the MOE asking permission to implement a study, provide a brief summary of the study, and indicate where the research will be conducted. Once I had obtained approval from the MOE, I implemented the study with the selected sample.

### 5.4.4. Limitations of Applying Children's Drawings as a Data Collection Tool

The drawing method may not be suitable for some children. As is the case with many individual likes and dislikes, certain children may not like drawing, presenting an obstacle in collecting data from them using this technique (Yuen, 2004). Thus, every researcher whose study is designed around this data gathering approach must comprehend the importance of obtaining each child's consent for participating in the study. Obtaining such agreement in advance may greatly facilitate the process of interaction between the researcher and all sample members.

The usefulness of drawing as a data gathering instrument depends heavily on the clarity of the instructions the children receive from the facilitator. As this individual may be a supervisor or teacher, the facilitator's opinions could affect the children's perceptions of the experience and responses as the adult provides support, such as clarifying what is required of the subjects. Thus, the responsible adult's influence on the participating children can affect the required study data (Deguara, 2019). In order to reduce this possibility, researchers in this context must be proficient in their chosen topic and understand how to deal with children, including playing the role of applier whenever possible. Alternatively, researchers must provide detailed information and instructions to those who will undertake the application on their behalf to ensure the validity of the required data in order to facilitate analysis and comparisons.

Another limiting factor in terms of yielding accurate findings is the possibility of not understanding certain visual languages or distorting the results of interpretation by viewing the data through a lens construed from the adult researcher's point of view due to the potential influence of personal experiences and the researcher's own culture of judgement and interpretation. This phenomenon may affect the accuracy of interpreting the data (Horn, 1998). Accordingly, Yuen (2004) proposed a solution to reduce this occurrence: using verbal interaction with the child who made the drawing to interpret the drawings. Alternatively, children might write a short description or suggest expressive words that they wish to add to their drawings. Taking this precaution serves as an essential source of triangulation to avoid mistakes; therefore, the current study included this practice in the

implementation. Researchers must also ensure that the data generated by participating children will provide meaningful information and infuse richness into the research topic by taking pains to clarify the context of the research topic up front to the children in their samples.

### 5.4.5. Collecting Data From the Children in the Current Study

The data required to achieve the aims of the study were collected through multiple methodologies, mainly consisting of children's drawings, visual narratives, and the researcher's ethnographic field notes from Spring 2022–Autumn 2023. The study sample comprised 45 children from four nurseries in Muscat, the capital city of Oman. The same children were followed to their primary schools despite some delays and occasional interruptions due to limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. To deal with the complications introduced by Covid-19, I formulated two plans for continuing the study. The first plan, which I was able to carry out as originally designed, entailed implementing the study from start to finish in the identified schools. My alternative plan was to try to see some children at home to observe their transition between KG2 and first grade under pandemic conditions.

The data were obtained from the sample by drawing and visual narrative activities that took place during the children's second semester in KG2 classrooms (Spring 2022). Subsequently, I followed the same children in the first semester of first grade (Fall 2022) and performed the same activities. The details of these implementation steps are presented in Chapter 6 Representation of Children's Drawings and Visual Narratives on section 6.1.1. P:130.

### 5.5. Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in the current study. In collecting my data, I relied on qualitative methods that fit the nature of the study topic. The main tools were the children's drawings and visual narratives. After extensive research into the suitability of this method and its implementation, along with its analysis, I identified this technique as the most appropriate approach for the children in the study sample whose age group

precluded expressing themselves in writing, filling out questionnaires, or conducting the same kinds of interviews as would be possible with adults. In this way, I supported the children's agency to express themselves on issues that concerned them in ways that were appropriate and enjoyable for them.

In addition, I investigated the opinions of stakeholders with a direct influence on the issue of study, drawing them from school, home, and related institutional settings, to discern the status quo of the issue and to ascertain the level of interest in the issue of children's transition from KG2 to first grade. I also wished to identify existing applications and activities if any were already in place. These two areas of focus allowed me to contrast the adults' point of view with the children's self-expressed needs. To obtain further confirmation, I employed triangulation by carrying out observations in a group of nurseries and first year schools (Grades 1–4) to examine the similarities and differences between the reality that I saw and the data I collected from the interviews of stakeholders, which might have been distorted in the picture the interviewees provided, such as stereotypical views of the subject according to the prevalent thought in their routine official work.

Therefore, I took all the above factors into consideration in designing my tools and implementing them on the sample during while making contingency plans in the event of any potential impact from the Covid-19 pandemic. In implementing the study, I encountered various difficulties; nevertheless, despite occasional delays and the necessity to vary some methods, I completed the work successfully and within the time frame specified for the study.

Finally, I analysed the data I had obtained from my multi-methodological approach by identifying the main motives and needs associated with children's experiences during their transition from nursery to first grade. Notably, the analysis process extended beyond merely obtaining meanings to encompass an understanding of how these meanings were embedded within both cultural and institutional contexts, following Taylor and Littleton's (2006) recommendations. Additionally, I went back and forth through the dataset to satisfy the specific analytical focus on how boundary objects were constructed to influence the children's experience, as Charmaz (2006) advised, by reviewing, examining, and comparing all data collected via the various tools applied to the study sample.

# Chapter 6
# Representation of Children's Drawings and Visual Narratives

## 6.1. Introduction

I implemented this study in four nurseries, with 11 children from MK School, 14 children from M School, 10 children from Q Nursery, and 10 children from IU School. My original plan had been to conduct the study in three schools, as the usual nursery classroom setting contained 15–20 children before the emergence of Covid-19. However, the number of pupils in each class decreased due to the preventive measures intended to reduce the spread of the virus, requiring the addition of a fourth school to complete the sample number I had previously determined. The process began after I had obtained ethical approval from the University of Glasgow, which was a lengthy process, as the sample of children placed my execution at the high-risk level, requiring me to apply a high degree of caution and employ certain measures to protect participants at this sensitive age stage (see obtained ethical approval from in appendix 6. P:307). Among these procedures were necessary forms, including a parental consent form and parents' information sheet that presented in detail the aim of my study and described the whole process (see parents' information sheet in appendix 5 p:304).

After I obtained the university's approval, the next necessary step was to obtain ethical approval from the MOE in my country, Oman, where I intended to implement the study. By the time ethical approval arrived from Glasgow, the mid-year holiday had begun for public and private schools in Oman. After the monthlong holiday period ended, the MOE decided that all children from KG1–Grade 4 would switch to remote education for another month because of the emergence of Omicron, the new mutant of Covid-19. This policy decision delayed the implementation of the current study. However, I was able to implement it in the time I had after starting the actual study in schools with double the effort.

### 6.1.1.  Implementation Steps

Under much stress imposed by the circumstances, I began implementing the study in the schools much later than I had planned. The study procedure followed similar steps in all of the schools but differed somewhat from one school to another. Those steps are described in the following sub-sections.

#### 6.1.1.1.  Communication With the School Principals

The implementation process began with a visit to each school to meet the principal after reviewing all official approval papers from the university and the MOE in Oman. Furthermore, the Ministry conveyed its approval to all schools in the official electronic correspondence system. I explained to each principal the goal of my study and the steps I had planned to implement it, along with describing the number of visits I expected to make. I also provided each principal with approval forms to be sent to parents to obtain their consent to conduct the study with their children.

In the case of the chosen primary schools, the three private schools featured both kindergarten and first grade classes. In addition, I contacted another two public schools that some of the children had moved to and repeated the same process with those schools' principals.

#### 6.1.1.2.  Children's Initial Visit

Obtaining parental consent from the parents of all of the participating children took quite a long time because the parents had many questions. Ultimately, I phoned each one separately to explain the process in detail. Fortunately, once they understood the process, the parents' response was positive, and everyone give consent.

Next, I made an initial visit to the children, where the principal and teacher accompanied me as I entered the class. I introduced myself to the children by name and explained that I was a researcher in a subject related to their concerns, with the aim of helping them in their studies. I also emphasised that I needed their help and that without their help, I would not

succeed in my mission. The children were curious and enthusiastic, as I asked for their approval, and everyone raised their hands as an indication of their agreement to cooperate with me. I asked all of the pupils to give me their names so I could get to know them. I promised them we would meet soon so that we could play together, and I would provide prizes and gifts as rewards. I also described how I would eventually ask them to draw pictures and that we would enjoy the drawing together. In response, they communicated their willingness to participate with me.

### 6.1.1.3. Visits to Learn and Play

I made two or three visits to each school to fulfil the need I felt to allow each group of children to become acquainted with me. Each of these visits lasted between 30–45 minutes each time. Some time we played together involved contests followed by presenting awards for the winners. Then gifts to everyone for their interaction with me. Part of my planned approach included allowing the children to use my mobile to video-record each other while playing, showcasing talents or contests so that they would become accustomed to my phone since I would use it to videotape them describing their drawings later. The children happily interacted with me and loved my visits. They seemed to eagerly anticipate the time when I would come, we would play, and they would engage in a competition and win prizes.

### 6.1.1.4. Actual Implementation 1

The study sample consisted of 45 children from four nurseries in Muscat, Oman's capital city. The same group of children was followed to their primary schools. The process was difficult because nursery schools in Oman – as mentioned in Chapter 2 section 2.5.2.1. on p:35– are private, either organised as an independent nursery or affiliated with a private school that includes grades from KG1 to Grade 12. The current study involved tracking children in various public and private schools, some of whom moved to the first grade in the same private or international school. The data were obtained from the sample via drawing and visual narrative activities that took place during the children's second semester (Spring 2022) of KG2. I followed the same children and conducted the same

activities with them in their first semester of first grade (Fall 2022). These activities reflected the steps suggested by Salmi and Kumpulainen (2019) as follows:

- The children's teachers helped me distribute A3 paper, a box of pastels, and a pencil, sharpener, and eraser to each child.
- I instructed the children to write their name and school at the top of the paper. The next instruction was to draw something that made them happy, what they loved the most in their class (nursery in the first round of data collection; first grade in the follow-up round of data collection), followed by what upset them and what made them unhappy.
- I walked around the room to check on each child and helped them write their names clearly, as well as the names of the schools. Not everyone could write clearly. I also ask them about their drawing and tried to help them by talking to them about what they liked and how to draw what they mentioned without affecting their opinions. The teachers also helped me encourage their pupils to draw the latter's visions.

Within the 40 minutes of class time, some of the children finished in 30 minutes, and others took the whole time to finish. Some of the children did not finish colouring but completed the drawing in pencil. I reassured them that all of their efforts were satisfactory. At the end of the class time, some of the children helped me collect and organise all of the papers.

### 6.1.1.5.    Actual Implementation 2

At each school, I returned the next day, bringing the drawings with me, and distributed them again to the children. I arranged with the school's management to locate a room in school building for visual narration sessions. Some schools kept my implementation in the same classroom where the children in the sample had performed the drawing activity. I helped the children move from drawing to visual narrations in order to make sense of the children's experiences from what they had drawn on the paper. The visual narration was conducted according to the following steps:

- I invited the children to narrate their drawings to their peers and the researchers.

- Each class was organised into groups of two to four children to carry out the narration session.

- I encouraged all of the children as a group to freely share the meanings of their drawings.

- I then asked each of the children to talk about their drawings and describe what they had drawn the previous day. I used my mobile to video-record each interaction as the children talked about their drawings. By asking guiding questions, such as "What did you mean by this?" and pointing at one part or another of their drawing, I encouraged each child to speak. I also asked them about what they liked if they had been unable to draw it.

- When I noticed a quiet child, I encouraged verbal expression by asking questions, such as, "What do you think was fun/unpleasant in preschool?" or "what do you think is fun/unpleasant in primary school?"

- Since the teachers were familiar with the children in their classroom, they helped me with children who exhibited great difficulty in talking. Throughout the study's activities, the teachers were very helpful and welcoming, and I enjoyed working with them.

- Lastly, I transcribed the video-recorded conversations.

The children surprised me with their willingness to talk, which I had actually not anticipated. I had earlier mentioned my fear to my sister, a retired first-grade teacher, about the difficulty of talking to children at this stage and how I might not obtain the information I wanted, especially because I planned to video-record them. She had replied, "Children now are not afraid of phone; they are used to it and its camera. [I've also seen] that this generation, in my experience, is more daring and starts talking earlier." My observations confirmed her answer as the truth, as the children's response to the study activities matched her description.

During these activities, I made ethnographic notes about all aspects of the process of collecting the data, enriching the obtained data and providing insights that were useful for understanding and interpreting the data.

### 6.1.1.6.      Encoding and Storage

I protected the participants' anonymity by giving each child a pseudonym comprising the first letter of their first name and the first letters of the words in their schools' names. By this means, I was able to clearly link their words and drawings. Then, I photographed their drawings and stored them on my laptop as well as in my university OneDrive as pictures identified using each child's pseudonym. I also saved and uploaded the videos, labelled with the pseudonym of each child. Specifically, for each school, I created a special file containing two files, one for the drawings and the other for the videos of the children from that school who participated in the study. This organisational scheme made it easier for me to access every drawing or video.

## 6.2.  Data Analysis

This section discusses analysing data collected from children's visual narration and how I developed a systematic tool for this process. I analysed the content according to the social semiotics approach, comprising two phases (Barthes, 1977). The first phase, *"denotation"*, involves the surface message. The second phase, *"signified"*, entails the deepest symbolism that I obtained from my observations while the children were drawing and talking, the letters and signs they drew, and the videos I recorded for each of the children as they talked about their drawings and expressed themselves. This is what I separated theoretically in the Methodology chapter (see section 5.4. P:116). As discussed earlier, data collection from the participating children was based on the children's agency and their right to express their opinion in a case concerning them. Then I developed a method for organising, classifying and analysing the collected data according to the cross-data network suggested by Deguara (2019), who used a cross-grid to represent the data extracted from children's drawings, uncovering both simple and complex patterns. Such a cross-grid consists of a vertical axis that intersects with a horizontal axis, dividing the grid into four sections. Along both lines runs a gradient from simple (S) to complex (C). Thus, the left half of the cross-grid indicates the simple mode, while the right half represents the complex mode of graphics, as illustrated in Figure 6.1. After the classification of the drawings is complete, the resulting grid presents a clear graphic impression of the simple–complex modes and the children's choice of drawings (Deguara, 2019).

**Figure 6.1**

*The Data Cross-Grid Indicating the Integration of Simple and Complex Modes and Themes. Source: Deguara (2019, p. 161)*
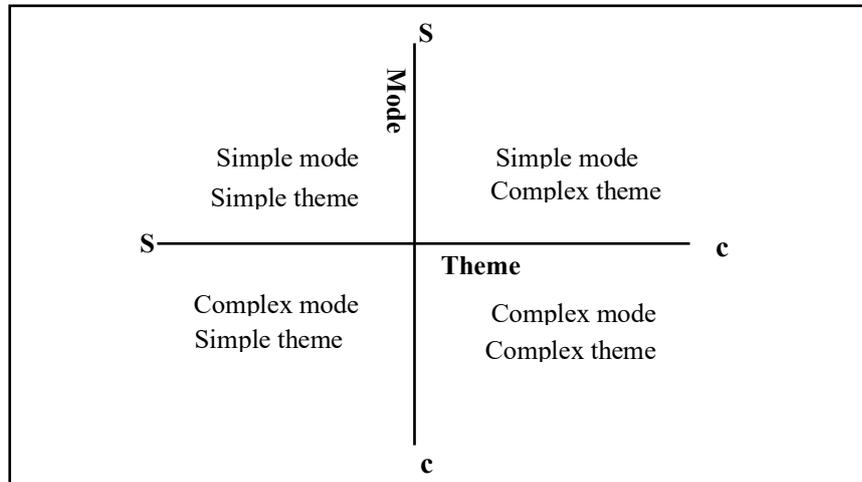


I developed the cross-data network and its associated cross-grid for my study by first dividing the study data to be analysed into four main parts, as shown in Figure 6.2, where the data in that grid are represented by a horizontal axis that intersects with a vertical one. The data were analysed based on the second part of the first question of my study, which searches for (the conceptualisation of boundary objects as tools and concepts that help the children to transition smoothly from nursery to first grade), the children's needs, represented in boundary objects and tools, were examined according to the CHAT, on which the study was grounded theoretically. In addition to the second part of the third study question, which searches for (the practices – if existing – of continuity of experience during the transition from nursery to first grade), which is based on Dewey's theory as the second theoretical part on which the study was built. The grid was also designed to reflect the third part of the third question, which searches for (the problems that children experience during their transition from nursery to first grade from the point of view of children). Thus, the three symbols that emerged were needs, problems, and activities currently available. However, regarding the activities currently applied – if any – the children saw some of them positively; therefore, it would be among their needs when moving from one level to the next. In contrast, they saw some activities as negative, placing these among their problems. Hence, the final two icons that I analysed the data founded on them were children's needs and problems. Then, based on the CHAT, these

needs and problems were graded into needs and problems within the school and others in the external environment that interacted with the school.

Thus, in the figure, the data are divided into four parts. The upper part of the vertical line represents the needs of children at this stage, while the lower part of the line represents the problems they suffer from. The left side of the horizontal line represents the psychological and social aspects of the child, while the right side of the line denotes cognition and skills. Each of the four parts is also divided into two sub-parts connected to the school and outside the school (home, community), aligning with the theoretical philosophy of CHAT on which the study was based (for more details see section 3.2. P: 59). Then follow what happened and develop in these needs and problems to reveal the extent to which the continuity of experience has been achieved in children according to Dewey's theory. This is a justification for continuing implementation on the same sample of children when they switch to first grade in the following academic year.

Accordingly, the data were distributed among four criteria, as follows:

• Cognition and skill needs within and outside the school on the right side of the grid.

• Social and psychological needs within and outside the school in the upper-left quarter.

• Problems related to cognition and skill in the school and outside it in the lower-right quarter.

• Social and psychological problems in the upper-left quarter for the school and in the lower-left quarter for outside the school.

I built my understanding of the children's needs and problems through their drawings according to the definitions in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1**

*Definitions of Data Analysis Criteria*

| Term | Description |
|---|---|
| Cognitive and skill-related needs | What the child needs in terms of basic knowledge and skills, such as languages, writing, reading, and mathematics. |
| Social and psychological needs | What the child needs in terms of the psychological and social skills of those around them, such as the need for containment, safety, friendship, stability, and adaptation. |
| Cognitive and skill-related problems | The child's problems related to understanding basic knowledge and skills. |
| Social and psychological problems | The problems that the child faces in their school, home, and community, affecting their healthy psychological and social development. |

**Figure 6.2**

*The Developed Grid of Data Analyses*
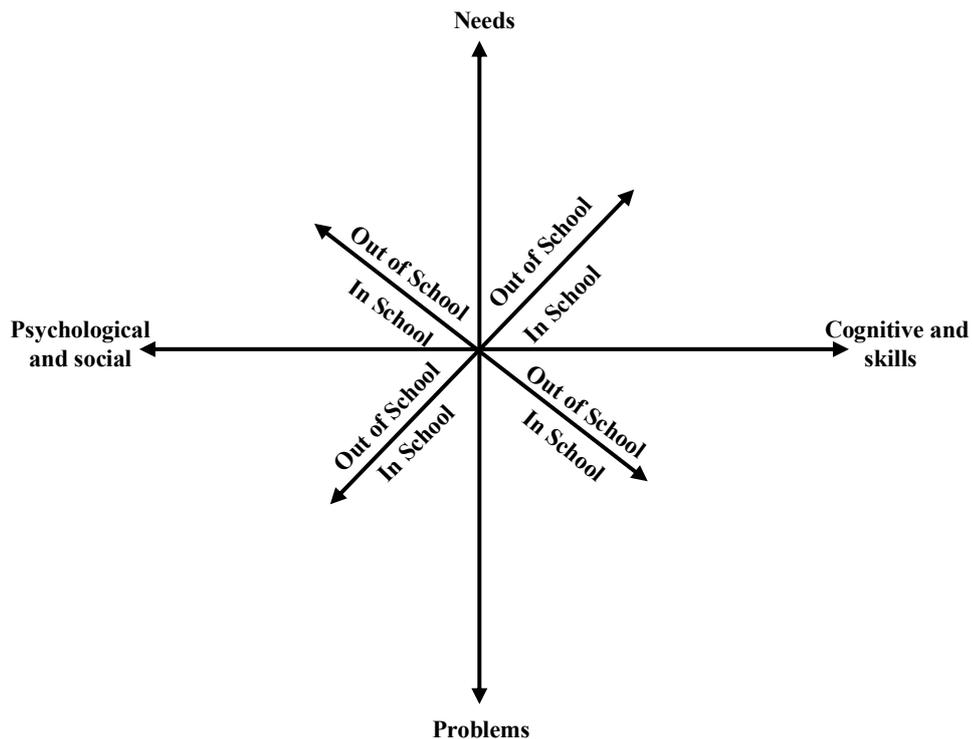
## 6.2.1.   The First Phase of Analysis: "Denotation"

I analysed the surface message of the children's drawings according to the four criteria on which I replied. For KG2, after filling the grid with the data (see Figure 6.3), the surface message appeared as can be seen in the details provided in Table 6.2. For first grade, I filled the grid as shown in Figure 6.4 for the first phase and distributed the details as in Table 6.3 for added clarity. They can be detailed as follows:

**Figure 6.3**

*The Data of Phase 1 Analysis "Detonation" for KG2 Children*
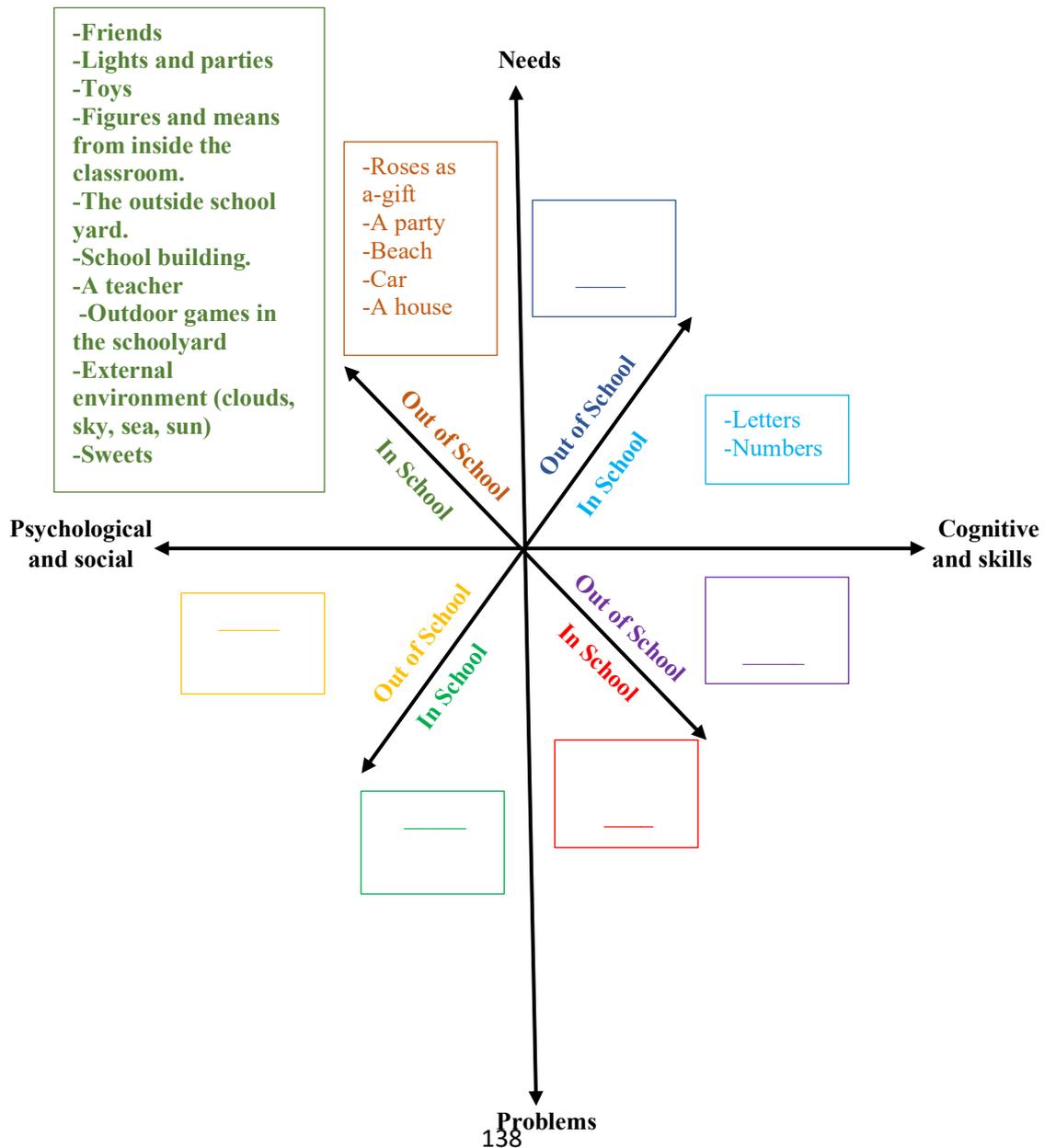
**Table 6.2**

*Frequencies/Percentages in Phase 1 Analysis "Detonation" for KG2 Children*

| Criterion | The process range | Subject | Frequency | Frequencies Total | Frequencies Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cognitive and skill needs** | Out of School | - | - | 7 | 4 |
| | In School | Letters | 3 | | |
| | | numbers | 4 | | |
| **Social and psychological needs** | Out of School | Roses as a gift | 1 | 8 | 5 |
| | | A party | 1 | | |
| | | Beach | 1 | | |
| | | Car | 1 | | |
| | | Roses as a gift | 4 | | |
| | In School | Friends | 35 | 144 | 91 |
| | | Lights and parties | 2 | | |
| | | Toys | 10 | | |
| | | Figures and materials from inside the classroom | 7 | | |
| | | The outside courtyard of the school | 8 | | |
| | | School building | 12 | | |
| | | Teacher | 21 | | |
| | | Outdoor games in the schoolyard | 19 | | |
| | | External environment (clouds, sky, sea, sun) | 29 | | |
| | | sweets | 1 | | |
| **Cognitive and skill problems** | Out of School | - | - | 0 | 0 |
| | In School | - | - | | |
| **Social and psychological problems** | Out of School | - | - | 0 | 0 |
| | In School | - | - | | |
| **Total** | | | 159 | 159 | 100 |

**Figure 6.4**

*The Data of Phase 1 Analysis "Detonation" for 1ˢᵗ Grade Children*



- Green box (top left):
  -Friends.
  -Lights and parties.
  -Toys.
  -Figures and means from inside the classroom.
  -The outside school yard.
  -School building.
  -A teacher.
   -Outdoor games in the schoolyard.
  -External environment (clouds, sky, sea, sun).
  -Sweets.
  -School bus.
  -Rainbow woman alone in a building.

- Orange box:
  -A house.
  - Mum.
  -Hearts.
  -Family.

- Cyan box:
  -Letters.
  -Numbers.

- Yellow box:
  -A lonely person.

- Green box (bottom):
  -Cross signs.
  -Lady with cross mark.
  -Building with cross.

Axes:
- Needs (top)
- Problems (bottom)
- Psychological and social (left)
- Cognitive and skills (right)

Diagonal labels: Out of School / In School

**Table 6.3**

*The Frequencies/Percentages of Phase 1 Analysis "Detonation" for 1ˢᵗ Grade Children*

| Criterion | The process range | Subject | Frequency | Frequencies Total | Frequencies Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cognitive and skill needs** | Out of School | - | - | - | - |
| | In School | Letters | 4 | 12 | 8.3 |
| | | Numbers | 8 | | |
| **Social and psychological needs** | Out of School | Family | 2 | 18 | 12.4 |
| | | Hearts | 10 | | |
| | | Mum | 1 | | |
| | | House | 5 | | |
| | In School | Friends | 29 | 104 | 71.7 |
| | | School bus | 2 | | |
| | | Rainbow woman alone in a building | 2 | | |
| | | Figures and means from inside the classroom | 4 | | |
| | | The outside courtyard of the school | 4 | | |
| | | School building | 15 | | |
| | | Teacher | 21 | | |
| | | Outdoor games in the schoolyard | 2 | | |
| | | External environment (clouds, sky, sea, sun) | 24 | | |
| | | Sweets | 1 | | |
| **Cognitive and skill problems** | Out of School | - | - | 0 | 0 |
| | In School | - | - | | |
| **Social and psychological problems** | Out of School | A lonely person | 7 | 11 | 7.6 |
| | In School | Cross signs | 1 | | |
| | | lady with cross mark. | 2 | | |
| | | building with cross. | 1 | | |
| **Total** | | | 145 | 145 | 100 |

### 6.2.1.1. Cognitive and Skill-Related Needs

The drawings did not show any indication of the children's cognitive, and skill needs from the environment **outside the school**. One possible explanation for this absence is that these needs, according to the general understanding, are not taken from the home or other societal institutions but are, instead, related to the school. Accordingly, society has become accustomed to this logic and has built its general culture on this understanding. Thus, this influence was transferred from the external community to the children in the current study, affecting their thinking style and leading to no responses in this area. In other words, the children did not perceive any cognitive or skill needs that they could take outside of school. This outcome is confirmed by CHAT regarding the influence of the surrounding society and culture on the student's thought and behaviour.

By comparison, some children's drawings contained some aspects that could happen **inside school**, such as Arabic and English letters (found in three drawings) and numbers in Arabic and English (four occurrences) in the drawings of some participants during the KG2 phase of data collection. From the children's work generated during the first grade phase of data collection, eight drawings contained letters and four contained numbers. The emergence of two languages in the drawings is unsurprising since children in Oman study letters and numbers as basic principles in both Arabic and English in schools of all kinds, whether monolingual (Arabic is taught only), bilingual (Arabic–English), or global (English is taught as an official language, Arabic as another language for citizens and Arabs).

Regarding the interest level of children who drew letters and numbers, their responses may have stemmed from the prompting of the school, teachers, and parents to focus on the cognitive aspect. This was consistent with the stakeholder responses, as some teachers in both stages, as well as parents, focused on the fact that preparing children for the primary stage means preparing them cognitively by training them in basic maths, reading, and writing skills (this section is further discussed in Section 7.2.2.1, p:188). My observations also confirmed the interest in the cognitive aspect even at the beginning of the school days for the first grade (see Section 8.3, p:224).

This influence led the children to care about those needs and turn to the school in order to acquire those skills. However, the inclusion of only seven responses out of 159 responses, equivalent to only 4% of KG2 children, and 12 responses out of 145 responses (8.3%) for them when they became first graders, indicates that those who cared about the academic cognitive aspect of their drawings were very few. Influencing the child in this aspect reflects his/her real needs, so it may not have been a priority for them.

### 6.2.1.2.　　Social and Psychological Needs

This factor had the largest share of children's interests, according to my scrutiny of the results of analysing external appearance. As for the scope **outside the school**, some children drew objects that represented their psychological and social needs, such as flowers, a party, a beach, a car, house, mother, little sister, cat, family members and hearts. This outcome may indicate that some children were still attached to the home and the events that took place in their houses -as the child spends more than 16 hours a day at home or with his family, meaning more than two-thirds of the day- along with school parties. They were affected by the environment in which they lived and that accompanied them to school. This observation aligns with Yang et al.'s (2021) emphasis on a positive relationship between the parenting environment at home and the cognitive and psychomotor development of children under 5 years of age. Thus, improving the parenting environment at home for children is beneficial for promoting their early development.

**At school**, the focus of the children was on friends, as reflected in the 35 responses I identified showing children playing in the school yard or the games room. Approximately 22% of the sample's responses appeared to contain friends. Likewise, 29 out of 145 responses (20%) of the drawings created in the first grade contained friends. Notably, in the pictures, the children portrayed were playing, not sitting in the classroom. This observation suggests that children may need friends and social interaction with their peers in an atmosphere of play and fun (Berk, 1994). In a similar vein, Baines and MacIntyre (2019) noted that playing and eating places in school provided children with different opportunities and social activities. This phenomenon points to children's need for a kind of freedom to make friends.

KG2 children also provided 19 responses containing outdoor games in the school yard, while two of the first-grade responses also featured outdoor games, indicating the children's need to play with friends and find enjoyment in the activity. Play is an essential part of a child's development, beginning in childhood and yielding fruits that appear at this stage. In particular, playing provides a means for children to learn to mingle, mature, think, solve problems and, of course, have fun. Play also documents the child's relationship with the environment, imagination, family, teachers, and the world (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This finding is in line with Piaget's (1971) assertion that play is an integral part of a child's intelligence development and a key factor in a child's cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) similarly emphasised this concept, saying,

> *"In playing, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour, in play; it's as though he were a head taller than himself."*

Undoubtedly, play is as important to the child as fun; furthermore, engaging in play is also an important means to achieve other educational goals. Clearly, children gather skills through play in the early years, paving the way for future learning and success from the nursery classroom to the workplace. In this way, children develop a constant tendency to learn. Controlling one's learning path, as in free play, fosters desire, motivation, and mastery (Erikson, 1985; Hurwitz, 2003). The decrease in the number of responses related to this aspect from 19 in KG2 to only two in first grade might have reflected the lack of toys in front of them in their primary school setting.

In addition, 29 responses contained objects from the external environment, such as clouds, sky, and the sun. Another 8 drawings included the school's outdoor yard for KG2 children. Among the children's first-grade responses, four responses reflected the school's outdoor area, and 24 contained objects from the external environment. This continuity in children's need to be present in nature and the external atmosphere, along with their enjoyment of it, also indicating their desire to develop themselves through this connection, confirms what the NLI's (2012) has argued that a lack of outdoor play can limit a child's creativity, stunt cognitive development, and reduce social skills in young children.

Happily, 21 of the KG2 drawings included a teacher, and the children's responses were very much the same in the first grade, with 21 responses that included a female teacher and

two responses including a teacher named Rainbow in her own building, indicating the children's need for their teacher and their attachment to her. This response seems natural, as the children would see their teacher as the one who takes care of them as a surrogate for the mother after they leave the house. A picture of a school building appeared in 12 of the KG2 responses and 15 of the first-grade drawings, possibly an expression by these children that they are related to the school they are used to attending. In addition, three KG2 responses suggested an atmosphere of parties and sweets, such as a Mother's Day party, Teacher's Day, National Day, Welcoming Ramadan, and other events related to Omani society. Whereas one first-grade response included a sweet, which may be explained by the timing of the implementation in kindergarten as taking place in the second semester, when the children experienced events and celebrations, compared to the first-semester implementation in the first grade, at the beginning of the academic year, before events and celebrations started to take place. Nevertheless, such celebrations add fun, play, and food that children love, increasing their love and attachment to the place.

Some children showed interest in visuals found in the classroom; specifically, seven responses in KG2 and four others in the first grade included figures like those I saw in the KG2 classrooms, such as a rainbow in one of the classrooms, as clearly displayed in the drawing of SKM in Figure 6.5, and two boxes of sweets, one shaped like a panda's head and the other in the shape of a rabbit's head, resembling those used by teachers as a reinforcement for children who are doing well. Possibly, the idea of reinforcement drew the children's interest to these objects, in line with evidence that positive reinforcement strategies are more effective than punishment strategies for increasing and forming positive behaviours in any educational environment (Downing et al., 2005). Conversely, negative reinforcement creates more problematic behaviour (Bernier et al., 2012). This outcome shows how important and relevant such items are to the child, along with their potential to make him a better person.

**Figure 6.5** Drawing of SKM

The school bus appeared in two first-grade responses, perhaps reflecting a new extra element of elementary school that was not present in kindergarten. Plausibly, experience primes children's interest as they become older and begin to ride the bus with older students.

### 6.2.1.3. Cognitive, Skill, and Social Problems

Problems, whether cognitive, skill-related or social and psychological did not appear through the drawing activity. One explanation might be that the children found it difficult to express this aspect at such a young age; alternatively, they might have drawn problems in their own way, which might have appeared later in talking about and describing their drawings. In contrast, references to these aspects appeared in their responses when they became first graders. Seven responses contained a single person, as illustrated in examples taken from drawings by YFB, RFB and MFM in Figure 6.6. Perhaps this type of response indicates that the children are separated into different schools as well as in different classrooms in the same school. Possibly, a child from KG2 was placed in a classroom with students who were completely new to him in the first grade, leading to feelings of loneliness at the beginning of the school year.



**Figure 6.6** *Drawing of RFB, YFB, & MFM*

Moreover, one of the responses contained crossover markers only, providing evidence of dissatisfaction and a lack of adaptation to the first grade. In this case, a non-Arab child (AFM) was sitting alone in the classroom and did not speak to anyone, even the teachers, as he could not communicate. Using simple English words, I asked him to draw something he did not like and then put a cross on it to tell me that he did not like it, as is shown in Figure 6.7. In response, he drew crossover marks all over the page. Language and communication represent a major difficulty for children faced with adaptation during their earliest years of study. Two other children drew a woman with a cross; however, I could not identify the women from the drawings. One child drew a building marked with a cross, possibly intended as a school. The children's lack of self-expression in this aspect, as well as the difficulty of explaining what they meant by their drawings, confirms the importance of supplementing the apparent subject of the drawings with helpful additional information, such as children's talk and comments, to provide clearer results according to the social semiotic approach I used in my analytical process in the current study. Accordingly, the final result on which the study relied was the combination of the findings and my own observations as a researcher.

**Figure 6.7**

*Drawing of AFM*

## 6.2.2. Second Phase: "Signified"

In the second phase, I analysed the children's drawing in terms of the deepest symbolism by considering the children's descriptions and talking about their drawings. In this phase, I reviewed all of the videos recorded for each child and made notes about the topics they talked about and described using their own phrases and words. I also monitored their movements and emotions during the conversation. I also relied on the notes I took while they were drawing. This procedure was based on the semiotic approach I chose to analyse the collected data (details p. 122). Figure 6.8 illustrates the most important issues and topics that emerged, distributed among the four criteria I had set for analysis and that I had used earlier in the first stage.



**Needs**

-Preference to come to school with the father.
-IPAD
-Love home time
-Mother's love, little sister, and cat

-Electronic games

-Learning in nature in the outdoor school yard
-drawing class
-Learn numbers and letters
-Learn swimming

*Out of School*
*In School*

*Out of School*
*In School*

-The desire to transfer female friends to first grade in the future (girl).
-Have fun parties
-Having a brother in the first grade
-Nursery facilities
-The teacher's love and her transition to the first grade.
-Desire to move a relative to first grade (boy).
-The researcher moved with them to the first grade
-Playing with friends in the school yard
-School bus love
-Transfer of friends to first grade
-Researcher's love
-Love gifts and promotions
-Need for containment
-Buying food from the school canteen
-Playing in the rain in the school yard
-School playroom love
-Desire to be a new first grade teacher

**Psychological and social**

**Cognitive and skills**

*In School*
*Out of School*

*Out of School*
*In School*

lost friends
Change the teacher in the future in the first grade
Fear of bullying
The desire to play in the school space alone.
Going to first grade alone.
Too much disturbance from children in class.
The annoyance of children yelling at the teacher
Not wanting to play at school.
Discomfort with others assaulting personal items such as pens and notebooks.

—

—

-Learning in the classroom
-There is no swimming pool in the school
-There are no electronic games in the school

148

**Problems**

**Fig 6-8** The Data of the Second Phase "Signified" for KG2 children.

I redistributed the collected data from the grid to Table 6.4; In addition, I transferred the content of the grid in Figure 6.9 into Table 6.5 containing first-grade data to make the data clearer and more readable. Overall, the children's ability to articulate their thoughts and ideas exceeded my expectations. They were able to express themselves and describe what they drew. In conversation with me, they also added other concepts that were not illustrated on paper. I assisted them by asking questions and extracting speech from them. Sometimes the teacher would step in to help me encourage them to speak without affecting their opinion. Consequently, immensely richer points emerged in the second stage than I had obtained in the first stage as a result of the apparent analysis only for myself.

**Table 6.4**

*The Frequencies and Percentages of Data in the Second Phase "Signified" for the KG2*
*Children*

| Criterion | The process range | Subject | Frequency | % | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cognitive and skill needs** | Out of School | Electronic devices | 2 | .8 | 1 |
| | In School | Learning in nature in the outdoor school yard | 9 | 3.6 | 9 |
| | | Drawing classes | 4 | 1.8 | |
| | | Learning numbers and letters | 5 | 2.1 | |
| | | Learning swimming | 3 | 1.2 | |
| **Social and psychological needs** | Out of School | Preference to come to school with the father | 1 | .4 | 2 |
| | | iPad | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Love home time | 2 | .8 | |
| | | Mother's love, little sister, and cat | 1 | .4 | |
| | In School | The desire to transfer female friends to first grade in the future (girls). | 1 | .4 | 76 |
| | | Having fun parties | 5 | 2.1 | |
| | | Having a brother in the first grade | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Kindergarten facilities | 4 | 1.6 | |
| | | The teacher's love and their transition to the first grade | 40 | 16.4 | |
| | | Desire to move my relative to the first grade (boys) | 1 | .4 | |
| | | The researcher moved with them to the first grade | 4 | 1.6 | |
| | | Playing with friends in the school yard | 39 | 15.9 | |
| | | School bus love | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Love of friends and transferring with them to the first grade | 43 | 17.6 | |
| | | Researcher's love | 5 | 2.1 | |
| | | Love gifts and promotions | 17 | 6.9 | |
| | | Need for containment | 5 | 2.1 | |
| | | Buying food from the school canteen | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Playing in the rain in the school yard | 2 | .8 | |
| | | School playroom love | 6 | 2.5 | |
| | | Desire to be a new first grade teacher | 3 | 1.2 | |
| | | Shapes in the school yard | 4 | 1.6 | |
| | | Shapes in the classroom environment (as a rainbow) | 3 | 1.2 | |
| | | Going to first grade without their friends | 1 | .4 | |
| | | No problem, there are new and old friends in the first grade | 1 | .4 | |
| **Cognitive and skill problems** | Out of School | - | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | In School | Learning in the classroom | 7 | 3 | 5 |
| | | There is no swimming pool in the school | 3 | 1.2 | |
| | | There are no electronic games in the school | 2 | .8 | |
| **Social and psychological problems** | Out of School | - | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | In School | Lost friends | 5 | 2.1 | 7 |
| | | Change of teacher in the future in the first grade | 3 | 1.2 | |
| | | Fear of bullying | 2 | .8 | |
| | | The desire to play in the school yard alone | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Going to first grade alone | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Too much disturbance from children in class | 1 | .4 | |
| | | The annoyance of children yelling at the teacher | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Not wanting to play at school | 2 | .9 | |
| | | Discomfort with others assaulting personal items, such as pens and notebooks | 1 | .4 | |
| **Total** | | | 244 | 100 | 100 |

**Figure 6.9**

*The Data of Phase 2 "Signified" for 1st Grade Children*



**Needs** (top vertical axis)

**Problems** (bottom vertical axis)

**Psychological and social** (left horizontal axis)

**Cognitive and skills** (right horizontal axis)

Purple box (upper left):
-Loved a female friend was with her in KG2.
Like the country flag
-Have fun parties.
-Having a sister in the school.
-The teacher's love.
-The researcher stays with them in the first grade to teach them.
-Love friends.
-Playing with friends in the school yard.
-Love 1st grade supervisor.
-Like break time.
-School bus love.
- Wishing that the KG2 teacher would transfer with him to the 1st grade.
-classroom.
-Researcher's love.
-Love gifts and promotions.
-Like school yard.
-Scared of the principal.
-Buying food from the school canteen.

Blue box (upper middle):
-love home time
-Mother's love, Little sister.

Yellow box (upper right):
-Learning in nature in the outdoor school yard.
-Drawing class.
-Learn numbers and letters.
-Learn swimming.
-Learn in nature.

Green box (lower left):
-Fear of bullying.
-Feeling alone because of language (Iranian student).
- No flowers or greenery in school.

Red box (lower right):
-There is no swimming pool in the school.
- Outdoor games in the school yard are not allowed.
-There are not allowed. games in school yard.

Diagonal labels:
Out of School / In School (upper left, purple/blue)
Out of School / In School (upper right, red/yellow)
In School / Out of School (lower left, green/orange)
Out of School / In School (lower right, green/red)

**Table 6.5**

*The Frequencies/Percentages of Data in Phase 2 "Signified" for 1ˢᵗ Grade Children*

| Criterion | The process range | Subject | Frequency | % | Total % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cognitive and skill needs** | Out of School | - | - | - | - |
| | In School | Learning in nature & school yard | 9 | 4.4 | 12.7 |
| | | Drawing classes | 6 | 2.9 | |
| | | Learn numbers and letters | 8 | 3.9 | |
| | | Learn swimming | 3 | 1.5 | |
| **Social and psychological needs** | Out of School | Love home time | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | | Mother's love, little sister, and cat | 4 | 2 | |
| | In School | Loved that a female friend was with her in KG2.1 | 1 | .4 | 72 |
| | | Have fun parties | 3 | 1.5 | |
| | | Having a sister in the school | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Like country flag | 4 | 2 | |
| | | The teacher's love | 41 | 20 | |
| | | Love friends | 35 | 17 | |
| | | The researcher stays with them in the first grade to teach them | 6 | 2.9 | |
| | | Playing with friends in the school yard | 19 | 9.3 | |
| | | School bus love | 5 | 2.4 | |
| | | Love 1ˢᵗ grade supervisor. | 3 | 1.5 | |
| | | Researcher's love | 5 | 2.4 | |
| | | Love gifts and promotions | 3 | 1.5 | |
| | | Like break time | 8 | 3.9 | |
| | | Buying food from the school canteen | 4 | 2 | |
| | | Wishing that the KG2 teacher would transfer with him to the 1ˢᵗ grade | 1 | .4 | |
| | | Classroom | 3 | 1.5 | |
| | | Like the school yard | 6 | 2.9 | |
| **Cognitive and skill problems** | Out of School | - | - | 0 | 0 |
| | In School | Learning in the classroom | 6 | 2.9 | 7.4 |
| | | There is no swimming pool in the school | 3 | 1.5 | |
| | | Outdoor games in the school yard are not allowed | 4 | 2 | |
| | | There are no games in the primary school yard | 2 | 1 | |
| **Social and psychological problems** | Out of School | - | - | 0 | 0 |
| | In School | Feeling alone because of language (Iranian student) | 1 | .4 | 4.9 |
| | | No flowers or greenery in the school | 3 | 1.5 | |
| | | Fear of bullying | 2 | 1 | |
| | | Scared of the principal | 4 | 2 | |
| **Total** | | | 205 | 100 | 100 |

### 6.2.2.1. Cognitive and Skill Needs

The children's cognitive needs were less likely to be expressed by the children in the study sample compared to their social and psychological needs. However, some of the needs connected to **inside the school** appeared impressive to me. Nine of the KG2 children, as well as nine of them in the first grade, indicated a preference for learning in nature in the outdoor school yard. Thus, they portrayed the school yard and objects or activities in that place. For example, HNM, a KG2 child, described his drawing (shown in Figure 6.10) in the following dialogue as we talked about his drawing:

- *What did HNM draw?*
- *Red butterfly, bird, tree, small house, worm.*
- *Where are these things that you drew?*
- *Outside.*
- *Where is the outside that you mean?*
- *School yard.*
- *So, you painted the schoolyard. Do you like learning there more than in class?*
- *I like both.*
- *Which one do you prefer more?*
- *Outside is better.*
- *Do you prefer to study there alone or with your friends?*
- *Of course, with my friends. We always play together.*

NMS, a first-grade child, provided the following answer to my questions:

- *Why do you draw a sea and a beach? Is it in the school?*
- *I like the school to be near the sea and there is sand. Then learn there.*

**Figure 6.10**

*HMN Drawing*



These responses confirm the arguments of some scholars who regard nature learning as one of the most important methods influencing children's education (Dadvand et al., 2015; Faber & Kuo, 2009; Van den Berg & Van den Berg, 2011). Without a doubt, a child's context influences its learning; for example, such physical characteristics of school environments as lighting, noise, indoor air quality, thermal comfort, building age and conditions all influence learning (Aturupane et al., 2013; Roorda et al., 2011). Along these lines, an American study (Li & Sullivan, 2016) demonstrated that students who were randomly placed in classrooms overlooking green spaces performed better on concentration tests than students in classrooms without windows.

In the responses of five of the KG2 children in the sample, as well as eight first-graders, indicated their perception of the need to learn letters and numbers, these small numbers represent less than 2% of the KG2 responses and 3.9% of the first-grade responses. Children, then, do not go to traditional learning, which they are forced to attend, according to the current state of education in many countries around the world. An example taken from among Arab countries is Kuwait, as mentioned by Alotaibi (2011), where most kindergartens feature a semi-formal curriculum concerned with teaching writing, reading

and knowledge to children. However, the presence of a group of them, even if they are few, may represent the influence of the society and the surrounding culture on directing the thinking and attitudes of children. CHAT confirms this phenomenon in terms of the effect on human activity or the actions of a group of people by the cultural environment and history surrounding them (Engeström, 1987; Foot, 2013). This idea can be found in the words of MNMK, who was in KG2 when the following dialogue took place:

- *What do you dislike about school, MNMK?*
- *There is no swimming pool. I like to learn swimming.*
- *And what else?*
- *I don't like games.*
- *Oh, do you really not like games?*
- *Yes.*
- *Why?*
- *My mother told me that school is for learning, not for playing.*

Here, the mother's influence extended to the child's attitudes towards cognitive education and not towards motor learning and other skills that come through play.

**Figure 6.11**

*Drawings of KNQ, NNM, & SBM*

Two of the children in KG2 and three in the first grade drew water at school, as shown in Figure 6.11, and discussed how they liked having a swimming pool at school to learn swimming. But unfortunately, most schools in our country do not have swimming lessons for children. In addition, three responses from KG2 children, along with six responses from first-graders, expressed the children's love for their drawing and colouring class. This observation, which points to children's interest in learning and expressing themselves through drawing and colouring, aligns with a prior study's finding that drawing has several functions, including that it helps a person communicate his thoughts and feelings to others and is useful for implementing ideas (Adams, 2006).

**Outside the school**, the results of analysis indicated that two of the KG2 children were interested in playing and learning by using a tablet; however, they also mentioned that their mothers did not always allow them to play on the tablet. I found it intriguing that the children did not talk about their needs to playing with electronic devices but expressed great interest in playing in the school outdoor games. Possibly, the availability of outdoor games distracted the children from electronic games at school, as was reported by a pilot field study conducted in Oman (Atheer, 2016). According to the results, most children used tablets (iPad) frequently, and 77% of children were addicted to electronic devices. Nevertheless, after the researcher distributed a set including various games to the participating families to use with their children as an alternative to electronic devices, 80% of these families achieved great success, and the children turned to other games with love.

### 6.2.2.2. Social and Psychological Needs

An aspect that appeared in the first phase of the analysis is evident in this criterion, becoming richer and even more detailed after hearing the children talk and express themselves. Figure 6.12 reveals the most important needs of KG2 children that they talked about themselves, while Figure 6.13 demonstrates the most important needs for pupils in the first grade. As can be seen by comparing the figures, most of the needs continued and were confirmed by the children after they crossed from one stage to the next. The first-graders also added four responses in the category of elements they loved: the country's flag, the first-grade supervisor, break time, and the school bus. Listening to children and

taking their opinion as a global trend was evident in the implementations of Finland, which believed in the agency of children and their right to express their opinion, as it supported the idea that education for the child should be like an organised chain that achieves continuity and stability for him. It even made the transition to primary school a compulsory year for every child at the age of 6. Its curricula and regulations are based on the agency of the children and their requirements during this period (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017)

**Figure 6.12**

*The KG2 Data of the Social and Psychological Needs*
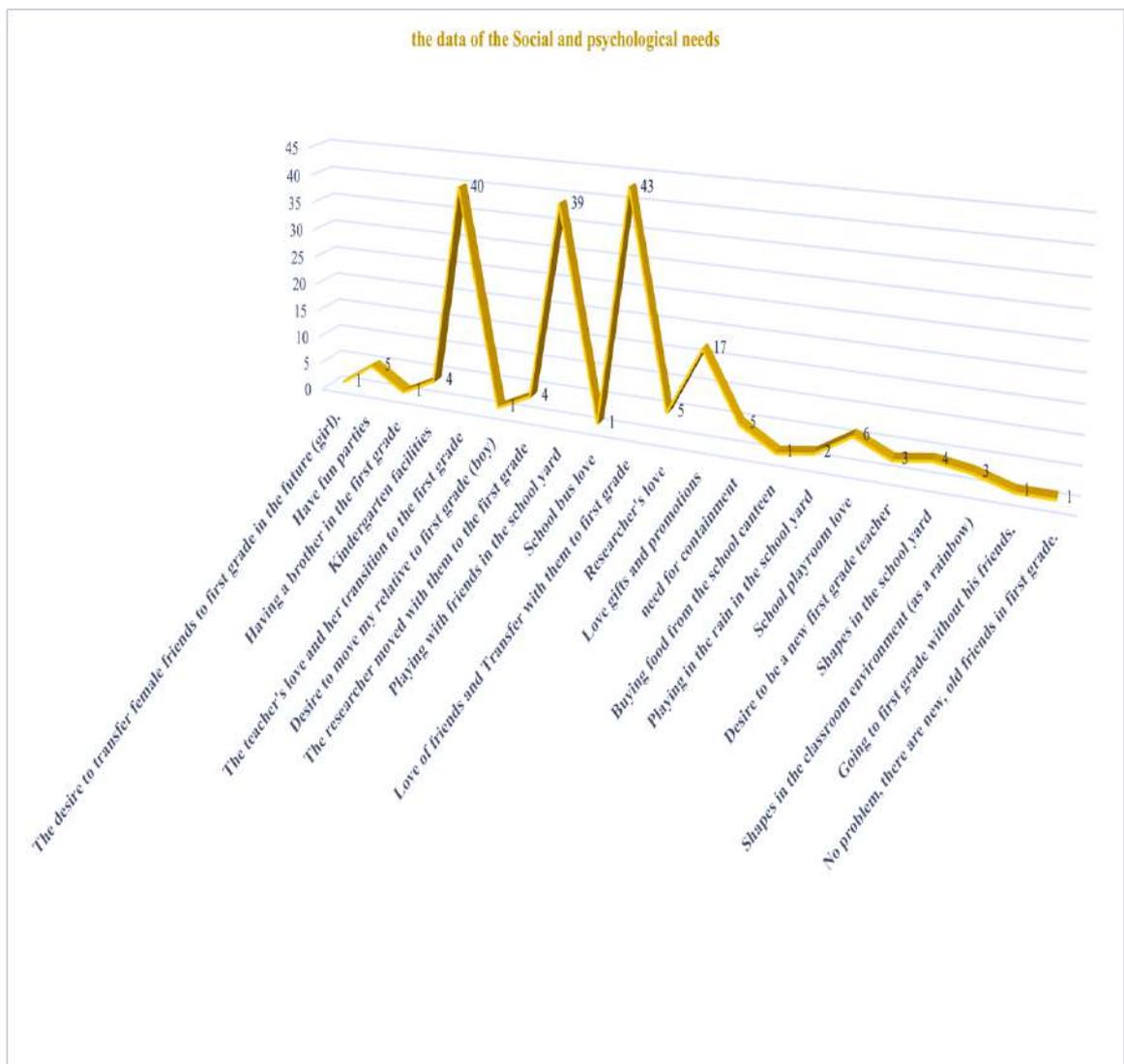
**Figure 6.13**
*Most Important Needs of Children in the 1ˢᵗ Grade*



the 1st grade data of the Social and psychological needs
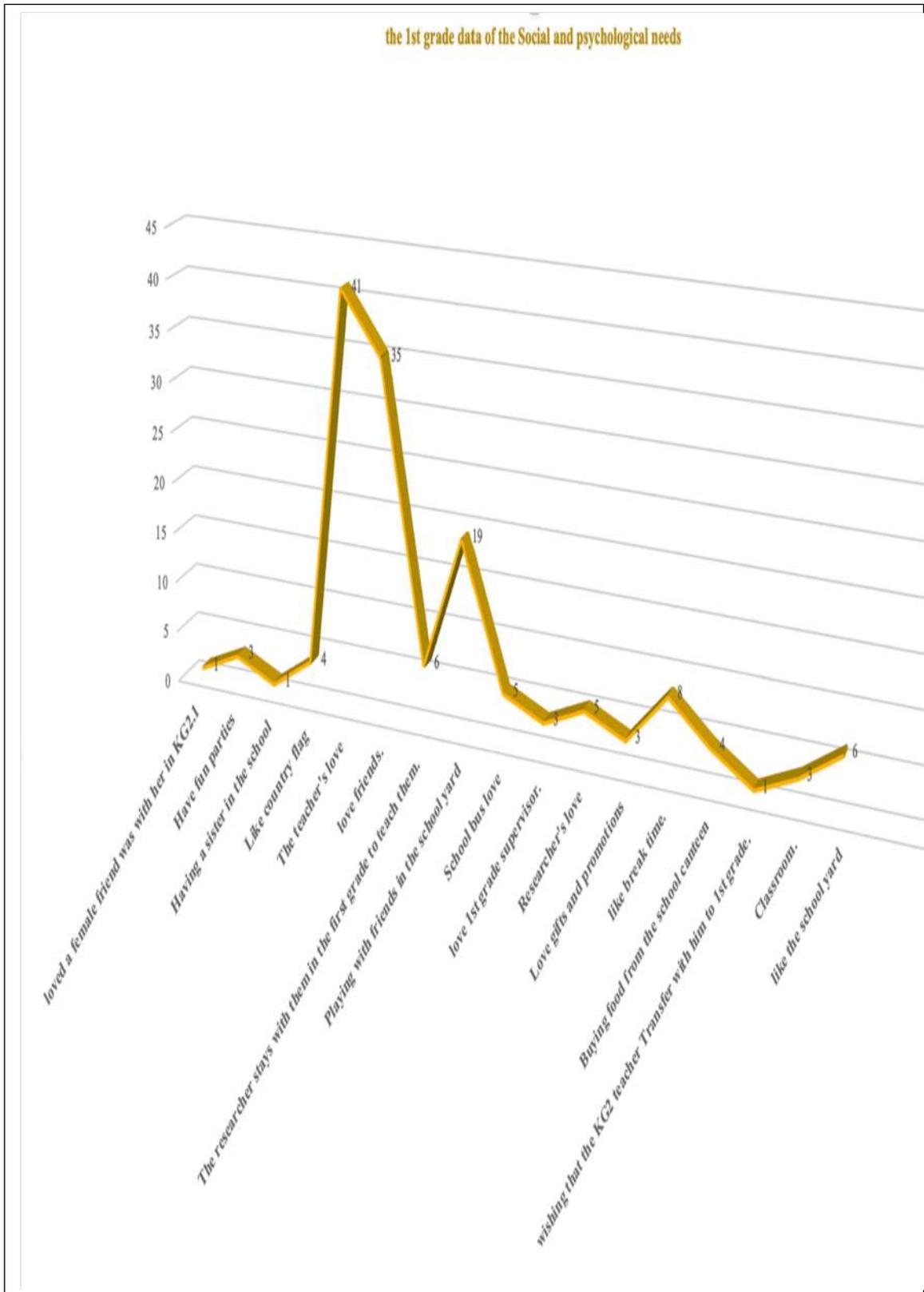
Some of the children in the sample seemed to still be attached to their homes and families while attending nursery or school. They drew and talked about the home when I asked them to draw what they needed or what made them happy at school. SHBB drew her mother, sister, and cat, as shown in Figure 6.14, and then expressed that she loved them very much and wanted them to be near her. In contrast, SNMS drew his father's car and talked about how he liked his father driving him to school, saying,

> *"This is my dad's car. I painted it blue even though it's not blue. My dad drives me to school every day; I love it so much."*

Two of the children drew their homes and told me they loved home more than school. ONMK depicted his house and described the picture to me in the following recorded conversation:

-   *What did you draw, ONMK?*
-   *My home.*
-   *Why did you paint the home? We agreed to draw what you like in school.*
-   *I like home more than school.*
-   *Why?*
-   *At home, I do what I want, play and exercise in the home yard. I go outside without restrictions.*
-   *Why don't you do it at school?*
-   *The school is just for learning. I also must get up early in the morning.*



**Fig 6-14** Drawing of SHBB

159

These children might have seen that the home did not represent for them the formal situation in school and the commitment to certain times. Indeed, the children continued to think about home after moving to the first grade, as KHBM demonstrated in his drawing of his house and family. We had the following conversation about his choice of subject matter:

- *What did you draw, KHBM?*
- *This is my home, me, my father, and my mother, I love my mother very much.*
- *Oooh. It's a wonderful home and family. But I asked you to draw things you like in school. What do you like at school?*
- *Yes, I love Mrs. R. Please, Miss, take a picture of my drawing, and send it to my mum on WhatsApp. Then tell her I'm a good boy.*
- *Of course I will, darling.*

Moreover, two of the first graders also liked home time (i.e., the end of the school day and the beginning of the return to the family). When asked, 'What did you draw, AKM?', he replied:

- *I drew my house and my friend Ithar's house.*
- *What do you like about school?*
- *I love teacher (R) and I love you.*
- *And I love you, sweetie. What else do you like about school?*
- *I love break time and home time.*

**Figure 6.15**
*AKM Drawing*
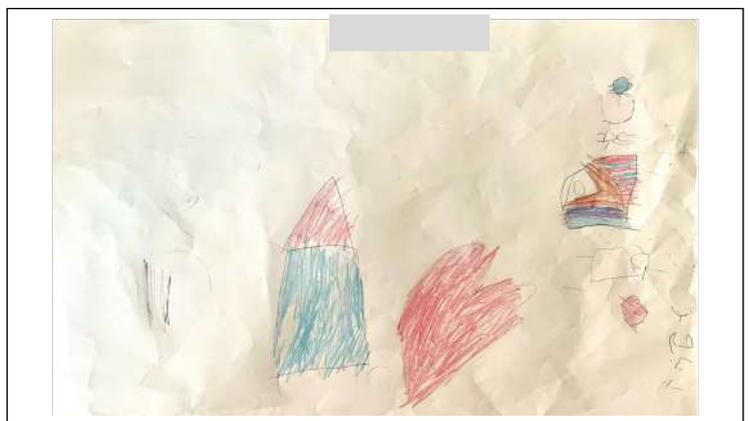
Moreover, MKM and I had the following conversation about his choice of subject matter:

- *MKM, what did you draw?*
- *I drew the sea.*
- *Is the sea in school?*
- *No.*
- *We said to draw things in school.*
- *I like swimming pool in school to swim.*
- *What else do you like in school?*
- *I like mealtime and I like home time to go to mum.*

**Figure 6.16**

*MKM Drawing*
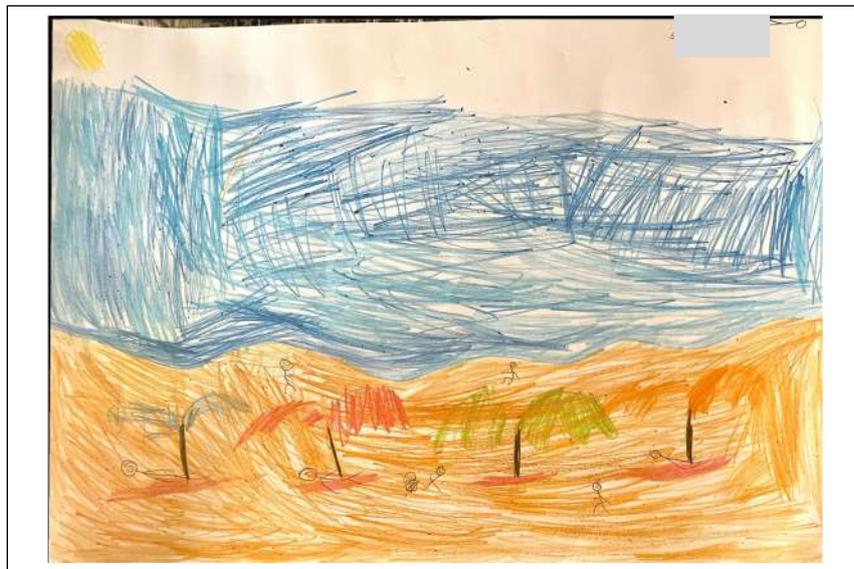


<span style="color:red">These responses suggest that the children may have been unable to adapt to, or integrate in, the school environment, as they still saw the home as their preferred place of safety.</span>

## Social and Psychological Needs Inside the School

Psychological and social needs represented the highest standards as the biggest orientation for children in expressing their needs and what makes them happy. In particular, 39 of the

sample children's opinions (87%) confirmed that what made them happiest in school was having friends and playing with them. For example, RNM only drew his friends, as shown in Figure 6.15. As we talked about his drawing, he expanded on his feelings in our dialogue, as follows:

- *RNM, you drew what you love most about school. Is it not?*
- *Yes.*
- *Tell me, what did you draw?*
- *My friends.*
- *Ooh. Maybe you drew the whole class?*
- *Yes.*
- *Do you love them all?*
- *Yes.*
- *Tell me the names of those you drew.*
- *O, SA, SU, M, SO, N, SAL, G, E, A.*
- *What do you like to do at school with them?*
- *Shall we play together?*
- *Where?*
- *In the school yard?*
- *Isn't it hot?*
- *We are young and we don't feel hot.*

**Figure 6.17**
**RNM Drawing**
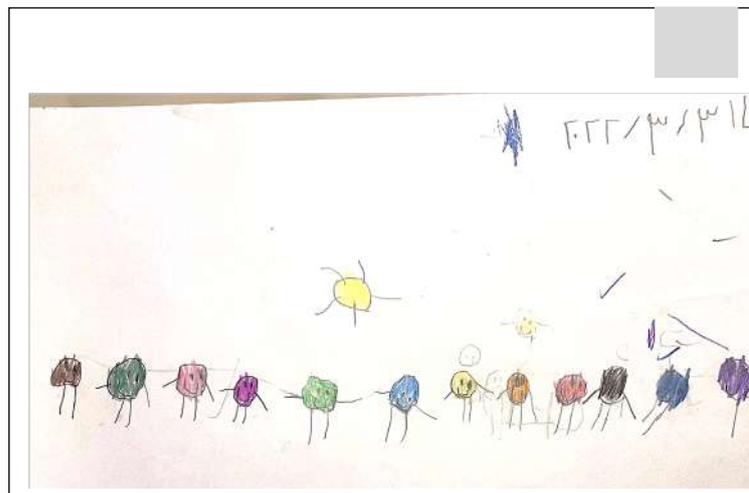
The same trend continued among the children after they moved to the first grade. At that level, 35 responses demonstrated the pupils' love for their friends. In addition, 19 of their responses indicated that they loved to play in the school yard with their friends, as demonstrated by RHBM, RBM, HBM and ABM, all of whom only drew friends in the schoolyard.

**Figure 6.18**

*Drawing of RHBM, RBM, HBM, and ABM*



Seemingly, the love of friends and the need for them would not be limited to being together at the KG2 stage. That said, 43 of the KG2 children (approximately 17.6%) responded that they would like their friends to move with them to the first grade the next year. A possible meaning could be social security for them at a stage unknown to them. KHNQ, a KG2 child, illustrated this idea in his dialogue with me as follows:

- *Do you know which class you will move to next year?*
- *Yes, first grade.*

- *Are you happy with that?*
- *Yes.*
- *Do you want to go alone with new friends? Or would you like your friends in this class to go with you?*
- *There is my brother in the first grade.*
- *Hahahaha. But he will have gone to second grade.*
- *No, he can go or wait for me.*
- *No, believe me, he is going to second grade.*
- *Then I will go with these friends. (He gestures to the children in the class)*

His brother represented safety to him in the coming stage due to their closeness. Alternatively, in the absence of that source, he saw friends as the source of his safety. Similarly, ANQ, another KG2 child, insisted that his cousin, who sat next to him in KG2, must accompany him to the first grade. Thus, the opinions of most of the sample children highlighted this issue (the presence of nursery friends) as possibly the biggest influence in the following first-grade year in terms of the child's adaptation to the new situation. This satisfaction appeared in the response of YBM, a first-grade girl, as depicted in the following conversation:

- *(Y) What did you draw?*
- *My school.*
- *What did you draw in it?*
- *This is me, and this is my sister.*
- *Oh... Is your sister at school with you?*
- *Yes, I'm happy about that. I go with her on break time.*
- *What else do you like at school?*
- *Break time.*
- *Wow. Why do you like it?*
- *To play and eat with my sister and other friends.*

Many studies have confirmed a strong relationship between friendship and happiness (Blieszner, 2014; Demir et al., 2012; Nicholson & Townsend, 2011; Uusitalo-Malmivaara & Lehto, 2013). In addition, friendships help children in their emotional and moral

development, as well as give them many social skills, such as cooperation and problem-solving. In fact, children tend to learn better in the presence of friends (Ferrer & Fugate, 2022).

Besides the importance of friends, children's teachers have great significance in their lives. Along these lines, 40 of the responses from KG2 children expressed their love for their teacher and the desire that she would go to first grade the following year, too. In our conversation, KNQ used his imagination to tell me about the extent of his attachment to the teacher and his friends (see Figure 6.17) but not others around him, as follows:

- *What did you draw, KNQ?*
- *I drew Khalifa tower, a spaceship, my teacher (H), my friends.*
- *Why did you draw all this?*
- *Me, my friends and teacher (H) will ride in the spaceship. My teacher will drive it. She will take us to the Khalifa tower. Then we will go to space. But we will be back before the home time.*
- *What if Ms H is not with you all?*
- *No, she should go with us. (His eyes look worried at my question, so I tried to change his mood afterwards with a different activity.)*

**Figure6.19**
*KNQ Drawing*
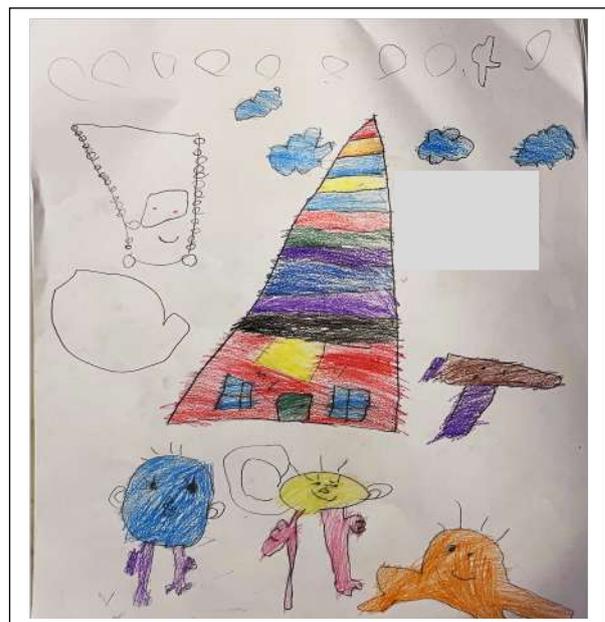
He loved his teacher as well as his friends. Therefore, he preferred that the teacher would go with them outside the globe because he felt safe in her presence: she could lead them and take them home later. MNQ also described her love for her teacher in her response to me ("*I love teacher [H] because she loves me.*"). SNMK detailed the reason for her love for the teacher, as stated in the following dialogue:

- *What did you draw, SNMK?*
- *My teacher H.*
- *Why?*
- *I like her the most in school.*
- *Why?*
- *Because she's always with us. She gives us everything. She teaches us letters, numbers, drawing. She also gives us pens and stickers. Plays with us, as well.*
- *Why did you draw roses here?*
- *I will give them to my teacher H.*

The children's feelings towards the teacher continued in the first grade, as emerged in 41 responses illustrating the children's love for their teacher. ABM and NBM drew a teacher in rainbow colours and a page full of colourful hearts around it. The following dialogue took place between NBM and me as we talked about NBM's drawing, a square with rainbow colours inside it (Figure 6.18):

- *NBM What did you draw?*
- *This is a school.*
- *Who is that inside?*
- *Ms R.*
- *And what do you like in the school also?*
- *My friends.*

**Figure 6.20**

*Drawing of NBM*
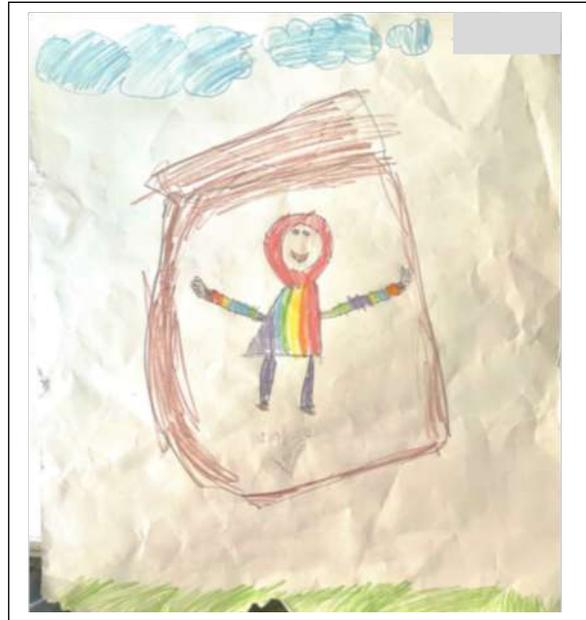


NBM drew a school with only her teacher inside. Children feel safe with the teacher as the person they spend the whole school day with. She takes care of them in terms of education, play, what they need during the break, and so on. Therefore, the teacher serves as a substitute for the mother who is the source of care at home for the child from birth. As Gopnik (2011) noted:

> *It's more important than ever to give children remarkable, spontaneous learning abilities free rein. That means a rich, stable, and safe world, with affectionate and supportive grown-ups, and lots of opportunities for exploration and play.* (p. 3)

Therefore, it seems normal and logical that the child will have a strong relationship with the tender teacher who represents the source of stability and safety for the child. However, its absence in the first grade may be one of the most important reasons for the difficulties of moving. The transition from KG2 to first grade means the child must separate from the person who provides him with tenderness and care. Many of the children in the sample showed their feelings in their facial expression when I asked them the following question:

*"If your current teacher couldn't go with you, would you be sad?"*

Most of the children did not answer with words but with anxious looks. These responses moved me to change the question and try to laugh with them to keep them from thinking about the topic.

The children also focused on their need for reinforcement through the gifts given to them by the teacher, reflecting the influence of rewards on motivation, which 17 of the KG2 children mentioned in their conversations. This observation aligns with Kohlberg's (1987) assertion that children in the age range of 2–7 years are in the reward stage, with self-interest-based motives that cause them to respond better to rewards than punishment. A clear example of this phenomenon's occurrence in the current study is my conversation with MNM about his drawing, as follows:

- *What did you draw, MNM?*
- *I drew a bunny and a panda.*
- *What are rabbit and panda?*
- *Boxes containing assorted sweets (he was pointing with his hand at two boxes on top of a cupboard in a corner of the classroom, one with a lid shaped like a panda's head and the other shaped like a bunny's head).*
- *Do you like sweets?*
- *Yes.*
- *When does the teacher usually give you one of those sweets?*
- *When I'm good.*
- *Would you like the bunny and the panda to go with you to first grade next year?*
- *Yes.*
- *Why?*
- *I want the teacher to give me sweets when I'm good in first grade.*

This observation may also indicate the children's focus on certain objects in the classroom, their attachment to them, and their desire to move with them to the next stage (first grade). Four of the KG2 children from M school drew a rainbow, a figure in the classroom that the

teacher used in a lesson when she taught them about the rainbow. The children loved the figure, and it became something they liked and talked about. These figures and outside games can be linked to the "boundary objectives" described by Vygotsky in 1978 (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) and explained in CHAT (Hogsnes, 2015). Vygotsky saw these boundaries of games and experiences as having a clear role during their transition when children are dealing with the new environment and how to act in it (Vygotsky, 1978). This phenomenon also appeared in the children's responses as first-graders, as three of them mentioned the classroom and their sense of safety inside it. Thus, the classroom might have represented for them the place where they had spent the most time with other children during the past month, starting when the new school year began. Conceivably, this proximity and duration made them feel safe and indicated the beginning of stability.

MNM indicated his desire for containment mixed with reinforcement and fun. He worked hard to get it. This desire made him, along with four other KG2 children and five of the children when they reached first grade later, picture me as someone they loved at school even though I was a new person; in fact, four of the KG2 children wanted me to go with them to first grade to be their teacher. Six of the first grade pupils wanted me to stay with them as their teacher. For example, as in the drawing in Figure 6.19, when I asked SNM about his drawing, the child answered as follows:

- *What did you draw, SNM?*
- *My teacher and you. I love my teacher O, and I love you?*
- *Why do you love me?*
- *Because you play with us every day, and you give us gifts.*

**Figure 6.21**
*Drawing of SNM*

The children felt close to me because we played together, and everyone used my mobile phone for photography and video-recording. I also distributed many gifts to them in various competitions. They were happy, and when they saw me the next day, they jumped for joy at my arrival. This observation indicates children's urgent need for play, reinforcement, and simple gifts that make them happy. Making the effort to be close to them made a psychological difference to them that was perceptible to me, even in the short time I spent with them.

The children fell in love with all things fun. Six of the KG2 children painted the playroom in the school. In addition, five drew the parties that were held in the school, such as the Ramadan celebration, Mother's Day, Teacher's Day, National Day, and Teddy's Day. In addition, 39 children depicted playing in the outside games in the school yard. After moving to the first grade, eight of them drew and talked about the break time, and four of them described buying from the school canteen, as well as the state flag in the school yard, representing the morning queue as a new experience that entailed standing with the school's senior students. Five of them drew and talked about the school bus, another new experience where they rode with the school's seniors, who made them feel transformed and grown up. In other words, the children drew the school environment they needed or focused on what they liked about it. They described various school facilities, such as the canteen, the school bus, and figures in the school that would remain stuck in their minds and represent elements of psychological connection between them and the school. According to Fabian (2013), images and children's experiences that relate to their social circumstances and the events in which they live and interact with others are also boundary objectives that help children during their transition. Will the remoteness of these icons make it difficult for children to adapt in the first grade? Will they need to emulate it in elementary schools? Did the children talk about it in first grade? This will become clear later in reviewing their problems.

Despite all of the generalisations derived from this analysis, which may apply to good groups of the sample, exceptions are inevitable. Thus, as could be expected in any similar group of young learners, three KG2 children appeared to have a different opinion in terms of wanting a new teacher in the first grade who would be different from the one teaching them in nursery school. In other words, they had no problem contemplating such a change.

Two of them said they wanted new friends other than their own. This aspect may suggest a kind of maturity and independence in their case, as they were not affected by one person growing more distant and a new person arriving. That said, one of the first grade children expressed the wish that the kindergarten teacher had moved with him.

### 6.2.2.3. Cognitive Skill Problems

The children found it difficult to talk about things that bothered them or problems they were facing. Even daring, talkative GNM showed a certain reserve in answering my questions:

- *What do you dislike about school?*
- *I love everything.*
- *What makes you unhappy at school?*
- *Nothing. I don't like to be sad.*

It was possible that the children did not like to go back to a memory that they found hurtful. Alternatively, they might not have been accustomed to someone listening to them when they were grieving and therefore were not used to expressing themselves. The fact that LM mentioned not liking to be reminded of what hurt him, and the few statements I was able to get from the other children about what made them unhappy, is evidence that these children did not appreciate these reminders.

Nevertheless, via several attempts and with the help of the teachers, I was able to come up with some topics that could pose problems for children inside the school at the cognitive level, as seven KG2 children (as well as six of them at the first grade level) talked about their unwillingness to study in the classroom. Instead, they preferred learning outside. In my view, this might have been the most important problem mentioned by the largest number of children I could get answers from. This result can be explained in the light of a Swedish field study that confirmed the effects of regenerative nature on the attention of nursery children who went on field trips compared to their peers who learned in the classroom (Mårtensson et al., 2009). The observation of this phenomenon in more than one country suggests this issue has a global dimension that affects children in general.

Three children from KG2 and three first-graders drew water and mentioned that they would like to have a swimming pool in the school to enable them to learn swimming. However, most Omani schools do not teach swimming. Two of the KG2 children did not find electronic games at school. Two first-graders also expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of toys in their school. Another four from a private school mentioned that although games existed, they were not allowed to play in them, as the games were for the nursery children. An example of this situation is in my dialogue with NNM, a first-grade girl, whose drawing appears in Figure 6.20:

- *What did you draw, NNM?*
- *My friends; this is you. I love you so much.*
- *I love you too, dear. But what is this?*
- *Me also, I love dear.*
- *It is the outdoor umbrella in the school yard. There are toys under it, but we are not allowed to play in them. We grew up, and it is for nursery children. We were playing in them last year.*

Ostensibly, public schools do not have games for all grades, making it seem logical that children in the first grade do not go to play because there are no games. But we cannot excuse the private school that has games and specialises in nursery children. Because that is one of the conditions of the ministry to give them permission to open the kindergarten stage. Perhaps we can say that they ignore the needs and psychology of children despite their knowledge of them. Many of them talked about the needs of children, explained in the chapter 7, which discusses stakeholder interviews section:7.2.2.3. on p: 193.

**Figure 6.22**

*Drawing of NNM*

This is what the children considered problems in learning knowledge, skills, and methods in nursery. A good starting point in designing children's education programmes may be to consider children's needs from their perspective as a recognition of children's agency and ability to express what they desire. Children's agency is related to their ability to choose things for themselves and find out what works for them even as they move from one stage to the next (Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi, 2013; Sairanen & Kumpulainen, 2014).

### 6.2.2.4. Social and Psychological Problems

The children were most preoccupied with their social needs for companionship and the presence of the teacher with them. Consequently, the problems they expressed were related to those issues. As became clear from their responses to questions exploring what they needed, 43 of the KG2 children wanted their friends to go with them in the future, and it was evident in their eyes how worried they were about losing friends in the future (see Figure 6.16 for examples of drawings related this issue). Forty children were concerned about having a different teacher in the first grade, as I described earlier.

However, at least one of the children differed from the others in expressing that he wanted to move to the first grade alone and with a new teacher. In his drawing, which he clarified in our conversation, was a huge imaginary circular game in the school yard with a deep, dark hole in the middle where anyone could sit to be alone. It is possible that this child might have a kind of introversion that needs to be monitored and possibly addressed to avoid its causing him problems in the future. Out of caution, I later discussed this comment with the teacher, who, in turn, alerted his parents and the social worker so they might investigate his difficulty.

In addition, three of the KG2 children and two first graders talked about bullying from some of their peers. I observed several individual instances in children, particularly girls, from KG2. The first one was SMK, who spoke about her fear that someone would spoil her personal items, such as pens and colours. The second child, MQN, did not like to be

disturbed and shouted a lot at some children. The third, SQN, disliked peers who raised their voices at the teacher. Perhaps the sensitivity conveyed in these attitudes in girls was more evident in the current study than in boys because the latter would be more accustomed to accepting fights, screaming and chaos. This suggestion agrees with prior studies (Ponitz et al., 2009; Ready et al., 2005) indicating that boys in first grade may contribute to higher rates of class chaos than girls despite the presence of teachers because girls are more persistent or more willing to please the teachers.

In addition, seven of the first-grade children expressed feelings of loneliness. They had not made new friends by the end of the first month of the school year. An extreme case was ABM, an Iranian child, who did not speak Arabic, as this was his first year in Oman. He sat alone. His drawing contained a sad face and cross marks, as shown in Figure 6.5. I talked with him using simple English words he could understand:

- *What did you draw?*
- *Nothing.*
- *Why did you draw a cross?*
- *I don't know.*
- *Why didn't you draw your friends?*
- *I have no friends.*
- *Why?*
- *Because I do not speak Arabic; no one understands me, and I do not understand anyone.*
- *But you speak some English.*
- *They don't speak it.*
- *At the beginning of the year, you were with (R). He is from the same country as you. He speaks like you. You were sitting next to each other. Why did he move to another class?*
- *Because his mother doesn't want him to speak our language at school. She wants him to learn and speak Arabic.*

Since he did not speak Arabic, he had trouble integrating with his peers. In such cases, schools tend not to consider the issue of communication and the psychology of the child.

Language is one of the most important tools for communication and integration. It was also evident that R's mother had not considered the need of child A to adapt to the environment nor the likelihood that conversations between A and R would not prevent her son from learning another language. Furthermore, the school did not alert the mother of her mistake but, rather, agreed to her request without considering the potential negative consequences to these children as well as the school (as a private school that must pursue customer satisfaction above all). In formulating its educational policy, a school should implement what it deems appropriate for the interest of the child and the mother's persuasion. It would have been better to look, for example, at the experience of Germany towards facilitating the transition of children to the first grade, where children of different ages who are in the first and second years are mixed to help each other within the programme "The Introduction of a School-Entry Phase" (Huf, 2013). So how about if they are in the same class only because one of them has studied two years of kindergarten in the same school and the other started school in the first grade?

## 6.3. Summary

In general, analysing the data made it clear that the views of children regarding their needs and problems in KG2 and after moving to first grade were strikingly similar. In both cases, the most responses related to social and psychological needs, and the smallest response concerned the problems the children faced, as illustrated in Figure 6.23.c
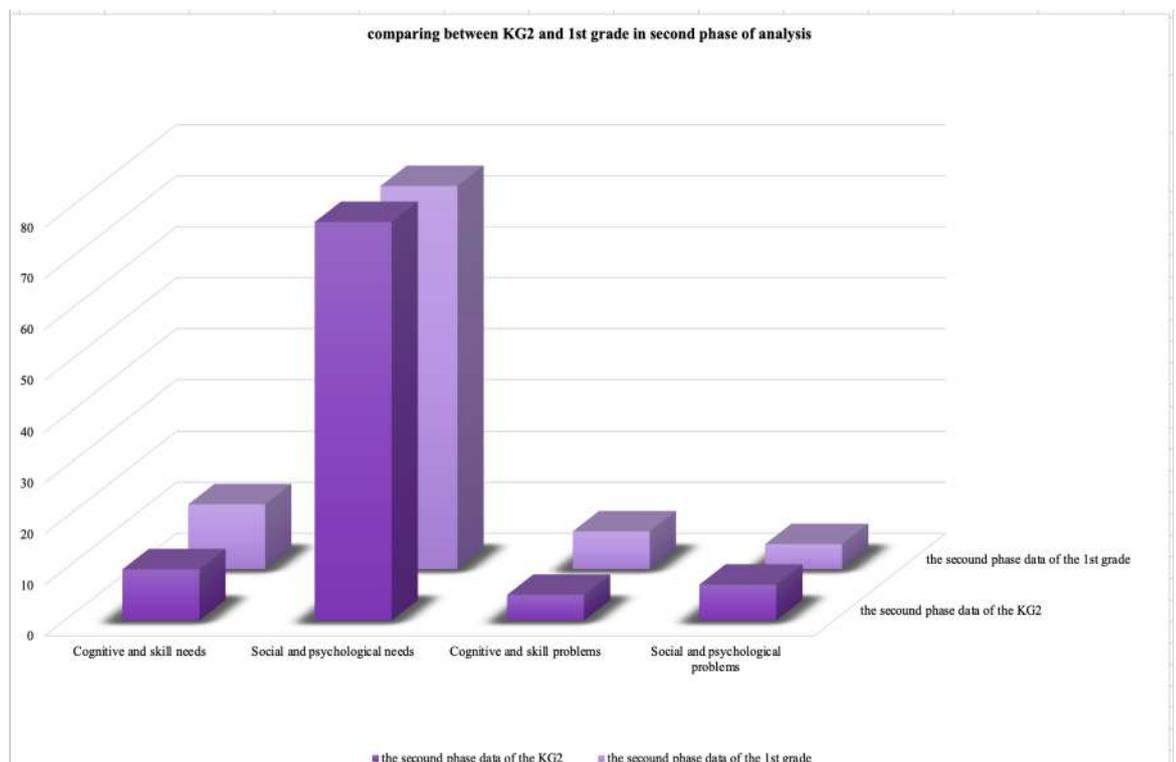


**Fig 6-23** Comparing Between KG2 and 1st Grade in the Second Phase of Analyses.

The first phase of the analysis (virtual analysis) uncovered that what children need most is social security, which is represented by their need for friends, followed by the need for psychological containment from the teacher and the surrounding environment. Likewise, children have an intense need to play; the children who participated in the study even described their preference for learning by playing and in a natural setting. More depictions of the school building appeared in their drawings than houses, which is unsurprising since school is the place where children receive organised education, meet their friends, and serves as the place where they spend most of their time.

The children apparently had more thoughts to express about what they liked compared to problems and obstacles; however, this interpretation might have resulted from the drawings seeming unclear or difficult to read to me at this stage. Such ambiguity underscores the crucial need for another phase, according to the semiotic approach, represented by expression and explanatory words on the children's part that reveal their intentions behind the contents of the drawings.

The children's lack of interest in cognitive needs appeared at this age, or they treated cognitive needs in the usual routine ways. Specifically, only four responses at the KG2 level and eight responses after the children moved on to Grade 1 included letters and numbers. This evidence suggests that academic need is far from the child's experience at this stage, so it can be built on this while looking at the child's needs that achieve a kind of stability and peace for him. To reassure him during his transition to a new stage, which is the primary school. In addition to the interest in figures and outside games to achieve continuity of experiences and build on them later, as Dewey (2005) suggested.

After the children talked about their drawings and the videos were recorded, results appeared to follow the same lines that appeared from the first phase of analysis, as illustrated in Figure 6.22. As might be expected when using the chosen analytical method, the second-phase results were richer and more profound. Nevertheless, I was pleasantly surprised when the children described their artwork and talked about themselves, as I had not thought they would interact with me in this way, preventing me from obtaining rich information from them in our interactions.

Ultimately, the children apparently cared mostly about their social and psychological needs more than any other needs. The need for friends was at the forefront of those needs, appearing in 43 responses from the children at the KG2 level and 54 from them after becoming first graders. These results indicate that children love their friends and like to play with them, confirming the observations of a study on the British experience in England as children moved from nursery to a reception class in primary school and then transferred together, for the most part, to the first grade in the same school (Brooker, 2007). Thus, friends stay together and achieve psychological stability in the first grade. The results of the current study also suggest that children's interest in friends is equal to their interest in the teacher; specifically, 40 of the KG2 children expressed their love for the teacher and their attachment to her, along with the desire for her to move with them to the first grade. This feeling continued among the children after moving to the first grade, as 41 of them focused on the teacher's love, even though not all students continued with the same KG2 teachers in all schools. First graders are attached to the class teacher, referring to the teacher of the first field (Islamic education, Arabic language, social studies) according to the educational system in Oman. The children need tenderness and containment, which they compensate for at home, a factor overlooked by Oman's educational system, which focuses on the cognitive needs of the child, in light of the participating children's discussion of their needs.

**Figure 6.24**

*The Defenses between Data Analyses Results of First and Second Analyses Phases*
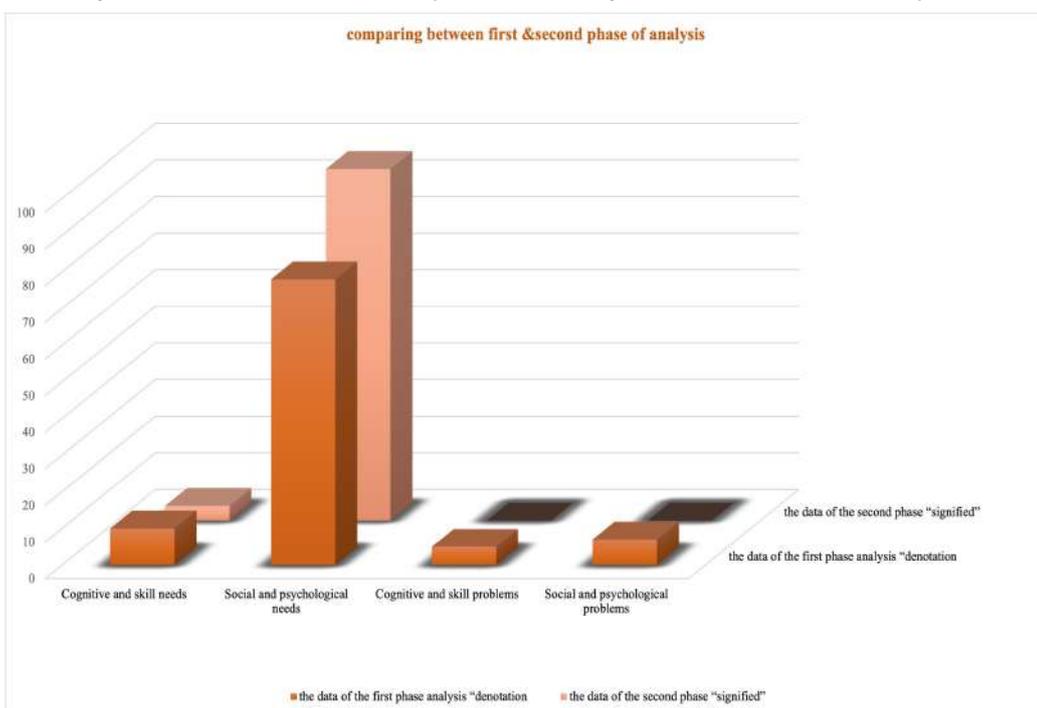
The children at both stages (KG2 and Grade 1) focused on playing with their friends in outdoor games, and they also loved learning outside. These things are not applied to them through my observation during implementation. That is, its presence in their needs from their point of view, despite its absence, is evidence of children's knowledge of the appropriate slavery for their obtaining information and learning in a way that makes them feel happy and enjoyable. I also observed a tendency in the children towards reinforcement to push them to produce the correct behaviour. While the evidence makes it clear that children are not resistant to nursery or school, it also highlights their need for a stimulus to make them love learning and be happy to attend school.

The children's mentions related to cognitive and skill needs were minimal. That said, this aspect appeared in some of them as an inclination towards learning numbers and letters. The children were also attracted by the idea of learning in a natural setting. Lastly, the children drew the school building, as well as figures found in the classroom and in the school yard, which indicates the influence of these elements and the children's connection with them.

The least-discussed aspects concerned the children's perceptions of problems. However, I was able to gather some data with the teachers' help in encouraging the children to talk, as well as through the young learners' facial expressions during the dialogue, where social problems were also a prominent issue. According to the study data, KG2 children worry about losing their friends and teachers in the future. Other problems that also emerged as increasing young learners' anxiety include losing personal items and disturbing the children around them. Furthermore, some problems continued even after transitioning to the first grade. Children in the study did not like to study in the classroom and wanted to learn swimming, a subject generally not found in Omani schools (only in international schools). The children's fear of bullying was also evident.

When the children in the study reached first grade, new problems arose for them. Their responses reveal that children feel lonely when they do not find friends at the beginning of the school year, there are no games in the public-school yards, and they are not allowed to

play in the games at the private schools. The children in one school also expressed fear of the school principal, which might be explained by the principal's focus on the need to establish systems without considering the age of these children who need to be contained at this stage. One possible solution would be to implement facets of an approach documented in Scotland towards facilitating the transition process for children from nursery to first grade, such as mutual visits between nurseries and primary schools and the sharing of the child's data and information with the primary school to which the child will move, along with teacher training. (Bryce & Humes, 2018). Others reduced the intensity of these children's fears and their effects on them.

Children's expressed needs or problems are often connected to school experiences. A contributing factor may be the child's self-centeredness, wherein he feels what is around him at that moment and can only express those perceptions. Nevertheless, the impact of the surrounding environment, both cultural and social, was noticeable, appearing in some children's responses as the desire to learn numbers and letters, imposed on them by home and society, as well as school. One child quoted his mother as saying that school was not for play but for study. The children's fear of bullying indicates the existence of behaviours owing to the background of the home environment and the parents' dealing with the child at home. The importance of the continuity of experience and its impact might have been most evident during the second phase of implementation after the move to the first grade, but there were also indications of the need for it earlier, such as children's desire for their friends and teachers to go with them, as well as some forms of the kindergarten classroom.

# Chapter 7

# Representation of Interview Data

## 7.1. Introduction

I analysed the data that I obtained from the interviews of the stakeholders by taking the most prominent major issues that appeared and then distributing them into four codes based on the theories of boundary objects from Vygotsky (1978) and CHAT (Hogsnes, 2015), along with Dewey's (1974) concept of experience, on which the study was based. The four codes are:

1. Concepts
2. Mediating artefacts
3. Division of labour
4. Rules
5. Interaction and continuity

First, I conducted the focus group interview. whose representatives were among the study sample in the individual interviews later. Each of the 10 stakeholders represented a category of those specified in the study sample, as presented in Table 7.1, and were subsequently asked to participate in an individual interview. I began the process by preparing a list of potential interviewees, each of whom I contacted individually to invite their participation in the study and obtain their written and verbal consent. I also sought their permission to create a WhatsApp group to set a time that would be convenient for everyone, receive everyone's input on the issue of time and inform the participants of the topics of discussion that would take place in the interview. Consensus was reached among group members that the meeting should take place via Zoom for multiple reasons, including the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus and the flexibility in terms of place and time for all attendees. The interviews were conducted in Arabic to support full understanding and fluent freedom of expression in accordance with the interviewees' preferences.

During the meeting, I guided the dialogue. Specifically, I asked questions and offered every participant the freedom to answer, allowing the possibility to take multiple opinions on the same question. I also distributed several questions to each person for the sake of everyone's participation and left comments on each answer from people related to what it was mentioned. Everyone was encouraged to participate and discuss, even the kindergarten teacher, who seemed more reserved than the rest. This interview informed me of the general status of the study issue in terms of the existing concepts, laws, practices, and the role of each category of stakeholders. The knowledge I obtained was helpful in the subsequent individual interviews, enabling me to focus on some of the questions from the prepared interview, and to add other questions to each person according to what I saw his role in the focused group interview.

Before conducting the individual interviews, I performed an experimental interview with one of the stakeholders, BM, to test the clarity of the questions, the effectiveness of the questions in collecting the required data according to the pre-established objectives of the interviews, as well as the suitability of the length of the questions for the time specified for each interview. The test interview results indicated that the questions were clear and fulfilled their intended purpose in collecting the required data. In addition to its suitability for the time I intended to allot to each interview, I categorised this test interview among the approved interviews for the study.

Next, I conducted 21 interviews with different categories of stakeholders, as shown in Table 7.1. Like the focus group, the individual interviews took place via Zoom, according to the interviewees' desires, and were recorded with their permission. I also took notes during each interview.

**Table 7.1**

*Categories of Stakeholders for Interviews*

| No | Stakeholders | number |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Educational policies makers | 2 |
| 2 | Nursery teachers | 3 |
| 3 | 1$^{st}$ grade teachers | 2 |
| 4 | Nursery supervisors | 2 |
| 5 | 1$^{st}$ grade supervisors | 2 |
| 6 | Nursery principals | 2 |
| 7 | Primary school principals | 3 |
| 8 | Nursery curricula developers | 1 |
| 9 | 1$^{st}$ grade curricula developers | 2 |
| 10 | Parents | |
| | Nursery children's parents | 1 |
| | 1$^{st}$ grade children's parents | 1 |
| | **Total** | 21 |

To protect the interviewees' anonymity, I assigned a code to each participant according to the first letter of his first name and the first letter of each word in the specified category of stakeholders in the current research. For example, the code for the kindergarten teacher A is AKT, while the head of supervision in Department N was assigned the code NPM. Table 7.2 provides the codes used for the interviewees.

**Table 7.2**

*Codes of Stakeholders' Category*

| No. | Code name | Stakeholders' category |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | PM | Policymakers |
| 2 | KT | KG2 teacher |
| 3 | GT | 1$^{st}$ grade teacher |
| 4 | SK | Supervisor of KG2 |
| 5 | SG | Supervisor of 1$^{st}$ grade |
| 6 | P | Parent |
| 7 | PP | Primary school principal |
| 8 | KP | KGs school principal |
| 9 | KCD | KGs curricula developer |
| 10 | GCD | 1$^{st}$ grade curricula developer |

The current study's interviews were organised for easy reference. Specifically, after each interview, I created a special file for the interview data containing the video recording, audio recording, written notes, and a separate file holding the interviewee's data. The resulting special files were then organised by category based on the stakeholder type. For example, I put the KG2 teacher's interview file in the teachers' interviews file, which was placed in stakeholders file that was located in the interviews file. As for the interview file of the Head of the Supervision Department, I put it in the file holding policy makers' interviews, which was placed in the file of the stakeholders within the interviews file. Figure 7.1 illustrates this arrangement.

**Figure 7.1**

*Arrangement of Interview Files while Stored*
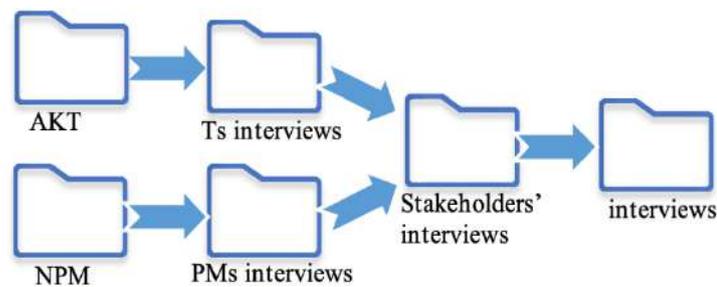


## 7.2. Interview Data Analysis

Analysing qualitative data is somewhat more difficult than analysing quantitative data. (More details on this topic are available in the Methodology chapter section:5.1. P:101) As was detailed in the discussion of the current study's methodology for analysing the participants' interviews, my data analysis followed the process of Radnor's (2002) framework for analysing interviews, which can be found in Figure 7.2.

**Figure 7.2**

*The Radnor's (2002) Framework for Analysing Interviews*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Arranging the topic | • identify both explicit and implicit topics.<br>• open a file on Microsoft Word, notes, or any useful program for each topic separately. T<br>• put a name and code of each main topic to the separated file. |
| 2. Building Category | • ories are extracted from the main topics<br>• writing the sub-topics for each topic in its file coded in the first step |
| 3. Distinguishing the main quotes | • highlight the quote<br>•  write the topic code and the category number next to it for later use |
| 4. Putting the codes quotations | • Putting the codes or numbers of specific quotations in their specified places inside the files that are encoded each according to the topic code and the category number written next to it. |
| 5. Taking coded quotes | • take some of the interview transcripts as they are to preserve the original transcript of the interviews |
| 6. Analysing for interpretation | • writing a statement or report that supports the data that is organised into topics and categories |
| 7. Deducing relationships and patterns | • Deducing relationships and patterns between topics and categories that emerge after completing their analysis |

I began the analysis process by writing an initial impression at the end of each interviews describing the issues that the interviewee had highlighted in our discourse. Next, I transcribed the entire dialogue from the interview recording, then matched the notes I took during the interviews with the transcription. The next step entailed identifying similar issues that the interviewees focused on, which led to documenting the major issues that appeared, then the sub-issues of each major issue, all of which I later linked to the keys of the study (i.e. the study objectives and questions according to the theoretical framework of CHAT). Since the interviews were in Arabic, as mentioned earlier, I randomly chose and interview and translated it into English to provide a representative example of the current study's interviews. Figure 7.3 lists the acutest issues that appeared to me after analysing the interviews, along with the sub-issues associated with each of them.

**Figure 7.3**

*Major Issues and Sub-issues of Interviews*

| | |
|---|---|
| **1** → Concept ambiguity | A clear blurring of the transition concept · The transition is an important phase. |

Random practices · No official programmes

| | |
|---|---|
| **2** → Mediating artifacts are Few, disorganised, and not official. | The most important needs of children at this stage are friendship, an affectionate teacher, and a suitable environment. · Parents' concerns are in academic and social aspects. |

Children's problems relate to the school system, new environment, and making friends. · The challenges' limitations are strategic policies related to curricula and teacher training and financial support.

Simple and random practices made by both nursey and first grade teachers.

| | |
|---|---|
| **3** → The loss of the stakeholders' roles | Absence of the role of policy makers and other stakeholders. |

Very weak communication between parents and school.

| | |
|---|---|
| **4** → The lack of rules | No clear policies · Limitations of rules |

Several teachers in the first grade compared to one teacher in KG2. · Very different school environment.

| | |
|---|---|
| **5** → Absence of Interaction and continuity | School system became formal. · Curricula do not consider continuity. |

The following sections discuss these results in more detail.

### 7.2.1.   Conceptual Ambiguity

In the concept issue, two sub-issues emerged: the stakeholders' lack of understanding of the meaning of transition, along with their agreement that transition is a crucial time for early learners.

### 7.2.1.1.     Lack of Clarity Regarding the Transition Concept

Most interviewees did not understand the term transition, implying that the concept does not exist in the Omani educational field. Out of 21 interviewees, 18 stakeholders did not approach an accurate definition or even come close to the correct meaning of the transition from KG2 to the first grade. The remainder, HPM, MPP, and APP, agreed on the same definition, which was closest to the correct understanding of the term transition defined by Love et al. (1992) as a process that includes a set of activities and practices provided by both the nursery and the primary school to bridge the gap that exists between those two institutions. Specifically, HPM, MPP, and APP defined transition as follows:

*"The transition from the stage of preparation to the stage of actual education."*

KGT approached the concept by saying,

*"The transition period means a child's transition from a small school to a large school. A different atmosphere, not the same friends, teachers, or games."*

In contrast, AKS talked around the concept, describing it as

*"a difficult stage that needs preparation, especially from the psychological and social point of view."*

Many of the remaining interviewees touched upon the lack of circulation of the term. APP provided a general definition, talking about

*"The necessary things that are available to children in order to feel psychological comfort and do academic achievement."*

RSG went into more detail, observing that

*"The children's containment needs in relation to their age and the period of time they are going through. There is abnormal psychological pressure that makes them need a rest period in the school year for the first grade, a programme to receive them, and reduce the lessons."*

These responses indicated that the interviewees dealt with implementation without understanding the stage and its concepts.

### 7.2.1.2. Consensus on Importance of Transition Phase

Although only a few of the stakeholders were able to describe the essentials of the transition process, everyone agreed that the transition phase is an essential aspect of education that demands the attention of all stakeholders, including schools and society in general. This perception is consistent with evidence from the early education literature that the transition from KG2 to first grade is very important for many children, as well as their parents and caregivers, especially in terms of the children's social and academic development. (Hughes, 2015; La Paro et al., 2000; Marcon, 2002; Toohey & Day, 2001; Rimm-Kaufmman & Pianta, 2000). The apparent lack of focus on the transition process may stem from a lack of emphasis on kindergarten, which is currently not regarded as an essential stage in the educational system in Oman. In AKT's view,

> *"Yes, of course, it is an important stage. The child is over a year old and needs to be self-reliant. Here, the role of the parents appears. But many of them are not cooperative."*

APP's response agreed with AKT's assertion regarding the importance of the transition stage but disagreed about who might be responsible and who might be negligent, as follows:

> *"Yes, it is an important stage to prepare the child academically and socially, but there was no cooperation from the teachers."*

This observation provides evidence of the deep ambiguity of the concept and, consequently, the absence of understanding of matters related to it, including particular knowledge of the roles of each stakeholder.

### 7.2.2.    Few, Unofficial, and Disorganised Mediating Artefacts

Mediating artefacts or tools are symbols, signs, and conceptual understandings that serve as physical and psychological tools, mediating activity between the subject and the object

(Cole & Engeström, 1993). The current study's mediating artefacts were language, children visiting, toys, books, teacher training, parent training, and so on.

The issues that emerged in this context included the randomness of practices, the lack of officially established programmes, and the failure to recognise and address children's actual needs. The following subsections will explore these aspects in more detail.

### 7.2.2.1.    Random Practices

Nine interviewees described scattered practices in some kindergartens and primary schools performed by female teachers on a purely personal basis. For example, first-grade teachers celebrate the beginning of the school year with their classes. During the short period spanning the first 2 days to the entire first week, they maintain a festive atmosphere in their classrooms and conduct competitions and various activities. Notably, none of the stakeholders described similar festivities at the end of the year in KG2. Two of the interviewees, who supervised the teachers RGS and AKS, reported having heard about activities or practices but did not know who implemented them. AKS confirmed her supervisor's impression, saying,

> *"There are some practices in the beginning of the academic year, but there are no activities in the kindergarten except for a graduation ceremony that may take place in the last two weeks of the school year, and the child may feel that he is moving to another stage."*

Three policy makers, APM, KGSD and SPM, did not know whether there were practices or not, as SPM specified:

> *"This is the matter of the school; I do not know if there are programmes or not. But I think that means they should be provided, such as stories for participatory reading and others, as a start for children."*

Three interviewees who were school principals emphasised certain practices at the beginning of the school year that took place with the joint efforts of the school staff. MPP, an elementary school principal, described such efforts at her school:

> *"We have a reception week for first-grade children. We annually receive a circular from the Ministry of Education that the first week be a reception week for children without specifying specific programmes or practices. The burden is on the school principal, the school counsellor, and the teachers. We carry out activities, such as providing gifts, balloons, colouring books, introducing children to school facilities, drawing on faces; it is possible to take children on a trip to the play areas in one of the malls."*

SPP, another elementary school principal, agreed with her and described very similar practices.

At the kindergarten level, some kindergartens were described as carrying out activities on their own initiative. KP, a kindergarten principal, recounted,

> *"To help the children and prepare them for the first grade, we prepare an annual plan with the teachers. Among its implementations is taking the shy children on visits to other kindergartens, developing the leadership personalities, taking the children on visits to nearby primary schools."*

Possibly, private schools featuring grades from KG-levels to Grade 4 or 12 have a better chance of dealing with the issue, as some practices are carried out at the direction of the school and not officially from the ministry.

APP, a private school principal, said,

> *"One of our procedures in the school to prepare the child for the first grade is for first-grade teachers to visit KG2 children in the last month of the school year. We also accompany KG2 children to visit the classrooms of the first grade. On broadcast in the morning assembly, the children of KG2 participate in presenting some segments with the students of the older classes so that they can integrate with the older students. A week in first grade students spend most of it in the school's play area."*

Contrariwise, two of the interviewees, a kindergarten teacher and the mother of a first-grade child, exhibited opposite opinions. In particular, the teacher AKT, said,

> *"There are no activities, just as there is no study at the beginning of the days."*

APP, the mother, confirmed this observation as follows:

> *"There is no preparation in the school and no reception." This divergence of opinions confirms the existence of some practices, but they are scattered and based on personal efforts."*

Perhaps it lacks the scientific aspect directed at treating an issue in a systematic and thoughtful manner.

My examination of the interview transcripts suggested the existence of communication between kindergarten and first-grade teachers in private schools that contain both phases. In contrast, independent kindergartens and public schools did not communicate. In this vein, NPM reflected:

> *"There is communication between the teachers of the first grade and the teachers of KG2, and it is possible that teaching aids were prepared at the beginning of the year. As for government schools, there is almost no communication with kindergartens."*

Practices that took place in kindergartens appeared in the efforts of a kindergarten teacher to prepare the children cognitively. As AKT, a KG2 teacher, described it,

> *"Yes, I had a role in helping the children of the first grade by preparing them in the skill of reading and writing in the Arabic language by preparing a plan for a programme that I would implement on them and evaluate them at the end of the semester. My preparation for this programme is the result of my accumulated experience and based on the approved curriculum for teaching Arabic."*

AKT then provided more details, saying,

> *"Yes, I help prepare children for the first grade by giving them activities to develop their knowledge, and I provide them with cognitive games to develop their thinking, as well as paper activities."*

The third KG2 teacher, MJT, similarly said:

> *"Yes, I do my part in preparing them for the first grade by memorising chapters from the Holy Qur'an, some supplications, reading and writing, and giving them the principles of mathematics."*

This evidence from the interviews illustrates the kindergarten teachers' interest in preparing the children's academic abilities to be cognitively strong in the first grade.

Seemingly, first-grade teachers are continuing this path. KGT described her approach as follows:

> *"A child needs at the beginning of the first grade to prepare a methodology for writing and reading designed for the beginning of the school year. As for me, I show pictures and videos of children about former classmates who learned in the first grade last year and took prizes for their behaviour and achievement. I also make promises to the children at the end of the school day with things and surprises for the second day that will make them happy and excited about school."*

First-grade teacher AGT also spoke of offering her pupils competitions, videos, and physical games at the beginning of the year.

Teachers in international schools that included grades from KG-level to Grade 12 described a slightly different situation, with reports that accompany the student from one class to another. As HKS described it,

> *"Students are evaluated during the academic year for the KG2 stage, and then a report is written for each student. This report goes with the student to the first-grade teacher responsible for him. The report contains a description of various aspects: psychological, social, health, and academic activities for the student. There are also activities, competitions, and video presentations to prepare the new students in the first grade."*

The evidence clearly demonstrates that practices related to easing children's transition from KG2 to the first grade in Omani schools are generally scattered, simple and informal in some schools, in essence placing the greatest burden on teachers and school staff. Also apparent was that private schools featuring continuous stages from KG to Grade 4 or 12 were in a better position to implement such practices, with the best situation seeming to be established in the most organised and professional international schools. Policy makers and other supervisors and curriculum developers were less aware of or involved in such practices, reflecting the lack of any official position on the issue, possibly pointing to a lack of awareness of the issue on the part of government officials.

### 7.2.2.2. No Official Programmes

The simple, random practices described as taking place in schools were not formal. The interviewees seemed unsure about the existence of any established educational policy on the issue of transition. For example, KG2 teacher MKT could not tell me whether the implemented programmes were compulsory or not, saying,

> *"Yes, there are programmes that are implemented for children at the beginning of the school year for the first grade, but I do not know if they are official or not. Likewise, whether it is obligatory or not."*

Such confusion reflects the absence of vision among those working in the educational field. Interviewees who ranked higher in the educational field criticised the system, as in KGCD's observation:

> *"There are no clear policies in this field. We often imitate and do not produce. That is, we see what exists and continue to reproduce it without looking at what our need is."*

KGCD's reflection points to the need for clear policies based on the actual needs existing in the field, underscoring the current study's objectives to identify existing needs and develop a framework to address them.

Yes, there are individual differences between children who come from kindergartens and between them and children who did not go to kindergartens. There are also problems that arise for them, but we do not notice so that we work to rectify issues in the educational field." These responses highlight the need to develop and implement official programmes to address the phenomenon of children not adapting, which has received little attention until now. A sobering possibility to contemplate is that such critics might discuss these issues with higher officials but do not write a response or, alternatively, remain silent in order to preserve their places and not rock the boat. Nevertheless, the educational literature offers a plethora of evidence (Fox et al., 2002; Groeneveld et al., 2013; La Paro et al., 2000; Laverick, 2008; Russ et al., 2012) emphasising the development and implementation of specialised programmes to help children deal with the shock of facing many new needs – academic, emotional, social, and behavioural – upon entering a new environment with a

new peer group, leading to challenges that responsible adults must note and focus on in seeking to help them.

APM, a high-level official, confirmed this idea, stating,

> *"There are no programmes directed at this stage. I also believe that the issue does not need to make decisions from the top down. Schools are able to produce methods and practices for this."*

In agreement were the words of the principal of a public primary school, MPP, who said:

> *"Yes, there is interest from the ministry, as we have received a circular from the ministry stating that the first week will be a reception week for middle-class children, and there will be no teaching. But the mechanism for that has not been clarified to us. It is also not mandatory. Some schools do not implement."*

From the latter's point of view, non-mandatory general circulars issued by the Ministry are considered sufficient, leaving schools to strive to handle issues such as the transition from KG2 to first grade with random practices that may or may not be effective.

### 7.2.2.3. Greatest Needs of Children at this Stage: Friendship, an Affectionate Teacher, and a Suitable Environment

Eight interviewees, representing nearly half of the study sample, believed that children need the support of friends from the beginning. Likewise, the participating children provided 35 responses that included friends. Thus, both children and adults are in agreement regarding this need, echoing the findings of Berk (1994), who focused on children's need for friends and social interaction in an atmosphere full of play and fun. For example, MKT linked friends with stability, saying,

> *"The child needs their friends to feel safe."*

EPP spoke eloquently on the topic:

> *"We have to help the child build friendships with their peers in the first grade, as it is one of their most important needs. We at our school support the establishment of friendships by honouring those who established friendships at the request of the*

*teacher, according to her vision of the need of each child, especially the antisocial child in the morning assembly."*

Thus, these stakeholders recognised the social and psychological aspects of the child as important boundary needs. Six of the interviewees stressed the importance of the female teacher's behaviour as a basic need and an important boundary object for the child's adaptation. If the child's teacher changes, the new teacher must be prepared, kind, and affectionate, dealing gently with the children. APP described children's needs in this area as follows:

*"The child needs psychological containment from the teacher and safety. Education is always directed not to abuse children. If the children find safety, they will build their trust in the teacher and the school, and this will help them to adapt."*

In addition to the importance of the teacher, the respondents cared about the school environment surrounding the child as a critical boundary object among the child's needs, as five opinions appeared in support of this idea, including the following assertion from HPM:

*"What the child needs most at the beginning is an environment similar to the kindergarten environment in terms of the availability of games, the way to sit in the classroom, a flexible and comfortable daily study programme that includes play time, and then how the teacher deals with it."*

These stakeholders believed that children need a school environment that is close to the kindergarten environment (games, different colours in the chairs and the classroom tools). Where he devoted two of them to EGT and KPM, who said,

*"The child needs to play in a place equipped with toys. This is the most important thing that makes them happy in the beginning, in order to adapt."*

That said, some interviewees highlighted the importance of supporting children's academic needs in helping them adapt in the new stage. Three participants underscored proficiency in writing, reading, and arithmetic as among the most-needed elements for children entering the first grade. APM specified:

> *"The child needs language skills that enable them to integrate with the academic levels in the first grade. There is also a need for a gradual approach that complements what they learned in kindergarten."*

However, these three interviewees showed less interest in psychological and social aspects. AKM spoke of the importance of teaching methods in transferring and building academic knowledge in children in their first stage of school, saying,

> *"The child needs an academic level that enables them to continue in the first grade, as well as attractive teaching methods at the beginning."*

Three opinions leaned towards the need for reinforcement, whether from teachers or parents. As KGT put it:

> *"The child wants reinforcement from those around him."*

The other two in this group referred to children's need for people the children know to be around them in the school environment from home, such as relatives, neighbours, or those who were with them in the kindergarten. SPM described this need as follows:

> *"The children have a need for others to be around them in life outside of school."*

RGS also mentioned children's need for safety in the transport carrying them to and from school at this stage, saying:

> *"The child needs safety, especially on school buses, and the attention of bus supervisors."*

Understandably, most interviewees valued children's psychological and social needs over academic needs, even if the distinction might be weak. Table 7.3 provides an idea of the division of the responses by their number according to their importance to the interviewees.

The next question addressed in this discussion concerns how realistically the stakeholders' actions matched their perceptions of the subject as presented to this point.

**Table 7.3**

*Arranging the Needs of Children in the Transition Phase from Most to Least Important, According to the Opinions of the Interviewees.*

| NO | Majority response | Number of responses |
|----|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | The need for friends | 8 |
| 2 | The need for a gentle teacher | 6 |
| 3 | The need for an age-appropriate school environment | 5 |
| 4 | Academic needs | 3 |
| 5 | The need for reinforcement | 3 |
| 6 | The need for people the children know from outside the school to be around them | 2 |
| 7 | The need for safety in transportation | 1 |

### 7.2.2.4.    Parents' Worries Regarding Academic and Social Aspects

Eleven of the stakeholders, comprising more than half of the sample, affirmed that the most important concern for parents at this stage is their child's academic level in terms of the ability to read and write. HKS stated this idea directly, saying,

> *"The most important thing for parents is for their child to master reading and writing at this stage."*

However, parents among the stakeholders held a contrary opinion, as in APP's assertion:

> *"The school is interested in the academic development of the child at this stage, although I did not touch anything of this. However, I look forward to the social development of my child, but I do not find it."*

BKP shared the same opinion. This apparent disagreement suggests a lack of communication between parents and other stakeholders, leading them to be unaware of each other's opinions.

Four other stakeholders named the first-grade teacher's lack of interest in their children compared to that of the kindergarten teacher as the greatest cause of parental anxiety. MPP pointed to the increase in the number of students in the first grade, saying:

*"What worries parents is the overcrowding of the classroom, which has reached 33 students on average, compared to 12 students in the KG2 classroom. As a result, the child's care and attention and the level of services that will be provided to them will decrease."*

Two interviewees focused on parents' concerns about their inability to communicate with the first-grade teacher because of her preoccupation with the numbers of students and the intensive curricula she must complete. They feared the first-grade teacher would not be able to satisfy the rights of every child and communicate with every family about all matters concerning them, unlike the kindergarten teacher. Kindergarten teacher AKT confirmed the problem, reflecting,

*"Usually, communication takes place with the kindergarten teacher more than with the first-grade teacher."*

Respondents also raised other issues involving parents' fears for their children at this stage. Four interviewees mentioned parents' worries about their children's inability to interact with others at school, which represents a new society for them, as well as the child's inability to integrate with the rest of the students and make friends. For example, EGT noted,

*"The parent is afraid that his child will not adapt with the rest of the students who are new to him in the class."*

Another parental fear reflects a child's potential inability to use the bathroom independently or buy food from the canteen, referring to services that were provided in the kindergarten. Three respondents thought that parents care about their children's psychological and behavioural status at school at the beginning of this stage. Four others also stressed the problem of bullying in school, especially from older students belonging to higher grades, and indicated the interest of parents in this issue.

In addition, a new problem emerged while talking about parents' worries, which was mentioned by three of the respondents: school buses (school bus service is free for all public-school students) due to overcrowding despite its large size because of the increasing number of children living in Oman. Among other concerns, RGS reported:

> *"There is a growing concern from parents about the buses that transport students. Especially after the tragedies that occurred after the death of children when the bus driver and the supervisor forgot them while they were sleeping on the bus, which led to their suffocation."*

Repeated occurrences of such incidents, even very few times, can cause societal panic to surge.

### 7.2.2.5.    Greatest Problems of Children: School System, New Environment, and Making Friends

Almost all of the respondents agreed that play and interactive teaching methods attract children's attention and help them learn at this stage. This opinion is consistent with evidence from the educational literature, such as Budniewski (2007) and Pianta and Cox (1999), emphasising that the transition from nursery to school is a sensitive time for children, determining their path in their adaptation to school as they move to a new environment and face new requirements, including the surrounding environment, the teacher, and friends, as well as new academic demands.

Therefore, all of these aspects must be taken into account to make this transition process easy and smooth and increase the child's love of school and learning. However, schools' current procedures do not fully support this approach beyond the diligence of individual teachers who want to achieve a positive outcome for the children. Along these lines, first-grade teacher KGT said,

> *"Yes, I practise teaching methods based on games, presenting videos and other interactive means, and constantly reinforcing children with words and symbolic gifts. But I often do not find support from the school, and I do not find the means available for that, so I buy the tools from my own money."*

Six interviewees mentioned that the change from having a single teacher in the kindergarten to having several teachers in the first grade was at the top of the list of children's problems at this stage. The teachers at different levels act differently; in particular, a female Grade 1 teacher has a more serious attitude as a subject teacher (for more details, refer to Chapter 2. section:2.5.2.3. Staffing in First Cycle School. On P:52) and is tasked with completing a specified curriculum. Thus, kindergarten teacher AKT reflected,

> *"The first-grade teachers seem more serious and intense than the kindergarten teachers. We are more like caregivers. As for them, they are teachers who have a curriculum and activities that they want to complete."*

HKS confirmed this idea, saying:

> *"The teachers of the first grade are more interested in the academic aspect, while they do not take into account the psychological aspect of the child."*

She went on to express her preference that Omani women should serve as the teachers of young children in kindergarten and first grade, specifying:

*"It is preferable for the female teachers to be Omani from the child's environment. They resemble their mother and the women he deals and interact with."*

From the perspective of three of the respondents, the change of teacher between KG2 and first grade confuses children and leads to a lack of interaction with the new teacher.

Another topic that emerged was making friends. Four interviewees mentioned the difficulty of making friends as one of the biggest problems facing children, as it may take some children a month or two to be able to form friendships that bring them comfort and help them love school. Some children endure months of loneliness, meeting only at break with their old friends from kindergarten while feeling alone in their current class, as first-grade teacher KGT sadly noted.

Seven respondents agreed that one of the commonest problems facing the child after moving to primary school is the environment surrounding the child in the classroom, such

as the shape of the chairs, tables, tools used, and outdoor playground where no games take place. Two of them focused on the issue of the change to a formal, compulsory school system, according to AKT:

> *"The first shock that children receive in the first grade is the compulsory system and formal education. In the sense that the student has become obligated to carry out activities in school, perform homework, attend class, and interact in it."*

Two stakeholders emphasised the increase in the number of students, reaching an average of 32 in a first-grade class; in contrast, the busiest kindergarten class size must not exceed 17. Two interviewees returned to their fear of school buses as representing one of the most daunting problems for a child due to the crowding of children on one bus in light of the accidents that have become public knowledge (detailed in the previous section 7.2.2.4. P:196). Thus, this factor can make it difficult for the child to adapt successfully to the new situation in primary school.

Four respondents named the home and community environment as having a bearing on the problems children encounter. Examples include parents' lack of knowledge or their lack of awareness or the Bedouin culture (in which parents are often indifferent to education and happenings in schools). At the other extreme, parenting at home and extra protectiveness pose problems of their own. RGS reflected,

> *"A child who is spoiled at home does not accept school because of the distance from home and his parents. Therefore, it is difficult for him to exercise independence. It is difficult for him to adapt to school."*

EGT offered a different perspective:

> *"Spoiling at home makes a child a bully at school."*

Two other interviewees shared this opinion. Conversely, NGS observed,

> *"The socially stable child is steadier at school, as his psychological stability makes him balanced and integrated."*

As Dewey and CHAT confirmed, it is natural for children and their psyches to be affected by the environments from which they came CHAT (Dewey, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978) (for more details, see Chapter 3 on p. 56).

### 7.2.2.6. The Challenges Limitations are Strategic Policies Related to Curricula, Teacher Training, and Financial Support

In discussing problems facing children during this time of transition, six interviewees described the intensity of the curricula, which makes the teacher focus on completing the required scientific subject without devoting attention to the rest of the children's skills, behaviour and psychological condition. KGCD referred to the large number of school subjects (see chapter 2, section: 2.5.2.3.,Curriculum on p. 50 for more details), saying,

> *"The large number of compulsory school subjects that children face in the first grade shocks them and thus delays their adaptation to the new situation."*

In addition, KGCD highlighted the lack of certain areas of expertise in the curriculum development process:

> *"There is no interest in the psychological and social dimension of the child during the development of the curricula, because there are no psychologists or counsellors in the curricula, and others from outside the curricula department are not involved."*

Thus, as they are closest to the child's needs, the absence of the female teachers' input into developing the curricula was considered a serious loss by some stakeholders. Perhaps they envisioned easing the transitional burden on children in the first grade. This lack resulted curricula that did not support the transition process, as three of the interviewees indicated. From another perspective, EGP pinpointed that the curriculum did not take into account the continuity of experience with children, observing,

> *"The first-grade curriculum is not linked to the KG2 curriculum."*

This lack of connection also complicates the children's experience of their transition from KG2 to the first grade.

Financial support was another challenge mentioned by five of the respondents. First-grade teacher EGT discussed how financial support fell short of that needed to implement the required activities as follows:

> *"We are asked to implement and diversify activities without providing the necessary materials for that. So, who can we implement them from?"*

The supervisor of the first class, NGS, agreed:

> *"There are financial difficulties in schools that prevent teachers from carrying out the supposed activities."*

However, such restrictions in the implementation of some activities may be administrative and not due to the lack of the financial support, especially in the case of activities that need to go out to the external environment. KG2 teacher MKT reflected,

> *"Yes, there are administrative challenges. We are not allowed to carry out all the activities that we want to carry out. Science does not have complete freedom in implementation."*

These responses illustrate how administrative obstacles are integrated with weak financial support to impede teachers' ability to implement learning activities as they see fit.

In addition, four respondents complained about the lack of training for teachers at all academic and psychological levels. For example, WKP specified that

> *"Teachers need courses on how to deal with children's psychology."*

Inadequate training leaves a teacher with little knowledge, as exemplified by kindergarten teacher AKT, who did not appear to be well aware of what is required at this stage, as she asserted,

> *"Currently, there are no challenges or restrictions, either."*

The information arising from these responses indicates a critical need to train teachers according to a clear vision of the goals to be achieved so that the teacher becomes fully

aware of the responsibility entrusted to her, along with the practices she must implement in scientifically studied and directed ways.

In addition, the controls that govern the school system in private schools differ from those that govern public schools in all respects, including the number of students in the classroom, the quality of the curricula, evaluation methods, and school environment. Overall, private schools enjoy a distinct advantage. The differences between the school from which the kindergarten child came and the one they will go to are wide depending on whether the child will transfer to a public school or will continue in the same private school. For example, the surrounding primary school environment in private schools is devoid of toys and trees, which is a shock to the child, as three of the respondents mentioned.

My review of the bulk of the interview data yielded categories of children who could be most at risk from transitional problems: those who did not learn in kindergarten, have difficulties such as speech difficulties and shyness, have special needs, such as children on the autism spectrum, and suffer from psychological problems. Such cases represent the majority of those who do not feel safe in the new school or experience some kind of alienation.

Despite the obstacles and challenges mentioned by the interviewees, regardless of their positions and their gradation on the career ladder, a high-ranking official in the MOE, APM, asserted:

> *"There are no significant challenges at the level of senior management in the Ministry."*

Lack of recognition of the problem or perhaps lack of awareness or interest in it has unsurprisingly led to its lack of development. This lack of vision or, perhaps, compassion might have been behind a situation mentioned by the principal of a public primary school, MPP:

> *"It was recommended by the Ministry, according to the number of students registered for the first grade, to open seven classes for them, provided that each class contains a maximum of 30 students. The children were distributed to class after*

*2 weeks, and the number of students was in every class reaching from 22–24. Then came an order from the Ministry to close the seventh section and redistribute the children randomly to the rest of the six classes. The children were terrified and cried; even the teachers joined them in crying. They started again to adapt with new teachers and new friends in the new classes.”*

The ones who must pay for these administrative mistakes, which the official did not see as challenges, are the children, who also have no idea of the resulting impact on their psyche.

### 7.2.3. Loss of the Stakeholders' Roles

Two sub-issues emerged from this main issue, which are described in the following sections.

### 7.2.3.1. Simple, Random Practices by Nursery and First-Grade Teachers

As mentioned in detail above in the section 2.1, the burden of implementing and organising various simple and random practices in the educational field mostly rests on the teachers. The practices implemented, according to the previous discussion, were entertaining and ceremonial to receive children based on the Ministry's circular, with the goal of making the first week a week of reception. However, when I asked the teachers about their role in facilitating the transition process, all three of the kindergarten teachers I interviewed agreed that their role was to develop the academic side.

In particular, kindergarten teacher AKT said,

> *"Yes, I had a role in preparing the children academically and cognitively, so that they would be ready when they reached the first grade.”*

HKS, an early education supervisor at an international school, echoed the same idea as follows:

> *"When I was a teacher, I used to enter the classroom in the second semester to see how the students studied so that I would be aware of their academic level and what knowledge they had reached. Thus, I would be ready to teach them when they moved to my class next year.”*

In this area, it became clear that those who implemented the practices were not fully aware of the issue and its importance for the child to the same degree that they were aware of official orders issued and actions that had to be taken and implemented.

### 7.2.3.2. Absence of the Role of Policy Makers and other Stakeholders

Potentially, the lack of an officially recognised definition of the term transition and the consequent absence of direct policies led to ambiguity of roles and definitions of the responsibilities for each group in the educational field. The roles continue to be unclear and randomly applied, and most of the work falls on the shoulders of school staff. On this topic, the principal of a public primary school, MPP, reported:

> *"The implementation of practices for welcoming children in the first grade is carried out by the counsellor and activities specialist in addition to the first-grade teachers. As for me, I play a supervisory role over them."*

From a leader's perspective, APM, a high-level official, said,

> *"There is modest communication between the competent authorities with regard to the Department of Curricula and the Department of Supervision of Teachers and Schools."*

The gap between these perspectives is due to the failure to define the issue and the required roles from each side. Implementation relies on personal diligence by some staff members to make it clear that they are complying with the requirements for the situation, even if their efforts are unofficial or not documented. For example, RGS, a first class supervisor, noted,

> *"My role is that during my meetings with first-grade teachers, I always stress that they must know the child's psychological characteristics. The child needs to be heard."*

Nevertheless, knowledge of psychological characteristics may not be sufficient to implement practices to help the child adapt in a matter that is likely much broader in scope. Along these lines, kindergarten supervisor AKS shared her opinion as follows:

> *"We are preparing the kindergarten teacher to give the children the foundations in the kindergarten to prepare them for the first grade."*

In this description, AKS was referring to the academic preparation of the child, where she saw her role to be focused.

In contrast, some interviewees admitted that they had no role in facilitating this transition process. For example, HPM, an official in the Kindergarten Curriculum Department, responded,

> *"I had no real role because of the lack of clarity in public policies."*

Furthermore, when I asked the supervisor of the first class, NGS, about her role in facilitating the children's transition, she replied,

> *"I have no role."*

Evidently, these two interviewees were the frankest about the fact that the Omani educational system had no officially established guidance on the transition issue under consideration.

Another stream of opinions emerged where some respondents placed all blame on other officials. An official in the Curriculum Department, SPM, described the situation in the following way:

> *"Implementing practices for this purpose in the same way as the school. There is also a guide given to first-grade teachers to prepare children to study the Arabic language, which was prepared by female teachers. As for parents, most of them are not specialists and do not have educational backgrounds, so they do not help in this matter."*

Thus, SPM placed the responsibility of caring for this issue on the school staff, teachers, and parents. In essence, he ignored his role as a specialist in the curriculum department to serve this issue. Similarly, the director of a private school, APP, seemed to hold the teacher training department responsible for a lack of support regarding transitioning children:

*"There are workshops offered by the ministry to first-grade teachers regarding teacher ethics, curricula, and teaching strategies. But there is nothing dedicated to the transition stage and how to deal with it."*

The respondents' clashing opinions could be traced to the absence of an official definition for transition in the existing educational policies.

This absence of roles led to a lack of communication between kindergartens and primary schools, which is considered a key to facilitating this transition process. As elementary school principal MPP described it:

*"There are no prior arrangements between kindergartens and primary schools – in order to learn about the child's social and psychological problems or his academic level, for example. Only while the child attends school registration is it possible to notice whether he suffers from psychological problems – if they are prominent, of course."*

Thus, the status quo reflects no official oversight or guidance regarding this critical transition. Only when the issue is placed on the agenda of educational policies will the necessary practices begin to be established.

### 7.2.3.3. Weak Communication Between Parents and School

From the perspective of the school, nursery principal WKP asserted:

*"There is a lack of awareness among mothers, and they also have no culture of the stage and the characteristics that children go through. In addition to the lack of communication from mothers."*

The principal of a private school EPP offered much the same opinion:

*"Communication is poor on the part of parents. We send pamphlets and circulars with children to the homes. Then we do not find interaction with them. Moreover, most parents do not attend periodic meetings. Perhaps communication at the time of Covid-19 was better due to remote meetings or contact by phone."*

The supervisor of the first class, NGS, agreed, saying,

*"As far as I know, communication between the school and the home does not exist."*

First-grade teacher EGT sought to appeal to parents through this study with the statement:

*"A message I send to parents to work to prepare their son for the first grade."*

As can be seen from these responses, schools blame the home for the lack of interest and communication. Also emphasised is the weak role of the home in issues of concern to the child during his studies.

On the part of the parents, opinions differed. APP, the mother of a child in the first grade, described the lack of communication with the school from her perspective, which was opposite that of the school staff quoted earlier:

> *"I do not trust the teachers of the first grade. I went to school twice at the beginning of the school year to check on my son's condition. He was shy. I did not find satisfaction from the teachers. I did not repeat the visits after that. Communication with the kindergarten teacher was better. At that time, I preferred to rely on talking to my child about his school day and his impressions so that I could discover his situation and then help him."*

As can be seen from this mother's account, the situation is different from a parent's viewpoint. Parents blame the school and the teachers for problems. This disconnect also points to the neglect of the issue at an official level, with no practices or defining roles for each category. One solution to this problem has been implemented in Scotland, where primary schools hold meetings for the parents of children who will be moving from KG2 to first grade before the children enter school (LT Scotland, 2011). The schools' purpose is to explain the transition to parents and outline what they can do to support their children at this stage.

### 7.2.4. Lack of Rules

According to Huang and Lin (2013), rules can be defined as the proper procedures and the regulations of interactions that are acceptable by the subjects and therefore have cultural properties. For the purposes of this study, the proportional rules for transition processes are defined by children's growth specifications, their cultural and historical background, past knowledge, previous experiences of the children, education policy, child rights, and more.

Among the most prominent issues in the context of the rules were a lack of clear policies and limitations to the rules, which are discussed in detail in the following sections.

### 7.2.4.1. Lack of Clear Policies

Sixteen stakeholders, representing most of the study sample, agreed that responsible official authorities have not provided any explicit policies regarding the issue of children's transition from KG2 to first grade. The following phrase was repeated in multiple interviews:

> *"There are no clear policies."*

HPM, an official in the Kindergarten Curriculum Department, explained further, saying,

> *"The policies are not clear at this stage, from the directorate responsible for them. Also, the practices in schools, if any, are not obligatory. There is a generalisation not to teach children in the first week. But its implementation is not mandatory."*

Perhaps it is necessary, now that the problem has been identified, to draw attention to a solution implemented in Japan after educators noticed the suffering of children in adapting to the new environment of the first grade (MEXT, 2016). After officially labelling the issue as "the problem of the first grade" in order to identify it, officials worked to solve it by establishing an advisory council for research and investigation on the transitional process. The aim was to smooth the way for children from ECEC to primary school, which was accomplished by reviewing the curricula and searching for ways to enhance this transition.

Despite holding important positions, some stakeholders did not seem to understand the meaning of official educational policies on this subject. Thus, WKP, a kindergarten principal, interpreted the issue as follows:

> *"There is good censorship over schools. There are also curricula designated for the two stages KG2 and grade one."*

Such viewpoints allow no room for the topic at hand, highlighting that school employees do not appear to know what it means to set specific policies for an issue and may not even recognise its importance. The principals of two public primary schools underscored this

apparent blind spot in sharing their opinions on the existence of policies. One of them, SPP, said,

> *"Yes, there are policies. We have received a circular from the Ministry of Education to receive children and that the first week should be without actual teaching. In addition, there are examinations conducted for children, as health conditions such as autism spectrum disorder, autism, and other health disabilities have spread."*

In contrast, RGS explained the reason for the lack of official interest in such issues as follows:

> *"There are no clear policies from the Ministry of Education. From my point of view, 99.2% of their interest is directed to the academic side."*

In this response, the interviewee appears to explain the reason behind marginalising such important issues related to child psychology. In a similar vein, EPP, the principal of a private school offering grades from KG levels to Grade 4, reflected,

> *"Yes, there are clear policies regarding the academic and educational field. But the psychological and social aspects are absent."*

Conceivably, this tendency to focus on academic issues was indeed the reason for the lack of attention to other issues, such as psychological and social aspects, in official policies.

### 7.2.4.2.    Limitations of Rules

Two policy makers, SPM and NPM, emphasised the ministry's cross-cutting structure in which the functions of departments sometimes overlap or, alternatively, separate functions that are supposed to be commonly applied. Such organisational confusion can lead to the loss of the required results. An example of the separation of tasks that are supposed to be involved is the task of producing curricula, as described by NPM, a high-ranking officer in the Curriculum Department:

> *"There is no communication between the developers of kindergarten curricula and those of the first grade or beyond. This creates separation and lack of continuity."*

SPM, an official in the same department, specified:

*"The difficulty of making directed decisions stems from the complexity of the Ministry's structure. This leads to overlapping roles. Therefore, each department does not know whether it has to take this decision, or is it the responsibility of another department?"*

Consequently, the ramifications of the structure, such as duplication that is evident in the Curriculum Directorate in the Ministry and the Curriculum Department in the Private Schools Directorate, blurs the lines of responsibility. As a result, determining who is responsible for the kindergarten curricula or linking them with the first-grade curricula may be challenging, if not impossible. If it is difficult to assign blame for the failure to address such issues, it will be, by definition, equally difficult to assign the task of solving the problems, leaving crucial issues unresolved.

An important challenge appeared in the conversation of three of the interviewees regarding the lack of kindergartens in the official educational system of the state, which has led to a lack of focus on related issues. HPM highlighted this lack in making the following observation:

*"The biggest challenge is that kindergartens are not included in the official educational scale. Therefore, interest in them is much less than the official educational stages that start from the first grade."*

The boundaries of the official administrative laws stop at the official scale, which begins with the first grade and ends with the 12th grade. In contrast, kindergartens are left to the discretion of the schools, with ill-informed guidance from those concerned with the Ministry, reflecting the reality of administrative laws.

The laws of the MOE are inflexible and complicated from the schools' perspective, thus creating administrative difficulties. WKP, a kindergarten principal, described some of the challenges:

*"Some laws are complex and inflexible. For example, the kindergarten teacher must take the rehabilitation course for kindergartens provided by the Ministry of Education for her to be entitled to work in the kindergarten. On the other hand, the condition for her admission to this course is that she belongs to a kindergarten."*

The stipulation WKP described resembles a random decision that was not well thought out to be actionable. MPP, the principal of a public elementary school, provided a similar anecdote:

> *"In fact, kindergarten from those surroundings in our school tried to bring KG2 children to visit the school and get acquainted with its facilities as an endeavour from the kindergarten. But we did not approve that because we did not obtain permission from the General Directorate of the educational district to allow us to receive kindergarten children on the school day."*

Therefore, the laws effectively limit practices that could otherwise provide support to children moving to primary school without considering the potential benefit or possibility of unintended consequences because the issue was not explored to begin with.

From another perspective at the level of the schools' management, three of the interviewed teachers agreed that the schools' principals were rigid and not renewed. Kindergarten teacher GKT said,

> *"Sometimes we have activities that we want to implement that are obstructed by the kindergarten principal."*

MKT, a kindergarten teacher, and KGT, a first-grade teacher, echoed this assertion. It seems that the administration at all levels is practising the same process, which seems to be aimed at complicating matters and making them more difficult for those working under them. Arguably, every manager is hyper-aware of the need to satisfy his superior, causing the process to repeat itself from top to bottom.

### 7.2.5. Absence of Interaction and Continuity

Four sub-issues emerged from this point, which are discussed in the following sections.

#### 7.2.5.1. Several Teachers in the First Grade Compared to One Teacher in KG2

Most of the interviewees agreed that the biggest problem children faced and the lack of continuity of their experiences was found in the change in female teachers, as well as the

multiplicity of teachers in first grade compared to a single female teacher in KG2. Among the first grade teachers who will be introduced to every new first-grader is a teacher in the first field (Arabic, Islamic), a teacher in the second field (science, mathematics), an English language teacher, a physical education teacher, a music teacher, and an art education teacher. Consequently, children who have formed a close bond with the single kindergarten teacher who replaced their mothers' position at home are likely to encounter difficulty in connecting to so many new adults in the new environment. As NPM described it:

> *"In the kindergarten, there is only one teacher. As for the first grade, the children must deal with several teachers from the first week. Each subject has a teacher."*

This situation exposes the child to a new experience that has no connection with a similar precedent, leaving them confused about how to deal with the new demands imposed upon them. Identifying a particular teacher who will represent them with care and attention like the previous teacher may seem an impossible task.

### 7.2.5.2.    School System: from Informal to Formal

The system in the kindergarten is informal, as recounted by NPM, who said,

> *"In the kindergarten, there is not even a bell announcing the end of the lesson. There is also no set time for the class. It ends when the activity they are carrying out ends."*

In other words, the child has become accustomed to an atmosphere characterised by extensive freedom, where they do the work however they want, anyone can leave the work if they are not able to complete it, and they are allowed to sleep if they grow tired. The transition to first grade poses the necessity of adapting to a more formal academic setting. Class starts when a bell rings at a specific time and ends with the same sound. During class time, the child is obligated to pay attention and achieve. The lack of observance of gradation in class times and the distribution of materials during the school day for the first grade represents a sudden shift for the child, as RGS confirmed:

> *"There is no continuity between kindergarten and primary school. There is a big gap. Kindergarten is play, movement and a simple curriculum. As for the first grade, it is an academic system and a formal curriculum."*

In addition, formal education requires the child to participate and carry out school activities. Thus, WKP, the director of a kindergarten, specified:

> *"The system makes a big shift for the child in the curricula and teaching methods. This leads to the formation of psychological pressure on him. I do not have the technology to prepare the child for the first grade."*

In this response, the kindergarten principal admitted her inability to make a difference in the current situation. In fact, most of the interviewees described the same issues. In the kindergarten, the teacher and her assistant provide everything for the child to eat. After moving to the first grade, pupils must rely on themselves in everything, such as buying their own food from the school cafeteria or eating what they brought from home. Additionally, first-grade children are expected to go to the bathroom alone and keep track of their personal items.

The change in the system of teaching methods also makes a difference to the children. APP, the mother of a first-grade child, said,

> *"There is no continuity in the practice of activities. From dynamic and fun activities in KG2 to more serious and formal ones in the first grade."*

In the short span of 3 months of summer vacation separating KG2 from the first grade, the activities become more serious, with the unspoken expectation that the child will mature at a rapid rate to meet the new challenge, which seems counterintuitive. In fact, most of the respondents agreed that education through play is the most effective method for educating children in the kindergarten and primary school stages and should, therefore, be continued. Why their theorising has not been followed by implementation seems a mystery to me, especially since the interviewees included educational policy makers, curriculum developers, supervisors, principals of schools and kindergartens, and teachers. Individuals in all of these categories should ideally have the capacity to change an untenable situation.

### 7.2.5.3. Very Different School Environment

Nine interviewees described the lack of a playful environment in primary school compared to the environment in kindergarten. According to primary school principal, MPP:

> *"The school environment creates a shift for the child. It does not meet the child's needs in terms of games and places of entertainment. Even the shape of the classes differs. Likewise, the number of children in the class, this causes a shock to the child."*

Everything in the surrounding environment is different for the child, even the colours and shape of the chairs. The game-based environment they once knew is completely abandoned in primary school. The need to adapt to this strange new system inevitably poses a shock to the child.

### 7.2.5.4. Curricula Lack Continuity

Children face academic problems in being given a completely different and more formal curriculum. School curricula do not consider continuity, as KGT noted in the following description:

> *"Our curricula in the first grade do not take into account continuity in experience. The child comes to be shocked by the curriculum, as they are asked to write according to the activities of the curriculum since the third week."*

AGP, the mother of a first-grade child, confirmed this practice, recounting,

> *"My son is asked to write words and sometimes sentences in the first month of the school year. He is not ready for that, as he is not yet used to the school atmosphere to start learning."*

APM (the MOE official) added,

> *"The curricula vary in the first grade with different books, compared to one book in the kindergarten. Which leads to a delay in familiarity between it and the new curriculum."*

In addition to the multiplicity of curricula, the material deepened in intensity, as well, as described by the supervisor of primary schools, NGS:

> *"The child in the first grade studies only four books on the subject of the Arabic language, two books each semester, and the year contains two semesters. This is in addition to the fact that the child does not enjoy skill-based subjects such as art, music, and physical education because the methods of practising them are neither correct nor enjoyable."*

Along with the intensity of the curriculum, the way it is implemented is neither attractive nor enjoyable for children.

APP, a private school principal, added:

> *"The curricula are not linked to each other. Also, the kindergarten teachers are not prepared to implement the curriculum and prepare the child for the first grade."*

The problem also includes the weakness of kindergarten teachers in terms of preparing the child and conveying the curriculum to him in a correct manner. However, SPP, a public primary school principal, believed otherwise, at least before the impact of Covid-19 affected children's readiness to transition to the next level:

> *"Kindergarten graduates come to school and are able to write and read. Nevertheless, first-grade children this year and last year, most of them did not go to kindergarten because of Covid-19, so their levels are weak in these skills."*

SPP also brought up another problem that the curriculum does not take into account, describing the multiplicity of nationalities of some non-Arab children as follows:

> *"Every year in the first grade, we have children of different nationalities who may not constitute a large number. But cases must be considered, such as children from Bangladesh, Britain, Africa (who speak the Swahili language), Turkey, Iran, Baluchistan. They do not mix with other children because there is no language of communication between them, and they may be bullied."*

From the descriptions of these stakeholders, the curriculum in its current state does not allow for continuity or diversity in schools.

That said, some of the interviewees believed that the school curricula are based on the fact that the child starts from nothing and does not have any background even though most children in Oman are educated in kindergartens. According to NGS, a first-grade supervisor,

> *"The curriculum is incoherent. First-grade children start again to learn letters and numbers after they learned them in KG2. This makes the child feel bored."*

Along these lines arises a question as to whether boredom is the actual issue or, alternatively, whether children need some kind of revision of what they learned in KG2 after the 3-month summer vacation.

Although most of the respondents agreed that the curriculum does not support continuity, some of them disagreed with this view. Contrariwise, their responses indicated their belief that the curriculum supports continuity. A kindergarten teacher, AKT, said,

> *"Yes, there is continuity of experiences. I do activities that teach the child to hold the pen, read, and write in Arabic."*

Thus, she believed that her efforts were adequate to prepare the child for the work the latter would complete in the first grade. An educational policy maker, HPM, added:

> *"Yes, the curriculum takes into account the continuity of experience because it is a scientific subject, such as reading and writing, and the child continues in it."*

In other words, these interviewees saw continuity as continuing to learn the skills of the Arabic language, reading and writing, as well as mathematics, regardless of the method. This notion was confirmed by the kindergarten teacher, MKT, who said,

> *"Yes, the curriculum considers the continuity of experience, so the child learns letters, the Qur'an, and general science."*

Nonetheless, the situation may differ in international schools, which employ their own curricula, thus accommodating the stages of the child's progress through the school classes. In this vein, a kindergarten supervisor is in an international school, HKS explained,

> *"Yes, there is consideration for continuity. Our curriculum picks up where the child left off and builds on it in first grade."*

The observation may be true, at least from her point of view.

Notably, the interviewees' focus was on the curriculum with its academic spirit by learning the basic academic skills of reading, writing and mathematics, in addition to the educational activities they implemented to communicate this knowledge. Nevertheless, this approach lacked any consideration of continuity in the psychological and social aspects of the curriculum, which must be covered. Accordingly, their responses provided evidence of the absence of these aspects in the educational system, having been overlooked by those in charge of it.

## 7.3. Summary

The interviews conducted with the study sample yielded a variety of categories related to the transition issue involving children moving from KG2 to the first grade. To obtain a diversity of opinions at various levels, I ensured that the sample included teachers for the two stages, supervisors for the two stages, kindergarten and primary school principals, curricula developers for the two stages, and educational policy makers at different levels, as well as parents. Consequently, this diversity provided richness in the collected data. The respondents' opinions sometimes coincided and at other times diverged, illuminating the status of the subject under discussion. Five main issues emerged from the interview data analysis, along with related sub-issues. In addition to answering the study's questions, the identification of these issues supported the implementation of the theoretical framework of the study, which was built upon CHAT and Dewey's theory of continuity of experience.

Among the most prominent issues that emerged was the ambiguity of the concept, as the respondents generally lacked distinct ideas about the concept of transition. It can be said that this concept of transition is not known in the Omani educational community. Nevertheless, all of the participants agreed that this stage of transition is an important stage for the child, either helping them become stable and interactive or having the opposite effect. The second issue arose from the lack of practices to facilitate these young learners' transition. The process is also unorganised and informal, characterised by random

practices, most of which were carried out by teachers and school staff members. At the time of this study, the MOE had not formulated any official programmes to address this issue of transition.

Furthermore, the respondents emphasised that the most important needs of children, representing boundary objects according to CHAT, at this stage are the establishment of friendships, a caring teacher, and a school environment that is considerate of their needs. These needs closely matched the opinions of the children themselves. Therefore, it is natural that the lack of these boundary objects for children leads to problems in transitioning and adapting for them. (For more details, please see Chapter 6: sectiont: 6.2.2.2 on p. 156). In addition, most of the stakeholders considered the parents' biggest concern to be the academic level of their children. Parents themselves were divided on this issue, with one mother refuting the idea while another mother confirmed it. However, all of the participants agreed that the general problems that pose constraints to facilitating this transition process are related to curricula, teacher training and financial support for schools and female teachers. (see more details about that in current chapter, section: 7.2.2.5., p. 198)

The third issue related to the loss of the roles of stakeholders. None of them was sure of their role, perhaps due to the lack of formality in the implementation or even the absence of the issue from the agenda of educational policies. Existing practices are simple and randomly applied by first-grade teachers, as recorded in the observations I made at the beginning of the academic year 2023–2024 (for more details, please refer to Chapter 8, section: 8.3., on p. 224).

Communication between the school and the parents is also very weak, as all of the interviewees, including the parents, unanimously agreed. Accordingly, the fourth issue concerned the weakness of the regulations regarding this subject. Educational policies are unclear, as most of the interviewees indicated; administrative obstacles currently limit the existence of such laws, such as the complex structure of the ministry in which the tasks of the departments sometimes overlap or the tasks that are supposed to be shared are separated, the absence of kindergartens in the official educational ladder of the state, leading to a lack of focus on this issue. Adding to the problem, the laws of the MOE are

inflexible and impose complications on the schools, thus creating administrative difficulties for school staff.

Lastly, the fifth issue emerged from the absence of interaction and continuity as represented by Dewey's theory. The lack of continuity could be observed in several existing practices in the field, as described by the interviewees, in addition to the observations that I recorded myself (for more details, please refer to Chapter 8, section: 8.3., on p. 224).In addition, the freedom characterising KG2 gives way to a more formal school system in the first grade, featuring a completely different school environment and curriculum that does not allow for continuity.

In conclusion, the interview data illuminated the divergence of children's transition from KG2 to first grade in Oman as being far from the recommended approach stipulated in the theories adopted in the current study. Many countries around the globe have recognised the significance of this transitional period and, in response, have implemented programmes to improve young learners' experience and future prospects (for more details see Chapter 4, section:4.2., on p. 80), which have the potential to benefit Omani children in a similar manner. Therefore, a vision aimed at bridging this gap must be built based on all of the factors considered here.

# Chapter 8

# Representation of Analyses of Observation Data

## 8.1. Introduction

The observation phase of the current study took place in the participating children's elementary schools. In other words, the KG2 children who were in the sample in the first part of the study, which was carried out during the second semester of the previous year, transitioned to these elementary schools after completing KG2. Thus, some of the children were distributed between two public schools, while others remained in the same private and international schools where they had attended nursery. In all, the study was conducted in five schools: two public, two private, one bilingual, and one international.

### 8.1.1.   Implementation Steps

The observation part of the study entailed two implementation steps: an initial visit and the observation itself. The following sections provide details about each step.

#### 8.1.1.1.     Initial Visit

School staff, including principals, administrators, and teachers, begin their work 2 weeks before the school year starts for students. My initial visit, as the first step in the study's observation phase, occurred the week before the start of the school year, a week after the staff had begun their preparatory work. In the two public schools, which had not hosted any of my activities for the current study the previous year, I showed the official execution papers to the principals and explained the entire work mechanism. The principals then helped me obtain consent from the parents of the students included in my plans for the study's observation procedure. Less preparation was needed in the two private schools and the international school, as I had implemented the KG2 part of the study in them the

previous year; visiting each of these schools the day before implementation to inform the staff of my planned observation procedure was sufficient.

### 8.1.1.2.    Implementation Stage

My observation of the participating children who had moved from KG2 to Grade 1 began on the first day of the school year. One of the public schools, (H), had seven first-grade classes, five of which held some of the children from my sample. I entered each of the five classrooms in turn after attending the morning assembly with all of the children. Later that day, I moved to a private school (MK) with two first-grade classrooms that had some of my sample participants, and there I completed the rest of the school day.

On the second day of the school year, I visited the second private school (M), which was a bilingual school, where some of my sample members were distributed among three of the school's five first-grade classrooms. I attended the morning assembly with the pupils and visited the four classrooms. Then I went to the international school (USI) and spent the rest of the day there.

On the third day, I visited the second public school (BM), where some of the children from my sample were divided among four of the school's six classrooms. There, I spent the entire school day, sitting through full sessions of some classes and attending the morning assembly, break time, and home time. During the second week of the school year, I again visited all five schools over a 3-day period. Finally, during the last 3 days of the third week, I tracked the development of children's behaviour and their adaptation to the primary school situation.

I recorded all of the children's movements, attitudes, conversations, and behaviour. Sometimes, I asked them for an explanation of certain situations or behaviours. Because of our earlier encounters, the children knew me and laughed when they saw me. Since I was familiar to them, they were responsive to my questions. Some of them even ran to hug me the moment they saw me.

## 8.2. Observation Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed according to the model developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for "grounded theory". The current study's application of this approach entailed comparing the more recent data collected from observation with data previously encoded by other methods, including the children's drawings alongside their visual narratives, as well as the interviews with the stakeholders. The purpose of this comparison was to identify similarities and differences and clarify the meaning of the assessed categories, along with identifying sub-categories and describing the possible links between them. This technique provided triangulation of the data.

The following codes, which were applied in analysing the stakeholders' interview data and the children's visual narratives, were also used to analyse the data collected via the study's observations.

### 8.2.1. Codes Used in Interview Analysis

1. Concepts
2. Mediating artefacts (Boundary objects): According to the definition presented in the theory chapter, the boundary objects include mediating artefacts or tools that are symbols, signs, and conceptual understandings that serve as physical and psychological tools, mediating activity between the subject and the object (Cole & Engeström, 1993). For the purposes of the current study, these mediating artefacts are language, children visiting, toys, books, teacher training, parent training, and other such factors. Also considered among these boundary objects are the children's cognitive and skill needs and their social and psychological needs within and outside the school.
3. Division of labour
4. Rules
5. Interaction and continuity

### 8.2.2. Codes Used to Analyse Children's Visual Narratives

- Cognitive and skill needs within and outside the school in the right part.
- Social and psychological needs within and outside the school in the upper-left part.
- Cognitive and skill problems in the school and outside it in the lower-right part.
- Social and psychological problems in the upper part of the school and outside it in the lower left part.

### 8.3. Analysis of Observation Data

Based on the description presented earlier, the notes presented in Table 8.1 have been classified according to the defined codes into similarities and differences. Descriptive details are included, wherein the codes for analysing the children's visual narration data are treated as the main codes, and the data related to the codes for analysing interviews were merged within it to avoid repetition or any illogical extension of the same results or situations, as they are linked and poured into one vessel.

The observations in Table 8.1 are grouped according to the codes I relied on in analysing the issues that emerged from the children's drawings and narration in addition to interviews with the stakeholders. As mentioned earlier and seen in the table, some similarities as well as differences emerged between the codes and the field observations. Furthermore, other issues arose that did not appear in the children's drawings or conversations or the stakeholders' interviews. Among the possible explanations are that some of the children were unable to describe all of the details of their surroundings extensively or eloquently, while others drew whatever came to mind at that moment, or that the children, as I noticed, were more inclined to express happiness more than reasons for annoyance.

I mapped my observations to the four codes I used in analysing the children's drawings and associated narratives and integrated them with the five codes used to analyse the stakeholder interviews. The analysis data according to the interview analyses codes are displayed in Table 8.1.

**Table 8.1**

*Data Analysis According to the Interview Analysis Codes*

| Interview analysis codes<br>Cognitive and skill problems in the school and outside it | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Codes** | | **Similarities** | **Differences** | **New issues** |
| **Conceptual ambiguity** | **Lack of clarity regarding the transition concept.** | People in the school did not appear to know the term. | | Although the principal of a private school, EMK, mentioned official programmes in her school applied annually at the end of the KG2 year, such as visits to the first-grade classes, attending full classrooms with them, first-grade teachers entering the KG2 classes to talk to children to get to know them, and conducting the first 2 weeks of the first grade freely without learning. However, I have not seen any of these applications. |
| | **Transition phase is very important.** | | Neither the teachers nor the principals acted on the importance of the transition stage. | |
| **Mediating artefacts: few, unofficial, and disorganised** | **Random practices are typical.** | In some public schools, the principal and teachers received the children in the morning, distributed gifts in the classroom, or took the children on a quick tour of the school facilities. | Not all children were focused with the teacher. Some were crying and did not see anything. | |
| | **No official programmes are available.** | There is no formal programme that commits schools to specific practices or implementations. However, a non-compulsory generalisation was not implemented by all schools. | | |
| | **The most important needs of children at this stage are friendship, an affectionate teacher, and a suitable environment.** | It was also evident that the first-grade children loved teacher RBM because she was the kindest in dealing with them compared to the other grade teachers. Children who had friends they knew before also appeared more stable. | | |
| | **Parents' concerns lie in academic and social aspects.** | Some parents whose children had difficulty adapting to school were concerned about the social aspect that the child would interact with, as well as the attention and affection from school. | Most of the children's parents were not aware of the issue with the school. They often do not even come and ask about the child's situation. | |
| | **The most important problems of children are in the areas of the school system, new environment, and making friends.** | This result confirmed that the primary school environment (or the prevailing school system) is not prepared for the transition of children from nursery. There seems to be no interest in moving friends, acquaintances, or neighbours together. | | |
| | **Challenges/ limitations are strategic policies related to curricula, teacher training, and financial support.** | It was not clear that there was any strategy directed at this transition issue. The nature of the curricula and classes represents a major shift for children. Teachers do not have sufficient experience to deal with maladaptive children. | | |

| Interview analysis codes<br>Cognitive and skill problems in the school and outside it | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Codes | | Similarities | Differences | New issues |
| Loss of the stakeholders' roles | Simple and random practices are applied by both nursery and first-grade teachers. | Some first-grade teachers engaged in simple practices, such as decorating the classrooms with balloons, distributing gifts to all of the children, taking the children on an unorganised introductory tour of the school facilities, and giving the children free classes to play together, but many of the children did not move from their places because they did not know anyone. | | |
| | The role of policymakers and other stakeholders is absent in this area. | The non-appearance of any organised programmes naturally reflected the absence of laws or roles for any of the stakeholders. | | |
| | The communication between parents and school is very weak. | During the observation period, no parents were present. In the case of one girl in nursery, JNMK, who cried throughout and refused to attend classes because she was being bullied by one of her classmates, the mother played no role other than blaming the school for its failure to monitor the children. | | |
| The lack of rules | No clear policies exist. | The lack of any programmes on the ground or interest in the issue reflected the weakness of the policies guiding it. | | |
| | Rules impose limitations. | The limitations that appeared in the interviews included weak communication between nursery and first cycle schools (Grades 1–4). In addition to the presence of KG2 outside the ladder of formal education, this issue seemed abundantly clear, as there was no communication between nurseries and public schools. | In private schools, these limitations seem less severe, as children move from kindergarten to first grade in the same school. Teachers exchange their data. | |
| Absence of interaction and continuity | The first grade has several teachers, compared to one in KG2. | The child begins to interact with five or more teachers in the first grade after having one teacher and her assistant in KG2. Starting in the second week of primary school, the routine class schedule begins. | | |
| | School system becomes formal. | Primary schools were more formal in the way children sat in class and the type and colour of wooden tables commonly used in all public schools. Classes and homework are compulsory, no play times, and teaching methods are traditional. | | |
| | Very different school environments exist at the two levels. | The nursery environment is full of colours. It has indoor and outdoor games, colourful chairs and tables, a bathroom inside the classroom, and one teacher. All these elements are reversed in primary school. | | |
| | Curricula do not consider continuity. | I noticed that the KG2 curricula talk about the child, and the objects and pictures which surround them. Children also learn Arabic and English letters, some words, and some verses of the Holy Quran. In the first grade, they are taught the same letters and numbers, but the lessons are presented in a format that includes much writing, and pupils are asked to read and write. | | |

## Conceptual Ambiguity

The stakeholders in the school exhibited conceptual ambiguity in their apparent unfamiliarity with the term "transition" and consequent attitude indicating that no problem existed in this area. They seemed to be focused on the school system and curricula that they were required to implement – and that is what they did. Therefore, they did not show readiness related to the issue of transfer. This phenomenon was **similar** to the interview results revealing a lack of clarity regarding the transition concept. Conversely, a **difference** also emerged in their perception of the transition phase as very important. Nevertheless, neither the teachers nor the principals acted on the importance of the transition stage, as can be seen in Table 8.1.

## Social and Psychological Needs Within and Outside the School

Some of the children's cognitive and skill needs that they drew and talked about were **similar** my observations. The children loved the drawing class when the drawing teacher in a public primary school BM took them to the art education hall on the third day of the first week of the school year. The children were happy to change classrooms and excited about the lesson. Most of the children drew their houses and families, including the one who drew their father's car. Perhaps this type of change in the educational environment is important for the child's psychology.

In addition, the need for children to learn letters and numbers may have been evident in the situation of three girls, N, R, and F; MS in a private school, as they had not attended KG2 because of Covid-19. In contrast to other children around them, they did not know any letters or numbers. Each of them sat alone, did not mingle with anyone else, and did not participate in the class with the teacher. In fact, when the teacher insisted that one of them should stand up and interact with her, the child would start to cry. These girls believed that everyone else knew the answers, while they themselves knew nothing. R and MS continued to cry for 3 weeks.

In general, stakeholders perceived that the current curricula do not consider continuity. I noticed that the KG2 curricula talk about the child, the objects surrounding him, and the pictures shown in the materials. KG2 children also learn Arabic and English letters, some words, and some verses of the Holy Quran. After moving to the first grade, they are taught the same letters and numbers, but the lessons are presented in a format that includes much writing, and they are asked to read and write. The same verses of the Qur'an that they had memorised in KG2 are also repeated. This practice may align with Dewey's (1998) idea of the continuity of experience. Developing an implementation based on the British experience in reception classes (Huf, 2013) is another possible solution that could improve the transition issue and develop the skills every child need before entering school, regardless of the circumstances.

In addition, **differences** emerged between reality and what the pupils wanted and sought for in terms of their knowledge and skill needs. For example, on the first day of the school year in a public school, the teacher lined up all of the children in the class and took them on an introductory tour of the school facilities. However, this familiarisation activity was not sufficient for some children, who continued to ask where the toilet was when they wanted to go or even asked the teacher where the trash bin was in the classroom. In Scotland, kindergarten children are able to familiarise themselves with their future school by visiting the primary school and spending a day or more (Bryce & Humes, 2018), which may be a practical solution to this issue if applied in the Omani educational context. Another difference between the children's preferences and reality was the lack of opportunities to learn in the external environment as they would have liked.

All of the lessons I attended, spanning more than a month, were in the implementation period between the different schools in the classroom and followed the traditional approach. I asked the children while I was playing with them about their perceptions. They told me that they liked to learn outside at times and indoors at other times, yet they always learned in class. In addition, the drawing class, which the children enjoyed, did not appear to be presented to them properly. In particular, the teacher assigned seats to the children randomly; a more supportive approach might entail considering the newness of the environment to the children, as well as not knowing their classmates well and just beginning to become acquainted with the other children, where budding friendship can

help them feel safe and close to their new friends. The teacher also used complex words beyond her pupils' comprehension and age level, such as,

*"You will draw today to determine your levels and skills."*

In response to this instruction, some of the children left the paper blank, not knowing what she meant. I even saw one child take their neighbour's paper and draw and colour on it. Additionally, the children were not very committed to order and calmness and did not respond consistently to the teacher's instructions. This observation took place on the third day of the school year, and the children had not yet become accustomed to their new and serious school system. Nevertheless, the teacher maintained a serious attitude and treated her pupils as if they were older students who knew all of the laws instead of compensating for what might be expected in new first-graders' behaviour, in light of the more flexible environment they had previously known in nursery school. The children's hopes of learning swimming and other sports were also disappointed. Typical Omani schools have no swimming pools or sport halls, except for international schools, which typically enrol only a limited number of students. A summary of the analysed data according to the codes of cognitive and skill needs within and outside the school from the children's visual narratives is presented in Table 8.2.

**Table 8. 2**

*Data Analysis According to Codes for Cognitive and Skill Needs Within and Outside the School from Children's Visual Narratives.*

| Codes used in data analysis of children's visual narratives. Cognitive and skill needs within and outside the school. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Codes** | **Similarities** | **Differences** | **New issues** |
| **Learning in nature in the outdoor school yard** | . | All lessons were in the classroom and followed traditional methods. | Although the teacher took all the children in the class on a tour to introduce them to the school facilities, some still asked where the toilet was. |
| **Drawing classes** | The children were happy to go to the drawing room and were excited about the class. The children were not very committed to order and calmness. They did not respond much to the teacher's instructions. Most of the children drew their houses and families, some drew their fathers' cars, and some left the paper blank because they did not know what the teacher wanted. One student took their neighbour's paper and drew for them. | The drawing teacher was serious and dealt with pupils as adults. She also re-distributed the children in groups. They called to each other, but she did not respond to them. | |
| **Learning numbers and letters** | Three of the girls had missed attending KG2 because of COVID-19. Thus, their knowledge of letters and numbers was poor compared to their peers. Each sat alone and did not engage with anyone, nor did they participate in class with the teacher. | | |
| **Learning swimming** | | Despite the children's wishes, there were no sports for children to play and no swimming. | |

## Social and Psychological Needs Within and Outside the School

Through their drawings and dialogues, the children expressed their needs in the social and psychological aspects, which were confirmed by the **similarity** between those data and my observations. For example, during the last lesson of the day, the children kept asking when the class would end. They wanted to know when they could go home. Presumably, a child who feels safe and stable at school during this transition period would not express

impatience with the duration of the last lesson, along with their desire for the school day to end. Two minutes after the home time bell rang, the classroom was empty of children, and I was left alone.

Their connection to their homes was evident in the request KH made of me to take a picture of his drawing and send it to their mother via WhatsApp, along with telling her that he was a good student. In addition, most of the children drew their houses, family members, and their parents' cars in the drawing class that I attended. While it may be natural for a young child to be attached to their home and mother, the subjects of the study participants' drawings provide evidence of their need for similar affection in school, where they spend half of their day. Nevertheless, stakeholders underscored the weakness of parents' communication with the school, which aligns with what I noticed. One exception was the case of one girl in kindergarten, JMK, who was crying all the time and refusing to attend classes because she was being bullied by one of her classmates. The mother played no role other than blaming the school for its failure to monitor the children. Perhaps this affects the children's need for the home side at this stage.

I noticed many children who seemed relaxed, laughed, and interacted well with the classmate next to them. I asked such children if they had known each other well before coming to first grade. They told me that they were friends in nursery, for example A, Y; BA. In another instance, previous friends included M, O, E; MK. Other groups included brothers AH, AN, EY; HS, who were a set of triplets sitting next to each other, and two sisters, M and M; UAI. All of these children looked relaxed and happy. They also talked together and played during the break together.

Furthermore, these children with prior friends in the new class could get along better with others. This evidence convincingly confirms the child's need for their friends or one of their relatives to be with them in order to feel safe. In addition, friendships support children's emotional and moral development and give them many social skills, such as cooperation and problem-solving. According to the existing literature, children tend to learn better in the presence of friends (Ferrer & Fugate, 2022). This concept also appeared in stakeholders' views as reflected in the mediating artefacts code, which is that the child's most important social need is the need for friendship.

Unsurprisingly, children are exposed to many new experiences at the beginning of the school year in the first grade. The morning assembly in Omani schools is one such experience. Most of the children in the present study were happy to stand in the morning assembly and salute the flag. Perhaps this new activity made them feel that they had become older. Another new experience involved the school canteen. I observed some of the children standing happily in line with the teacher to go to the canteen in the school's outdoor yard and buy food. Then they went back to the outdoor school yard. In front of the classroom, a group of girls sat on the floor, eating and looking at others. One girl (MBM) started crying because she wanted to go with her sister in the fourth grade who could buy her food for her. In response, the teacher told her to get in line with her classmates. MBM continued to cry.

In the first weeks, break time was strange for children. Girls sat together and ate in groups of two or three. In contrast, the boys, also in groups of two or three, ate as they ran and played. Break time signified a time for all of the children when they were free from teaching or sitting in the classroom, which they appeared to enjoy despite their obvious attachment to the classroom where they spent most of their time and became used to its shape and contents. The children also told me about missing various elements of their KG2 classrooms, which supported stakeholders' interview reflections on the school system becoming more formal in children's transition from KG2 to first grade, along with their having to cope with a very different school environment.

Some public schools featured popular cartoon characters that the children loved, but they only appeared on the first day. In my view, that short time was not enough to connect the child with what they had in kindergarten. Children in private schools who moved within the same school to the first grade were better adapted to the building, the provided services, and their locations. This arrangement is similar to the Chinese experience, which supports young learners by making the nursery part of the primary school, providing the children with familiarity in dealing with the facilities and services in the school (Vaughan, 1993). Thus, the evidence confirms the need for continuity of experience for children, as described by Dewey (1998).

The child's need for containment and tenderness is also indisputable. The children in the study expressed this concept as one of their most important needs when they were drawing and talking about their teacher, their mothers, and the researcher (me), as well as another concept that the study's stakeholders confirmed in their interviews. At the beginning of my acquaintance with these children, they seemed to experience a kind of awe because I was a stranger. After our second meeting, which involved my playing with them and distributing gifts, that barrier was broken. In the third meeting, they greeted me with hugs, and they were happy to see me. Some even asked me to stay with them to teach them. In the case of those who were crying, I approached them and offered them tenderness and security, which helped them calm down and develop a liking towards me. As a result, they followed me when I moved around in the classroom or even outside during break time.

In one of the public schools (BM), I entered five classrooms among which the children of the study sample who were with me in KG2 were distributed. In Class 1/A, the teacher RBA was a new recruit for the first year and turned out to be the kindest teacher with the children. All of the children interacted well with her, loved her, and felt reassured in her presence. Later, during the implementation, all of the sample children in her class included her in the drawings that I requested from them. In contrast, in one of the private schools (MS), the children tended to go to the kindly first-grade supervisor, who was responsive to their requests. Notably, all of the children in the sample moved to the first grade and were faced with new female teachers; I was also a stranger in their eyes. Nonetheless, they quickly adapted to interactions with any adult who gave them tenderness and kindness and seemed to find reassurance with them. Thus, kindness appears to represent to young learners the continuity of the experience they transferred from their kindergarten teacher and their mother, helping them to quickly adapt, which aligns with Dewey's (2005) vision.

I also identified **differences** in terms of the children's needs in the social and psychological aspects in the area of school services. In our interviews, I listened to stakeholders say that the school system and the new environment were among the most important problems facing children. Children who moved to public schools, as well as those who were new to private schools, felt a kind of alienation and asked questions about every location in the school. One of the girls (FIUS) in an international private school had not attended the same school in the nursery stage. While interacting with the class, she suddenly started crying. In

answer to the teacher's question about why she was crying, she replied that she wanted to go to the restroom. Then she went, but when she returned, she was crying even harder. The teacher asked her again what was wrong, and she answered that she did not know where the bathroom was. This time, the teacher went with her and then returned to the class. FIUS continued to cry upon returning to the classroom and could not resume her previous mood and interaction in the class.

In a public school, another girl (MBA) went to the bathroom but did not know how to use the facilities. She soiled her clothes and then remained in the bathroom crying until the teacher went to find out why she had not returned. The teacher informed the principal, who called her mother to pick her up because she kept crying and refused to enter class. In this light, it might be useful to consider Germany's approach to facilitating the transition process for children by integrating children from different higher grades into the classroom with the first grade in order to help them in such matters (Huf, 2013).

Despite the child's need for both tenderness and love from their teacher, within the context of moving to the first grade, I noticed that all of the first-grade teachers in all of the schools I visited were new to the students. This situation was even evident in private schools that included the nursery as a part of the school. In their strange, new environment, some of the children cried, but the teachers did not pay attention to them, and so they kept crying. When I asked the teacher RQ, HS why she left FH crying, she replied,

> *"I have a large number of children, and I cannot give one of them more time than the others."*

Most of the teachers were serious with the exception of RB (in BM school) who was able to connect with the children and calm down those who were crying. In addition to the lack of encouraging interactions with their new teachers, the educational system did not cater to the children's need for contact with familiar friends, as the children who stayed in the same school were scattered among different classrooms, and the rest were scattered in different schools. Most children did not seem to interact during the first weeks of the school year with anyone besides the people they already knew, either a friend, neighbour, or relative.

The children also mentioned the need for buying from the canteen and break time. From my observations on the third day of the school year in the BM public school, at break time, the children I saw were confused and anxious as to who would go to the canteen to buy and who would stay in the classroom to eat what they had brought from home. Some even started crying. I saw children who did not engage with the break-time system in the primary school as they did not know how to enjoy the time. The girls sat, some of them alone and some crying. The boys seemed to spend the time running. Furthermore, in the public schools, the location of the canteen was problematic, as it was in the outdoor school yard, and the children had to endure the hot sun when buying food. There were also no places to eat and no guidelines for the children to follow, which made for a very confusing situation for the children at the beginning of the year. In contrast, the private schools had a smaller number of children and a canteen that was better overall, along with better places for eating and playing. Ultimately, these factors led to a situation where children in this transition period were generally unable to benefit from a fun and enjoyable break time that could give them a motive to love school and enjoy their time there.

Complementing these less than ideal experiences for children was the lack of a games room. Public primary schools do not have such a room, while private schools have a room but designate its use for nursery children only. In addition, public schools offer no shapes or means that resemble the nursery environment. In contrast, in the private schools where children were transferred within the same school, they remained in a familiar environment, providing a kind of comfort and stability. The first-grade rooms were empty at the beginning of the school year. Only one teacher (RQ) in a public school (HS) placed a model of roses and balloons in the classroom as an effort on her part. Additionally, swimming pools were available in international schools, and even the nursery children had swimming lessons. Children were very happy in swimming class. There were no electronic games or other games that the children might need, nor were there public-school playground games. When asked to contemplate what disappointed them, the children drew and talked about all of these issues. Despite the researchers' focus on the educational environment, it is important for children (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Previous research has confirmed the effects of regenerative nature on the attention of nursery children who went on field trips compared to their peers who learned in the

235

classroom (Mårtensson et al., 2009). For more details, see Table 8.3 Data analysis according to codes for social and psychological needs within/outside the school from children's visual narratives.

**Table 8.3**

*Data Analysis According to Codes for Social and Psychological Needs Within/Outside the School from Children's Visual Narratives.*

| Codes for data analysis from children's visual narratives. Social and psychological needs within and outside the school. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Codes** | **Similarities** | **Differences** | **New issues** |
| **Loved home time** | In the last class, the children asked occasionally when the class would end. They all screamed: "It's home time". | | In public schools, the canteen area was not suitable for children. It was in the outdoor school yard. The children had to walk under the hot sun to purchase food. There were no places to eat and no guidelines for behaviour. At the beginning of the year, the situation was very confusing for the children.<br><br>Private schools had fewer children, and the canteen was better, as were the seating and eating spaces. |
| **Mother's love, little sister, and cat** | One of the children finished the drawing, then asked me to take a picture of their drawing and send it to their mother. In the drawing class, most of the children drew their house and their family. | | |
| **Desire to transfer with friends to first grade** | Some friends who were together in KG2 were also together in the first grade. They seemed reassured and stable. | | |
| **Like country flag** | Children were happy standing in the assembly and saluting the flag. | | |
| **Having a sibling in the first grade** | There were siblings. AH, AN, EY (triplets) sat next to each other, as well as M&M (two sisters). All seemed relaxed and happy to talk and play and got along better with others. | | |
| **The researcher stays with them in the first grade to teach them.** | In the second meeting, I played with them and distributed gifts, thus breaking that barrier. In the third meeting, they greeted me with hugs. | | |
| **Nursery facilities** | Children in private schools who moved within the same school to the first grade were better adapted to the building. | Children who moved to new schools felt a sense of alienation, asking about locations. | |
| **The teacher's love and her transition to the first grade** | In one of the public schools, I entered five classrooms, Division A. The teacher, a new appointment, was the kindest of all the teachers. All the children loved her, and all the children in her class drew her. | All teachers in the first grade were new, even in private schools, where nursery was considered part of the school. | |
| **Desire to move to first grade with a relative** | A girl was crying during break because she wanted to go with her fourth-grade sister to the canteen. | | |
| **The researcher moved with them to the first grade** | The children asked me to continue with them as a teacher. | | |
| **Love first grade supervisor** | The children went to the supervisor in a private school. She was kind to them and responsive to their requests. | | |
| **School bus love** | Children who went on the school bus seemed happy. | | |
| **Love transferring with friends to first grade** | The children who moved with their friends seemed more secure and stable. | | |
| **Researcher's love** | The children showed love and welcomed me because I had previously played with them and gave them presents. I also cared for upset children. | | |
| **Love gifts and promotions** | Some teachers gave gifts to children on the first day. They were happy with that, but those who cried continued to do so. | | |
| **Need for containment** | The children bonded in a class from a public school whose teacher (RBA) was | Some of the children cried; the teachers did not pay attention to | |

| Codes for data analysis from children's visual narratives. Social and psychological needs within and outside the school. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Codes** | **Similarities** | **Differences** | **New issues** |
| | loving. The children were more reassured and attached to her.<br>Moreover, when I approached crying children and gave them tenderness and safety, they calmed down and liked me. | them, and they continued to cry. | |
| **Buying food from the school canteen** | Some children queued with the teacher to go to the canteen. They bought what they wanted and were delighted and later returned to the outdoor school yard.<br>In front of the classroom, a group of girls sat on the floor, eating, and looking at others. The boys ate while running. | On the third day, at the beginning of break time, the children were confused and anxious about who would go to buy from the canteen and who would stay in the classroom to eat what he had brought from home. Some of them were crying. | |
| **Like break time** | In the first weeks, break time was unfamiliar to the children. The girls sat and ate together in groups of two or three. Boys ran and played in groups of two or three. It represents a time without teaching or sitting in the classroom. | Children did not interact well with, or enjoy, the break-time system in the primary school. The girls sat while the boys ran around. Some children cried. | |
| **Playing in the rain in the school yard** | | There was no rainfall during the time of implementation and observation. | |
| **School playroom love** | | There were no playrooms in the public schools. In private schools, such rooms were only for nursery children. | |
| **Desire for a new first-grade teacher** | All first-grade teachers were very new, even in private schools. | | |
| **Shapes in the school yard** | In some public schools, there were popular cartoon characters that kids loved – but only on the first day. | No figures in public schools that resembled the nursery environment. In private schools where children were transferred to the same school, they were in the same environment, providing them a feeling of comfort and stability. | |
| **Shapes in the classroom environment (e.g., a rainbow)** | Children were attached to the classroom as they spent most of their time in it and got used to its contents. They told me they missed elements of their KG2 classrooms. | First-grade rooms at the beginning of the school year did not have any means to attract children or link them to the nursery environment. Only one teacher in a public school placed a figurine of roses and balloons in her classroom on the first day as a self-effort. | |
| **Going to first grade without his friends** | Most children went to different classes without their friends. In private schools only, some were put in the same class, but those schools distributed KG2 children to different classes for the first grade, where they were mixed with new students who had come to school this year only. | | |
| **No problem, there are new and old friends in first grade** | Few children had the courage to interact well with their new peers. | Most children did not interact during the early weeks of the school year except with those they already knew (either a friend, neighbour, or relative). | |

## Cognitive and Skill Problems Within and Outside the School

All of the problems related to knowledge and skills inside and outside the school that the children expressed in their drawings and dialogues were greatly **similar** to my observations. The lessons I attended over a period of more than a month all took place inside the classrooms and were undertaken in traditional ways. However, children need something kinetic that attracts them to learn, as I observed in a math class in a private school (MK). The teacher (J) started the lesson using the indoctrination method. Many students were not paying attention. (Y) was looking out the window. (N) asked me when the class would end (W, Z) took out the clay and played with it without looking at the teacher. Some of the quiet children looked at the teacher without focusing on her. Suddenly, the teacher started singing and dancing with the sounds and shapes of numbers, seizing the attention of all of the children. They got up and met in the middle of the classroom and started singing and dancing happily with her, repeating what she said.

In that case, a simple movement attracted the children and rescued them from the boredom that prevailed in the class. During my observations, I also confirmed that there were no swimming pools to teach the children swimming, even in private schools, even though many of the children expressed the desire to do so. Similarly, there were no electronic or other games, and there were no games in the public-school yard. Although the children had little to say about what bothered them, the topics they did expressed were reflected in the realities at school.

In terms of **differences**, I noted the existence of swimming pools in international schools, where even the nursery children had swimming lessons. Furthermore, the children were very happy in swimming class. However, the number of children in international schools is small compared to other types of schools that did not have swimming pools (see chapter 2, section 2.5.2.3. Schooling System in Oman, on p. 47 for more information).

Furthermore, private schools featured games in the outdoor playground, but they were only for nursery children, meaning that first-grade children were not allowed to play in them, as several children (N, S, R; MS) told me. According to Piaget (1971) the play is an integral

part of a child's intelligence development and is a key factor in a child's cognitive development. A summary of the topics discussed in this section are presented in Table 8.4.

**Table 8.4**

*Data Analysis According to Codes for Cognitive and Skill Problems Inside/Outside the School Children's Visual Narratives.*

| Codes for data analysis of children's visual narratives. Cognitive and skill problems within and outside the school. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Codes** | **Similarities** | **Differences** | **New issues** |
| **Learning in the classroom** | All of the classes I attended over a period of more than a month were all in the classroom and conducted in traditional ways. | Swimming pools are available in international schools; even nursery children have swimming lessons. Children are very happy in swimming class. | A private-school teacher in the first lesson of the first grade wrote all of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. She then asked each child to read it individually. Some children did not know many of the letters, possibly because they did not attend nursery due to COVID-19. Some forgot what they had learned the previous year.

A mathematics teacher in a private school started the lesson using the indoctrination method. Many students were bored and inattentive. She suddenly started singing and dancing with the sounds and shapes of numbers. All of the children got up and happily began to sing and dance with her, repeating what she said. |
| **No swimming pool in the school** | There were no swimming pools to teach the children to swim, even in private schools, despite many children's desire for such opportunities. | | |
| **No electronic games in the school** | Other games in primary schools. | | |
| **No games in primary school yard** | There were no public-school playground games. | They are present in private schools, but children in the first grade are not allowed to play in them. | |

## Social and Psychological Problems in the School and Outside it

Conducting multiple observations among children in different schools allowed me to identify typical problems affecting them. Table 8.5 summarises the results of my data analysis corresponding to the codes for social and psychological problems inside and outside of the school from the children's visual narratives.

Some of them are what they actually expressed and **were similar** to my observations. As for the problem of losing friends and their need of moving with them, it was the most

important issue that preoccupied children in their drawings and dialogues. A child SBA in the second week was sitting alone in the classroom during break time because they had no friends to play with. Sadness and crying sometimes come from those who are in the first grade and did not find any of their friends who were with them. Many of them could not make friends quickly. They were sitting alone and had little interaction in the lessons with the teacher and the rest of the children. Rather, 6 girls and one boy in different classes in different schools were crying because they felt lonely and did not find friends and did not know the teacher. This is what they told me when I asked them about the reason for crying. Another reason why children felt lonely was that the language of the child was different from the language prevailing in the school community. AM An Iranian child who feels lonely in the third week did not speak Arabic but simple English. When I was with them in the first week, an Iranian child RM was with them in the same classroom, but he studied in Oman at the KG stage for two years. He spoke Arabic and knew many children who are in his class because they continued in the same private school.

Then moved to the first grade in the same school. R and A used to sit together in the beginning of the year, they spoke Farsi, and they used to go out at break time together. Then I noticed A's introversion and calmness in the third week. I asked him about the absence of R and that he sit alone and does not interact with the teachers or the rest of the children, so he said,

> *"R's mother wanted to keep him away from me so that he could speak Arabic with the rest of the children and not speak our language."*

I don't know who to blame on the mother who did not understand the importance of the presence of her child with the new student until they adapt. Then she takes the action she desires. Or should we ask the school that responded to the mother without caring about A's situation and explaining that to the mother? Perhaps the two of them shared a mistake, but I see that the school is the most mistaken, because those in it are educators and psychologists, and they know how to act in this matter. This was also confirmed by stakeholders, that most parents' attention is on academic progress. If we look at the German experience in this matter, how did they integrate children from higher grades to help the new students to adapt, and this did not cause a defect in their education (Huf, 2013).

241

**Table 8.5**

Data Analysis According to the Codes for Social and Psychological Problems Inside/Outside the School from Children's Visual Narratives.

| Codes | Similarities | Differences | New issues |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Codes for data analysis from children's visual narratives.** <br> **Social and psychological problems inside and outside the school.** | | | |
| **Losing friends** | Children who came to first grade and did not find any previous friends in their new class were sometimes sad and crying. Many did not make friends quickly; they sat alone and had little-to-no interaction with the teacher and the rest of the children during the lessons. | Some children found their friends who were with them in nursery. They looked happy and relieved. | There is no unified programme or clear plan for receiving children in the first grade. Each teacher received the children of her class according to her vision. Some teachers put up balloons on the first day and brought sweets. Some reviewed educational objects, such as numbers and letters, but only a few children interacted with them. Some of them would sit and let the children draw and paint, but required everyone to sit in their seats.<br><br>An important issue arose with a girl (Retaj, Talent) who had not attended KG for the past 2 years due to COVID-19. She was not social, had no academic skills, and was placed in the first grade because of her age and her mother's insistence (despite her lack of social or academic adaptation). She was silent, introverted, and cried constantly, even at the end of the third week. She refused to participate in any activity in the class, did not respond to the teachers, and did not use any of her school items, such as pens or notebooks, like the rest of the children. |
| **Change the teacher in the future in the first grade** | All of the teachers for the first grade were new to the children. One familiar KG2 teacher was replaced by several teachers for different subjects. | | |
| **Fear of bullying** | Some children hit and bullied other students. | | |
| **Desire to play in the school yard alone** | One child in a class in the second week sat alone in the classroom during break time because he had no friends to play with. | | |
| **Going to first grade alone** | Six girls and one boy in different classes cried because they felt lonely, had no friends, and did not know the teacher. | | |
| **Annoyance at children yelling at the teacher** | Some children did not listen to or obey the teacher because they were used to the nursery environment, where children are allowed relative freedom (e.g., sitting comfortably and speaking whenever they choose to do so). | | |
| **Feeling alone because of language (Iranian pupil)** | An Iranian child felt lonely and alienated in the second week because he did not speak Arabic, but could speak simple English. | | |
| **No flowers or greenery in the school** | There were no plants or green spaces inside the school or in the outdoor yard. | | |
| **Discomfort with others damaging personal items, such as pens and notebooks** | One child (T. BA) carried his school bag everywhere. I asked him to put it down. He said he was afraid of losing it. | | |

All of the children experienced new teachers in the first grade and went from familiarity with one kindergarten teacher, in essence a substitute for the child's mother at home, to being introduced to several teachers for different subjects (for more details, see p. 51 of the context chapter). This situation represented a dramatic change for these young children. In addition, children's fear of bullying became obvious during my observations. One girl (JMK) was hit by one of her classmates, making her cry and fear entering the classroom.

She was not motivated to stay in school at all; every day she would go out to the principal's office and wait there for her mother to come for her. No one was able to force her into the classroom. When the school principal asked me to try with her, I went with her to the classroom and sat next to her for a whole class. She cried at first, then calmed down. As soon as I left the room, she went out with me and accompanied me for the rest of the time I spent in that school until her mother came for her before the end of the official working hours. Her mother was upset and told me,

> *"They say that a classmate hit her, and she seemed afraid of the school. I was very upset and did not know how to deal with the matter."*

In another school, I saw a child (SMs) who was sitting and not responding to the teacher. As I watched him, he saw a girl (NMS) sitting in front who was responding to all of the teacher's questions with the correct answers. He hit her violently until the teacher and I quickly intervened. The girl started crying and continued to cry throughout the class; she stopped participating as she had before despite my attempts to calm her down. The teacher told me,

> *"It is not the first time that he has been violent, and we have told the administration to contact his parents to look into his issues with them."*

This case represents one of the most serious problems in the school, requiring educators' and administrators' attention and problem-solving efforts. So, its result on the children that is difficult.

I also noticed children who did not follow the teacher's instructions. In my view, they were accustomed to the more comfortable, less formal nursery setting with looser standards for behaving, sitting, and speaking. This behaviour seems natural for small children, and they can be expected to gradually learn the system in later stages. Another problem that my observation confirmed and the children mentioned in their dialogues was the lack of plantings or green spaces inside the school or in the outdoor yard. This dearth had a negative impact on their ability to quickly adapt to the school environment. In an observation related to the children's fear of losing their possessions because they did not feel safe at school, I saw T BM carrying around their school bag all the time. I asked them

to leave it. They said they were afraid of losing it. Perhaps implementing the Finnish system to make the transition class a part of the official school system that every child must experience would enable stakeholders to overcome most of these problems that children suffer from (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017).

All of the problems discussed here reflect the stakeholders' concerns: there is an absence of the role of policy makers and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the current lack of any programmes on the ground or interest in the issue reflects the weakness of the policies guiding this process.

However, some **differences** were also evident, as some of the children in this study transitioned with friends from their prior KG2 class. They seemed happy, psychologically relieved, and unaffected by the fear of losing friends. In other cases, some children, especially boys, from the same classroom played and ran together in the yard even though some of them were newly acquainted. Children may have different abilities to form relationships and integrate socially with others. Additionally, although some children expressed their fear of the principal, I saw principals in all of the study's chosen private and public schools dealing with children kindly. One private-school principal sat in her office with children who were crying until they calmed down. The principals I observed did not seem cruel or strict to the children despite some children's perceptions to the contrary. The children's perceptions must not be dismissed since, of course, people differ. In other words, some principals outside the study but within the scope of some children's experience may have been cruel or strict.

It is worth noting that **new** issues appeared to me that the children had not mentioned in their dialogues or drawings. Chief among them was the children's need for someone other than the teacher to take care of these issues. From a practical standpoint, teachers have many students and are responsible for a curriculum they must convey to the children, along with other administrative matters. Similarly, a school's social specialist or psychologist is responsible for all of the students in a school. Some principals asked me to approach crying children. I provided tenderness and comfort to these children in distress, asked them why they were crying, and tried to integrate them with other children by asking the latter to

become the sad child's friends. Relationships began to emerge. These children were attached to me and cried when I left.

The lack of a unified programme and clear plan for receiving children for the first grade has led to a haphazard response, which some stakeholders referred to as unofficial, simple, and random practices that are employed by both nursery and first-grade teachers. The current unsystematic approach may arise from the fact that there is currently no clear strategy directed at the transition issue. The nature of the curricula and classes imposes a major shift on children. Teachers do not have sufficient experience to deal with maladaptive children; therefore, they tend to let them cry while caring for the rest of the interacting students. Each teacher I observed was working with their class. Some put up balloons and brought sweets during the first day (but only that day). Some teachers reviewed educational concepts, such as numbers and letters, but only a few children interacted with them. Some teachers allowed the children to draw and paint while requiring everyone to sit in their seats. In such classes, those children who were accompanied by a sibling or an old friend from nursery would together as they talked and drew.

In contrast, children who did not know anyone else in the first grade were alone, which often made them cry. An extreme case was a girl (RM) who had not attended KG for the previous 2 years because of Covid-19. She was not social and was placed in the first grade because of her age and her mother's insistence on her staying in the first grade despite her lack of either social or academic adaptation. In contrast to the other children in her class, who were reading and writing letters and interacting with the teachers, R was silent, introverted, and cried all the time, even at the end of the third week of the school year. She refused to participate in any activity in the class, did not respond to the teachers, and did not use any of her school items, such as pens or notebooks, like the rest of her classmates. Children are individuals; in other words, teachers should ideally be aware of each student, their academic level, their social background, and their personality in the interest of the best possible educational outcome for every student. In the context of the current topic, it might be helpful to establish a programme that enables the nursery teachers who have invested time into the children they teach to pass their accumulated knowledge and understanding to the children's first-grade teachers as an integral component of this transition. An example of such a solution can be found in an implementation in Scotland

aimed to facilitate the transition process (Bryce & Humes, 2018), making it easier to distribute the students and giving teachers a head start in dealing with them, in effect jump-starting the learning process as the new school year begins.

## 8.4. Summary

The observation provided me with practical evidence regarding the children's thoughts in their drawings and discourse, adding valuable information to the data already collected from interviews with stakeholders. The analysis according to ground theory yielded much information that I recorded in the notes and guided the process of organising and sorting them according to their importance. In addition, the analysis process highlighted the spontaneous attitudes that the children had demonstrated in front of me, along with their words and actions, revealing their problems and needs. Based on the theory, I uncovered similarities and differences between the ideas the children and stakeholders expressed and my observations. Their perceptions correlated closely with my observations, confirming children's ability to express their opinions accurately in a way that reveals truth and conveys their ideas to others. I analysed my observation data according to the codes used for the analysis of the stakeholders' interviews and children's visual narratives, overlapping some codes to avoid repetition.

Regarding conceptual ambiguity, the absence of targeted programmes and the failure to address the problems inherent in the transition under consideration, much less attempt to deal with it, even individually, demonstrates the ambiguity of the concept. This finding is **similar** to the opinions of those concerned. However, a **difference** also became clear in that they recognised the issue of transition as a relevant topic, yet their professional actions did not demonstrate any organised practical interest in the issue.

T**he social and psychological needs within and outside the school** also yielded similarities and differences. The children's likes were **similar** to what I found in my observations. I saw happiness in the children in the drawing class. Children's need to learn letters and numbers also appeared in the situation with the three girls who lacked this knowledge, appearing withdrawn and not interacting with their teachers and classmates. Among the **differences** noted was that the children did not recognise the facilities and

services of the school even after the teacher took them on a quick tour around the school, indicating the potential need for a more focused or extensive familiarisation process. In addition, dealing with a much larger class size and the element of confusion may have affected some children's ability to listen well or focus. Fear might have been another impediment to focus. Some of these problems might be resolved with visits to the new school during the year before the transition and spending a day or more becoming acquainted with the new environment. Another disparity was noted between the children's desires and the places and nature of learning they experienced, as there was not a single lesson in the open air or in a place other than the classroom. Even the drawing class, which the children loved, was presented in a traditional manner, with the teacher treating the session as a serious academic lesson in which the children must abide by the rules of the lesson. Lastly, the children were disappointed at the lack of opportunity to learn to swim and engage in other sports activities, which my observations confirmed in all but the international schools.

I also found **similarities** between these pupils' opinions and my observations regarding **their social and psychological needs within and outside the school.** Children love home time. Their firm attachment to their house emerged in their drawings in the drawing class when the teacher asked them to draw what they wanted. They also depicted their mothers, homes, and parents' cars. I also concluded that the children focused the most on their need for friendship; furthermore, those who had former friends or siblings in their first-grade class seemed more reassured and stable, more freely interacting with each other and with others. In contrast, those who did not know anyone were withdrawn and quiet and did not even interact with the teacher, who was also new to them. The stakeholders' impressions correlated closely with the children's perceptions. This finding aligns with Blieszner's (2014) finding of the strong relationship between friendship and happiness.

I also discovered that some – but not all – of the children liked certain new experiences they encountered, such as the morning assembly and flag salute, as well as buying from the school canteen. As much as children needed friends, they also needed a kind and caring teacher. Although they may leave a trusted teacher behind, having a nice teacher in the next grade is beneficial. My observation of one of the teachers confirmed this impression, as well as the children's attachment to me when I was kind to them, including time playing

and having fun together, along with giving them prizes and gifts. Curiously, the **differences** that appeared were contradictory to the children's needs. For example, they did not adapt to the school's services despite their need for them, such as the toilets and canteen. In addition, the multiplicity of new teachers for different subjects meant the children were faced with forging many new relationships instead of the one-to-one interactions they had previously experienced, first at home with their mothers and then in kindergarten with one teacher. Most of these issues reflect serious concerns and do not consider the age of the child and their need for safety in order to be reassured before learning.

Viewing **the similarities** that appeared in **the cognitive and skill problems within and outside the school**, the problems the children brought up were associated with learning in traditional ways, along with the lack of swimming pools, games rooms, or even games in the school's outdoor yard. These findings are significant in light of Piaget's contention that play is an integral part of a child's intelligence development and is a key factor in a child's cognitive development (Green, 1971). Among the **differences** was the presence of swimming pools in international schools, where even nursery children had swimming lessons. Nonetheless, only a few children were in international schools; the majority of children attend public schools without swimming pools. I also found games in private and international schools. However, the first-grade children in the private schools were not allowed to play in the games, which were reserved for KG children.

In the context of **the problems of social and psychological within and outside the school,** my observations yielded instances that were both similar to as well as different from the children's opinions. Furthermore, I was able to monitor many realistic situations that typically happen in schools. The **similarities** were clear in my observation that what the children reported about their fear of losing their friends had real implications. One child who did not know anyone sat quietly, was introverted, and had little interaction. I also saw other children crying at various times as a result of feeling lonely and alienated. I perceived a look of awe on their faces at having to deal with multiple new teachers for different subjects for one class. These observations also correlate with the ideas the children expressed previously about their fear of losing their teacher.

The problem of those who did not speak Arabic was complicated by the lack of deliberate plans to contain them or guidance for how to deal with them. In confirmation of the children's fears of bullying from some of their peers, I was actually able to monitor situations that represented the seriousness of the problem for them, and I witnessed its impact on their behaviour and attitudes later. I also noticed that there were no green spaces inside the schools, confirming the children's mentions, as well as children who did not feel safe regarding their own property. In this area, one of the **differences** I saw related to children's fear of losing their friends. Specifically, children who moved from kindergarten to first grade along with one or more friends were at ease, interacted freely, and appeared more stable. Many of the boys were able to form fast relationships with some of the other boys by playing and running together. Another difference involved the children's fear of the principal, which they mentioned, for I did not notice any abnormal behaviour directed at children on the part of the principals I observed; nevertheless, it is possible that such actions occurred but did not happen in front of me.

In general, those concerned believed that the problems associated with relocation were due to the lack of a clear vision represented by policies directed at trying to intervene by providing solutions. Consequently, other problems emerged from this situation, the most important of which are the absence of a defined role for each person involved, weak teacher training, a lack of parental communication, the difference in the environment to which the child moves, the lack of continuity in the curricula and the environment, and other factors. These perceptions seem **similar** to observations where random activities, lack of interest, and an obvious problem involving maladaptation were evident for many children.

In addition, several **new** issues, not mentioned by the children in our earlier conversations, emerged from my observations, most notably their need for someone who cares about psychological and social issues, who is really close to them and is specific to this stage. There is no unified programme and clear plan for receiving children into the first grade. Each teacher worked with her class for the first or second days only. The teachers in the first grade were not familiar with the children's backgrounds, including whether they had successfully passed the nursery stage or not. To their new teachers, the children's academic

skills, as well as their social or health backgrounds, were a blank form waiting to be filled in.

In general, the observations were very useful in identifying the children's needs and problems, which corresponded to a large extent with the children's vision. Ultimately, this correlation also demonstrated the importance of the child's agency and that children are actually able to express their requirements and needs (Sairanen & Kumpulainen, 2014).

# Chapter 9
# Framework for Change

## 9.1. Introduction

It is worth noting that the prevailing theories of change in the educational system help scholars understand the meaning of change, along with the mechanisms associated with it, in addition to identifying the necessary tools for its creation and management requirements (Elmore, 2009; Fullan et al., 2009; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). Theorising is usually related to the results of real practices and experiences applied within educational systems in specific contexts while describing those contexts, the corresponding processes, and outcomes. In addition, this concept also applies to monitoring problems and challenges and identifying how to avoid them.

According to Sahlberg (2011), educational change invokes the concepts of reform and improvement. Change, which is based on clear and measurable goals for student achievement or tangible production in school, is usually imposed by national educational policies. In a similar vein, Wiseman (2013) asserted that discussing change in any educational system is based on the country's educational policies and culture. However, the term change or development implies the possibility of a desirable outcome that is different from the current reality. Approaches to change may feature retaining elements of the current reality and adding new facets to it or abolishing it entirely and replacing it with a new system. Thus, educational change can be interpreted as making the educational system function better, with more successful results. At the country level, the concept can be linked to the national context and its orientations within the framework of the general international system.

Any discussion of educational change in the educational literature must take into account certain related issues, especially the direction of the change approach, whether from top to bottom or from bottom to top. The former approach describes a system that adopts central policies in making its educational policies and decisions. Change according to the latter approach takes place in systems that apply democracy in decision-making and

implementation. Regardless of the approach, it is essential to consider sustainability and the size of the desired change when adopting a plan to reform the current educational system.

Identifying and defining the categories involved in change processes, along with the associated symbols, is also essential. In the local educational context, "community" can refer to one within the school and another surrounding the school. Beyond the local context are societal levels, expanding from local communities to provinces, governorates, and the state. The participants in the change process, as well as their roles in this process, will depend on the scope of the anticipated change process, as well as whether they possess the skills and professional qualifications required for change and if they have the desire or inclination to implement change and reform the system, essential questions that demand answers during any change or repair process. International comparisons of education, or what scholars might consider learning from others, or the choice to conform to international standards, can provide motivation and a rationale for change. It can be represented in the level of educational systems based on students' achievement results in international examinations, such as the international tests of student performance provided by the OECD as well as the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (Datnow, 2002; Fullan, 2009; Hargreaves et al., 2010).

## 9.2. Fullan's Framework for Change

My choice of Michael Fullan's model of educational change for this study was influenced by other researchers' praise of this model as a clear methodological framework for educational reform in the past decades (e.g., Simola et al., 2017). Fullan is a recognised scholar in the field of education, having authored multiple books on educational change and educational leadership (Fullan, 1991, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2014). He has also been involved in many large projects aimed at system-wide development of the education systems in the United States and Canada, as well as other projects outside North America. The factors supporting my choice of this framework include its clear methodology, comprehensive scope, multi-level application, sustainability or continuity, and consideration of change directions. The following sections describe each of these factors in more detail.

### 9.2.1. Clear Methodological Framework

Fullan's theory of educational change relies on a clear methodology that schedules the work or strategies required for the reform process. Specifically, Fullan (2003, p. 53) described his theory as follows:

> *"The theory of change, or action, concerns what policies, strategies and mechanisms are going to be used, in effect, to implement the theory of education."*

Implementing change must be preceded by defining the problem and naming it. Then it will be possible to submit proposals to resolve the issue according to the available circumstances. Within such a proposal, the objectives and tools that will be used in the work mechanisms are set and justifications are given for their use. Defining the scope of reform and change is also required to establish the appropriate focus on bringing about change in a phenomenon or addressing a problem that is scheduled within the scope.

In 2019, Fullan and Kirtman identified the following reasons and premises behind the need for educational change:

1. Traditional school is boring.
2. Inequity is widening.
3. The world is troubled.
4. Deep learning innovations show promise.

Regarding the subject of my study, the issue of transition was studied in the Omani educational field by taking into account different points of view by the children concerned and the relevant stakeholders influencing this issue. In addition, I personally conducted observations to gain a realistic perspective of the children's experiences during the time this transfer occurred. The results of the analysis of the collected data touched on the reasons that Fullan and Kirtman listed. The study uncovered a lack of presentation of the issue and haphazard efforts at implementation to address its impact on the children. Consequently, especially in light of the movement of prevailing thought towards traditionalism, the need to bring about change in this area is clear. There is no equality in attention to kindergarten versus attention to first grade, so there is no equality. As a result,

the transitioning children are confronted by differences and shocking changes, potentially leading to the development of various disorders in children. Caring for children, who represent a wide segment of Omani society (see Table 2.10. on p. 52 for more details), which includes addressing the issues affecting them, means caring for the future.

### 9.2.2.   Comprehension

Understanding change goes beyond education to encompass all of society, its development, and people's well-being. Therefore, the goal of bridging the gap and raising the bar for all students infuses all of Fullan's (2003) reflections for change.

Fullan's theory of educational change is comprehensive in its view of those who need change, as it includes all members of the system: students, teachers, policy makers, administrators, school leaders and supervisors. The theory is framed in a manner appropriate to each category and its needs while emphasising the need for motivation in each category towards change and development, reflecting Fullan's (2006) bold assertion:

> *Take any hundred books on change, and they all boil down to one word: motivation.* (p. 35)

From Fullan's (2003) point of view, change involves the whole society for its development. In other words, the goal in solving a problem or bridging a gap is to raise the level of all students. Accordingly, the author highlights the new meaning of educational reform or change in all of his books, applying his ideas to actual practice, breaking the process into three stages – initiation, implementation, and continuation – and focusing on the two principles of sustainability and tri-level reform in all of his reform ideas (Fullan, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007).

### 9.2.3.   Tri-level Reform

Fullan's concept of educational change can be understood to occur at three levels (schools, school district, state), as illustrated in Figure 9.1. That is, change is not restricted to the community inside the school, including teachers, administrators, and students, but must also include the communities surrounding the schools. Thus, change takes place through

changing the awareness and culture of society at all three levels to achieve sustainability. Fullan (2005) described this concept as follows:

> *To alter people's mental awareness of the system as a whole, thereby contributing to altering the system itself.* (p. 40)

**Figure 9.1**

*Tri-Level Reform. Source: Fullan (2005)*
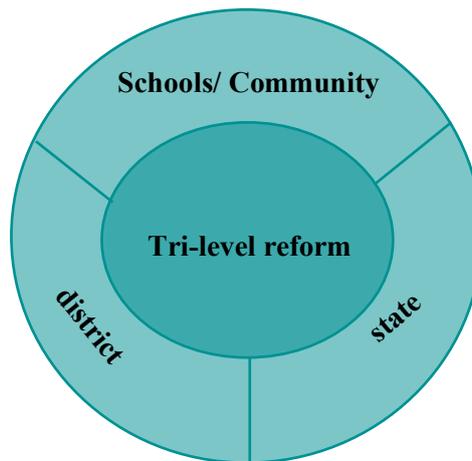


On a similar note, Hattie (2017) identified four starting points for collective efficacy, as follows:

- shared belief in conjoint capacity to produce results.
- primary input as "evidence of impact".
- culture of collaboration to implement high-yield strategies; and
- leader's participation in frequent, specific collaboration.

### 9.2.4.  Sustainability or Continuity

According to Fullan (2005), continuity is formed as a result of preparing the system to be able to participate in development processes and solve problems. Therefore, it requires a change in the prevailing culture across the levels of the system in which the change is required. Change, then, takes place if the people representing the change community

become convinced of the need to rethink the prevailing system and fill the gaps in it. Everyone must participate in this process of change (Fullan, 2005).

### 9.2.5. Directions of Change Methodology

Although the change strategy needs the participation of the community involved in the system in which the change is to be affected, differing methodologies for initiating a decision and implementing actions are possible. Specifically, a decision will either be central, imposed from top to bottom, or democratic, allowing the bottom to make and exercise choices. In the educational context, the former approach can create isolation for the teacher, creating a neglected follower who may not be convinced of the change and one who needs to build their capabilities for the stage of change. However, Fullan (2003) also highlighted an advantage of this approach in that the beginning stage requires a central decision that achieves the direction and the required level of order. In contrast, decentralisation, characterised as the decision arising from the bottom and moving to the top, is best applied when an implementation requires continuity, creativity and innovation in subsequent stages. However, the bottom-to-top approach has its own drawbacks, such as the possibility of undesirable results stemming from the lack of ability and capacity of those concerned with the issue to be changed. Figure 9.2 displays the main coherence required for the successful management of change processes according to Fullan's framework.

**Figure 9.2**

*The Coherence Framework. Source: Fullan (2019, p. 3)*
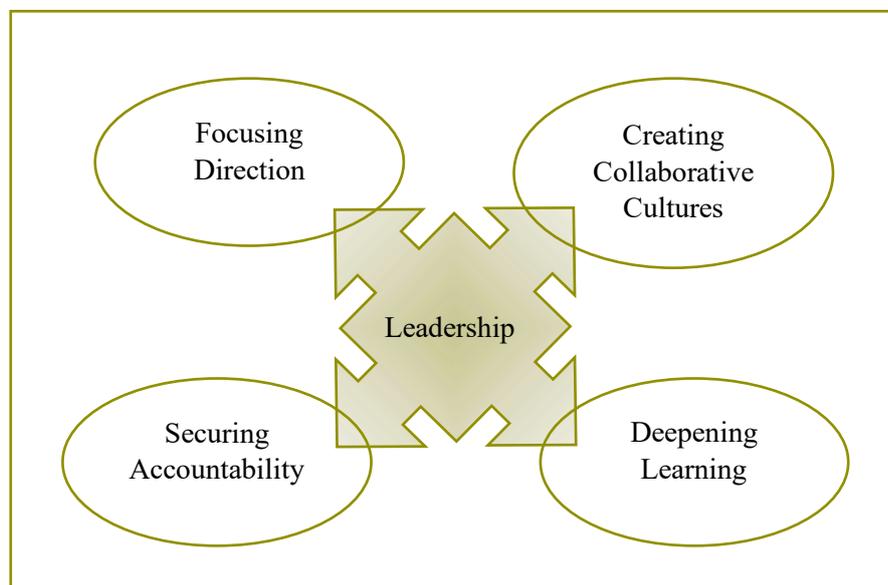
A careful examination of Figure 9.2 supports the conclusion that the successful management of the process of changing or solving a problem in the educational system requires leaders who can persuade and influence others. Educational leaders must be also able to identify the direction, requirements, and goals of change, along with having sufficient tools for evaluation and evaluation and participating in the process while offering full transparency. In addition, a comprehensive knowledge of the change project, its tools, and the community that the leadership will deal with at all stages of the process is essential.

## 9.3. Framework to Bring the Change in the Current Study

### 9.3.1. Theorical Underpinnings of the Framework

In the current study, I harmonised existing theories, specifically CHAT and Dewey's principle of continuity from his theory of experience, to build the theoretical framework I used for understanding the issue of children's transition from the nursery to first grade. To this framework, I applied my findings from the analysis of the collected data concerning the study issue, as summarised in Figure 9.3, in an attempt to bring about change in it through Fullan's framework for change (Fullan, 2005). In specific steps that combine the points of convergence and how to use the data that I have come up with through the theoretical framework I used.

**Figure 9.3**

*Findings of the Current Study*

Based on all the results, there is a need to present a suggested framework to fill the gaps.

**4**

The practices were few, unfocused, short-term, and did not consider all aspects that could make a difference They had little-to-no impact..

**3**

- A lack, unorganised, informal, and random of practices that facilitate the transition.

- Children expressed their need to learn in nature, and learn motor skills and sports

- Most important problems were in the school system, new environment, and

**2**

- No official programmers
--No clear policies
- - Limitations of rules
- - No communication between nursery curriculum developers and first grade curriculum developers.
- The teaching methods for the first grade are traditional.
- The challenges limitations are strategic policies related to curricula and teacher training and financial support.
- Parents are concerned over academic aspects, and their communication with the school is very weak.
- Absence of interaction and continuity in terms of teachers, school environment, school system, and curricula.

**2**

-A clear blurring of the transition concept.

-The transition is an important phase.

**1**

**Study findings**

The conceptual points of convergence between CHAT and Dewey's principle of continuity from his theory of experience, on the one hand, and Fullan's educational change framework, on the other, are described in the following sections.

### 9.3.1.1.  Community

In the context of CHAT, the community is the social and cultural group that subjects are a part of, with explicit rules or social norms that regulate and influence behaviour (Cole & Engeström, 1993). In contrast, Fullan (2005) saw educational change as occurring at three levels (schools, school district, state). Thus, the change includes both the community inside the school and the communities surrounding the schools. Accordingly, the current study combines these ideas in its definition of community as the target children, nursery teachers, primary one teachers, nursery and primary-school leaders, policy makers, and parents and caregivers.

### 9.3.1.2.  Continuity

Dewey (2005) and Vygotsky (1978) revealed a similar interest in children's past experiences. In the context of pedagogy, the researchers focused on boundaries, teaching strategies, instructional activities, and design. In this context, boundaries are the components of the educational systems with which the child is involved, through which the educational process is developed, and in whose components the required change takes place. The current study's desired goal is to fix attention upon its improvements through different stages that achieve continuity in the child's transition from one stage to another and from one environment to another. This description aligns with Fullan's framework through the implementation phase in identifying the areas in which change is required and then building continuity in its development as a system.

### 9.3.1.3.  Overall Content

Education per the CHAT model interacts in a continuous process with the environment and community members. Learners (subject) build knowledge and skills (objective) according to their historical and cultural context. The process involves using tools and boundaries, such as technology, teachers, training, and curricula to engage the learner, as the subject in the learning process, and build knowledge and skills by dividing the work among all of the community members. Thus, education is affected by the community context, culture, and

history. As a result, the interaction that will take place during the activity between all of these elements will produce knowledge and skills for the learners (Engeström, 2001).

Similarly, Fullan's framework also entails a continuous change process (Fullan, 1991). The first target is to disseminate the meaning of change among the community members and seek to change their opinions towards the old system that needs to improve after identifying the problem to be solved, along with the aims and needed procedures. Next, it is necessary to define the areas of the change in order to establish the participators from the related community. Lastly, the work is divided among them. Figure 9.4 illustrates the content of Fullan's framework.

**Figure 9.4**

*Fullan Educational Framework to Bring the Change. Source: Fullan (1991)*
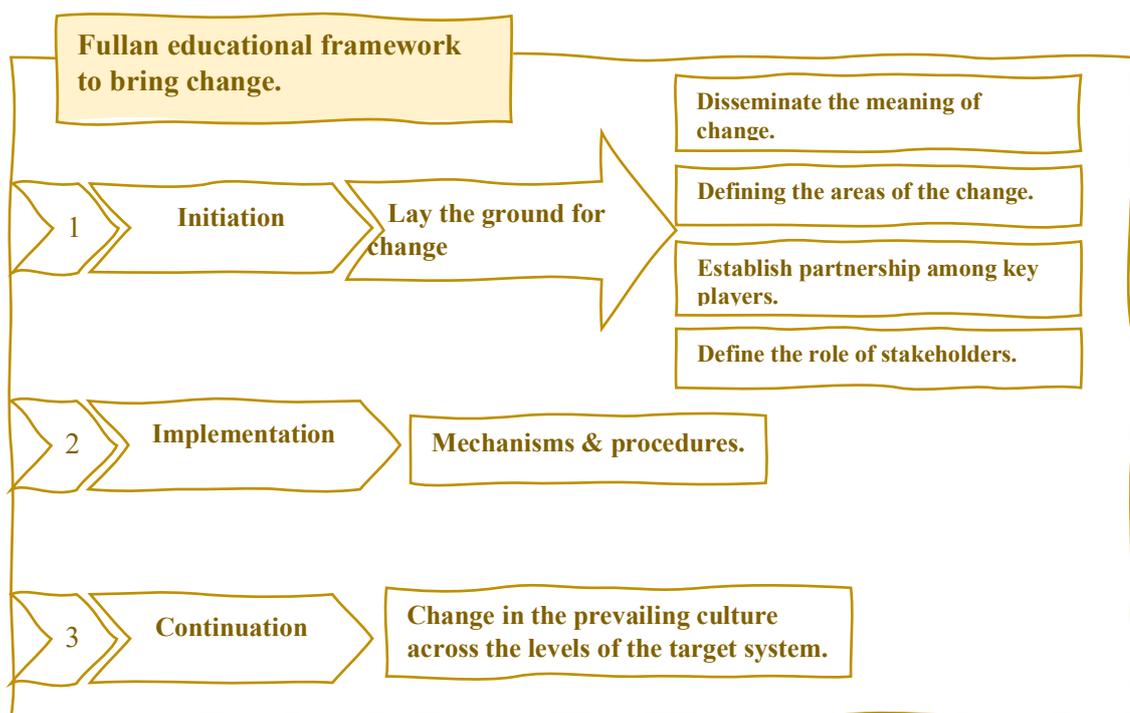


## 9.4. Implementation

The previous discussion reveals the possibility of aligning CHAT with interaction and continuity in Dewey's theory, as well as Fullan's educational framework for change. The combined model offers a new and unique framework that can be used to bring about a

positive change in Omani children's transition from the nursery to first grade. The proposed framework consists of five elements, which the following sections outline in detail.

### 9.4.1. Laying out the Grounds for Change

The proposed model, according to Fullan's approach combined with CHAT, focuses on bringing about a transformation or change in the system. The process will entail development in several partners at different levels in the functional hierarchy and address their relationship with the issue or system targeted for change.

The task of adaptation requires justifying the reform to the participants and beneficiaries, in addition to convincing them of its purpose and importance. Regarding the first stage, which involves disseminating the meaning of change among the stakeholders, Fullan's (2003) model targets motivating the community associated with the required change and directing them to believe in the importance of the work they do. This focus leads to creating a sense of responsibility and commitment to the work they do. Notably, the process includes all stakeholders related to the system or target issue. Thus, this stage relates especially to educational policy makers as the ones who will develop and talk about change policies to convince the community about it and its importance, which Fullan described as defining areas of the change.

This stage is the general ground for a change process whose impact extends to society, considering education the main path to a better life in societies and supporting societal progress. Along these lines, a policy must be developed to advance the general improvement of society, making the beneficiaries and participants more convinced of the topic and strengthening their belief in it. In the proposed framework, this step is labelled "Establish partnerships among key players".

Fullan's (2003) framework focuses on the moral aspect of the change process and is directed at teachers in that educating all students alike is a priority in the teacher's work. In contrast, CHAT sees the stage where the role of stakeholders is defined as a division of labour. Therefore, the teacher has a moral obligation to do so. It is the binding

261

responsibility of the teacher towards each student. This is one of the basic conditions for any educational change process in addition to building a feeling among teachers that what they are doing is worth putting their best efforts into, simply because it is worthwhile (Fullan, 2003).

At the children's level, representing the intended level at which the process is directed, it is also possible to determine the reason for the need for reform or change. A teacher's experience speaks to the likelihood of individual differences between students' levels of performance. In the case of the current study, the children behaved differently in terms of adapting to the new educational environment during their transition from the nursery to first grade. Therefore, the identified goal is to try to reduce the gap between children and raise the level of children with poor adaptation to be able to pass through the stage smoothly. Identifying the goal answers the main question: Why the process of change? This calls for taking strategies and measures to verify and identify the problem. The current study identified a specific issue in the educational system. Addressing this issue will require public participation from other groups that are representative of society and who will be beneficiaries at other levels. Therefore, the matter goes beyond governmental decisions to encompass comprehensive collective action towards achieving this aim.

Accurately setting goals is an important stage in the process of creating change. The goal serves as a guide to the implementation process (guided by such questions as "What do we implement? and how?"). In addition, this goal must be measurable. Setting a time frame allows the participants to measure the extent of the goal's achievement. In specific terms, this time frame will feature a starting point and then a time for implementation followed by an evaluation. Including a period in the future to re-evaluate the outcome is vital to ensure continuity. Naturally, this process requires a set of tools and mechanisms for its implementation.

Thus, multiple short- and medium-term goals serve as intermediate steps to support achieving the main goal. Each goal includes a particular aspect or group of the case community and requires a set of tools appropriate to its nature and level. Fullan (2003) described this concept in terms of changing the contexts accompanying the achievement of the main goal. In the context of children's transition from the nursery to the first grade, as

262

indicated in the literature review chapter (chapter 4, p. 74) , along with the results of applying the theoretical framework of CHAT, the overall goal is to achieve an easy, smooth transition for children. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to define the goal, devise small sub-goals, and achieve them in order to fulfil the overall purpose. For example, achieving the main goal of smoothly moving children from one level to the next can be broken down into sub-goals related to training teachers, raising parents' awareness, training curriculum developers, training school and nursery principals, training educational supervisors, providing the required tools, and setting general time strategies for every sub-goal. The ability to measure achievement each step of the way will put the planners and implementers on the right track to achieving the overall goal.

### 9.4.2.  Process Range

According to Fullan's (2003) educational change model, the process can be understood to entail tri-level reform (schools, school district, state). In other words, the change process envelops a whole study community, selected according to the CHAT (nursery and first-grade teachers, nursery and first-grade supervisors, school leaders of nurseries and primary schools, educational policy makers, nursery curricula developers, first-grade curricula developers, parents, and children), which is affected by surrounding environmental factors (history, sociocultural influence, technology). Then we define the level they belong to each category. Thus, its role and time will be determined by the plan at the previous point.

### 9.4.3.  Mechanisms and Procedures

The second stage in Fullan's (2003) change framework is implementation, which involves engaging the mechanisms to solve the study problem or change the system. CHAT presents this idea in terms of the mediating artefacts or boundaries concepts. In the current study, those mechanisms will be the practices to improve the transition process for Omani children from the nursery to first grade. Examples of the anticipated mechanisms include approaches, practices (children visiting, toys, book) , curricula, language, nursery and first-grade teachers, teacher training, and parent training.

This stage concerns the plans and strategies that are taken in the required change or reform process. The idea is to promote clarity of procedures, professional stakeholder commitment, identification, and the form of interactions amongst the community identified with the target issue, along with development of the capacities of people within the system in which change is taking place. In the procedures stage, the required change process and its requirements are understood and described, causing the process to become clearer in its procedural-executive form.

Accordingly, this stage is concerned with the inclusiveness of the community related to the issue under reform or change, which Fullan (2003) referred to when describing three-dimensional reform that includes the state, district, and school levels. Reform will not be on the right track if it does not include these categories; furthermore, the role of each category must be defined, along with the effect of reform or change on each category. This categorisation leads to the same destination as CHAT's division of labour among the groups that represent the community of the issue targeted for change. Creating a productive interaction between and through these groups leads to targeted sustainability. Change is not easy and cannot be one-sided only, as all corners of society are linked and complement each other.

Based on this discussion, the stage of mechanisms and procedures involves setting a detailed, inclusive agenda for all segments of the community related to the issue of transition. Providing learning and training opportunities for all is included in this stage, along with opportunities for participation and exchange of experiences. Developing financial plans, requirements, practices, and procedures also falls within this time frame. The agenda must be flexible and capable of modification and development according to factors that emerge or evolve during implementation and practice, or the emergence of unexpected inputs. The process must be clear and understandable to the implementing agencies, as well as executable, featuring tools that are available. Human and financial capabilities required to achieve change must be identified, as well as those targeted for support and development. In addition, procedures for short-term goals and others related to long-term goals must be defined to facilitate continuous as well as a final evaluation of the process.

### 9.4.4. Outcomes

The outcomes stage is linked to all of the previous stages, representing the final mirrors that reflect the success or failure of everything that was done in all of the previous stages. According to Fullan (2003), outcomes are linked to accountability in addition to the implementation of goals that have been set for all stages and categories in the process of change or reform, whether short-, medium-, and/or long-term goals. Outcomes can be determined by measuring the extent to which those goals are achieved. While the level of outcomes is the responsibility of policy makers and those in charge of the change process, implementation can take place at several levels, inviting self-evaluation and accountability at the school level, as well as at higher levels above those responsible for setting policies and implementing plans and programmes.

The evaluation process for goals at different stages leads to the continuation of development of the process, including the possibility of modification and revision to reach the longer goals more successfully. Evaluation also leads to the accumulation and development of experiences. In this way, accountability is a productive process that enhances the change process. In the context of the transition issue, evaluating the training processes of teachers and parents and their mastery of the skills and knowledge required for each category of people is a medium-term goal, which supports continuing to develop these capabilities and leads to a more successful impact in achieving the long-term goal, which is to facilitate the transition of children from the nursery to the first grade.

Consequently, the outcome stage requires data collection in the different stages and from all participating groups that represent the community of the targeted issue for change. The data must be evaluated at different stages of time to ensure that the goals are achieved at all levels and achieve the required comprehensiveness and continuity.

Thus, the current study seeks to bring a change or achieve the following outcomes:

- Short-term outcomes:

  - Stakeholders who are convinced of the importance of the issue of transition and its impact on the psychological, social, and academic health of children.
  - Nursery and first-grade teachers who are trained in the knowledge, skills, techniques, and applications that help children overcome the transition phase smoothly.
  - Parents and administrators who are aware of the transition stage and how to contribute to facilitating it.
  - Tools, environment, and practices that are available in the nursery and primary schools to help children transition smoothly, establishing a strong structure to support continuity in the future.

- Long-term outcomes:

  - Teachers who are constantly able to deal with and help children in transition.
  - Easy and smooth transition of children from the nursery to first grade constantly.
  - Children who are in excellent psychological, social, and academic health.

### 9.4.5. Experience and Continuity

The third stage of Fullan's (2003) change process is sustainability or continuity, which can be achieved by preparing the system through the relevant community's members to be able to solve problems and make future improvements. Sustaining change into the future means holding on to progress made as well as anticipating and planning for the need to make adjustments to address issues that emerge at a later date, after the planned implementation has reached completion. This concept is also contained in the theories of Dewey and Vygotsky (CHAT) in their interest in children's past experiences and improving young learners' current experience, then applying the lessons learned in the future by preparing

them through the boundaries, including improving stakeholders' skills to maintain the continuity of the change.

In the current model of my study, continuity will be achieved by:

- Preparing the ground, materially and humanly, to be a strong foundation that can be built on continuously. This preparation is accomplished by training the stakeholders, providing supplies, providing tried and successful international practices and experiences, and adapting them to adopt the appropriate solutions.
- Continuously evaluating the stages to ensure that the project is on the right track.
- Training children to use their past experiences to cope with the new experiences they encounter in their lives.
- Providing tools, environment, and practices prepared in the nursery and primary schools to build a strong structure to support continuity in the future.

## 9.5. Summary of the Model

The proposed model for developing Omani children's transition from the nursery to first grade consists of five categories: laying out the grounds for change, the process range, mechanisms and procedures, outcomes, and experience and continuity. This framework was formulated according to Fullan's (2003) model of educational change combined with insights uncovered in the study regarding CHAT and the principle of continuity from Dewey's theory of experience. These practical and procedural categories are practical have been formulated as a reform strategy on scientific grounds. Figure 9.5 illustrates the framework for developing Omani children's transition from the nursery to the first grade. The main points of the model can be summarised as follows:

### 9.5.1. Lay Out the Ground for Change

- Disseminate the meaning and purpose of the change.
- Convince stakeholders of the issue importance and its impact on society.
- Present the agenda.
- Specify the levels wherein change will be targeted.

- Identify the participants in the change process as implementers and targets.
- Develop a timetable showing the implementation stages and the time points for evaluating each of them.
- Determine short-term and long-term goals and the time to measure each of them.
- Clarify the moral purpose of the change process (e.g. equality between children in the right to ease of movement, the right to education, and the right to mental and social health).
- Determine the roles of the participants and the time of each of them.
- Specify the tools and materials that they will need during implementation.

The results of the current study constitute the first building block on which this stage can be built. Figure 9.3 displays the most important features of the issue in the Omani educational community.

### 9.5.2.  The Process Range

- Specify the categories belonging to each level of educational change for Fullan (schools, district, state).
- Define the roles of each category in each level.
- Distribution of the financial needs and the necessary tools for each category in the three levels.
- Distribution of short-term and long-term goals to these categories.
- Determining how each category at each level is affected by the surrounding environment factors (history, societal culture, technology).
- Develop a schedule that sets the timetable for the role of each category.

### 9.5.3.  Mechanisms and Procedures

- Start the implementation of the plans laid out in section (9.3.1).
- Inventory and evaluate existing practices to keep elements that fit the current plan and abandon those that are not.
- Focus on laying a foundation that will ensure continuity.

- Monitor the occurrence of any inputs or variables that were not previously considered and address them to reduce the occurrence of adverse or unexpected results.
- Continuously evaluate practices, the implementation process, and the extent to which aims have been achieved at their specified levels.

### 9.5.4. Outcomes

Make sure to achieve the following:

- Accomplish short-term goals set for each category at each of the identified levels (e.g. teacher training, provision of necessary tools, training of stakeholders and parents according to their position and mission).
- Encourage interaction between the different groups at the three existing levels and the extent of their interaction with the surrounding environment represented in history, societal culture, and technology.
- Create an infrastructure of expertise, tools, and environment to ensure the proper functioning of the work.
- Main outcome: Children will be able to move from the nursery to first grade smoothly.

### 9.5.5. Experience and Continuity

Continuity is related to all four previous points. In practical terms, this principle is a common thread running through them all. In order to achieve continuity, the following actions are necessary:

- Prepare the ground for positive change. To this end, ensure clear and achievable goals, select the right people at each level, prepare them correctly, define their roles, and accurately define the tools needed for implementation.
- Move in the defined levels of change in a timely manner and maintain the proper definition of the role of each category of them.

- Continuously evaluate steps taken to ensure that there is a solid foundation on which it can be built on an ongoing basis.
- Monitor inputs to be considered during continuous development.
- Ensure that the goals, both short- and long-term, are achieved at all levels to ensure the success of the change process, making it an experience that can be built on continuously.

**Figure 9.5**

*Framework for Developing Omani Children's Transition from the Nursery to 1st Grade.*



The rationale behind the change

Developing the children's transition from nursery to 1st grade.

**1 Lay the ground for change**

- Disseminate the Meaning of Change — Community
- Defining the Areas of the Change — Subject rules mediating artifacts.
- Establish Partnership among Key Players — Community
- Define the Role of Stakeholders — Division of labor

**2 The process range**

Socio-cultural factors

Schools/ Community

Tri-level reform

district

state

Historical Factors

Technological factors

Experience — 5 — Continuity

**3 Mechanisms & procedures**

Approaches, practices (children visiting, toys, books), curricula, language, nursery and first-grade teachers, teacher training, parent training, etc.

**4 To bring a change in (Outcomes)**

- ❖ The short-term goals set for each category at each of the identified levels.
- ❖ The interaction between the different groups in the three existing levels and the extent of their interaction with the surrounding environment represented in history, societal culture, and technology.
- ❖ Existence of an infrastructure of expertise, tools, and environment to ensure the proper functioning of the work.
- ❖ Main outcome: children able to move from nursery to 1st grade smoothly.

270

# Chapter 10

# Conclusion

## 10.1. Introduction

Endings can help consolidate the various thoughts presented throughout a long discussion, weaving the various themes into one complete argument. Accordingly, in this chapter, my purpose is to re-weave all of the previous chapters, going through the stages of my journey through the chapters of the thesis. I carry with me the love of the children with whom I lived for a period, whether observing them, accompanying them in a drawing class in which they expressed something about themselves, or encouraging them as they expressed in their own words what they had drawn. I took pains to create for them an atmosphere of fun, playing games with them and distributing gifts. Within these moments, I passed through other stages in my research journey, ultimately reaching this conclusion. The chapter begins with a casual summary of all of the chapters of my journey. Next, I present the study questions and summarise the answers found as they related to the objectives and the conclusions, followed by a review of the cognitive and research contributions of my study. I also explore the study limitations that were involved in this research journey. Then I offer recommendations based on the findings of the study results, in addition to the general context of the study issue. The discussion concludes with suggestions for further research and a hopeful glimpse into the future. Rather than representing an ending, this completed study should be seen as turning a doorknob and beginning to open the door to the issue of children's transition from kindergarten to primary school at the local and regional levels.

## 10.2. Brief Recap of the Research Journey

This thesis represents far more than a research process conducted to earn a PhD degree. The topic concerns an issue I have believed in, a story I have lived in my own experience, including suffering the effects myself and with my children. Consequently, every word in this document both represents me and belongs to me. I moved between chapters, searching

for insight that could enable me to complete this journey and achieve its goal. In the second chapter, I began by reviewing the local context that surrounded the study sample to gain an understanding of its variables, capabilities, and the basis on which I would be able to build what I planned to achieve. The third chapter completed the second stage of construction by establishing the theoretical foundation for the current study based on two perspectives: Vygotsky (1974) and Dewey's (1974) principle of continuity in the context of experience. These choices were not lightly or casually made but rather reflect careful research leading to my assessment that these models offer the most appropriate guidance to achieve comprehensive and continuous change that interacts with society, its components, and its culture.

The process required looking westward and eastward for studies, experiences, and practices that would guide my study to find the way forward. The resulting resources form the underpinning of the fourth chapter, which presented practices, examined studies across the globe, and experiences that led to tangible successes. It was then necessary to identify tools and methods for collecting data that could uncover the true picture of the status of the study issue. At that point, I stopped for a while to listen to my inner child, who since my childhood had always asked for others to hear her and to take her opinion. I found support for this in the legitimate rights of children in the international agreements ratified by Oman, where I am continuing my studies, guaranteeing the right of children to express themselves and provide their opinions on issues that concern them.

Therefore, I set out to give young learners agency in carrying out this study of mine; I encouraged them to use a microphone and a drawing brush to express themselves according to their ability and desires, so that their voices could reach and inform officials in hopes of eliciting a response. My journey of discovery did not stop there but continued onward, as I sought to hear the voices of the stakeholders and established the extent of their agreement with the children's expressed needs. Afterwards, I conducted classroom observations in real time to ensure the consistency of the data I had gathered. The details of these explorations appear in Chapter 5. Also included in that chapter is my search for ways to analyse all of the data I had collected in appropriate ways, along with applicable theories so that I could extract the desired data amidst the crowd of collected data.

Next, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 covered the analysis process for each group of data, all following the carefully chosen manner and arriving at clear results consistent with the theories on which the analysis approach was built. My strong desire to pursue change emerged from the stories I saw, so like my own and my children's stories, in the eyes of many of the first-grade children I visited. I lived through those moments by their sides; I cried with them; I hugged and consoled them. For their sakes, I then developed the framework discussed in Chapter 9, which has been designed to bring about beneficial change as a part of expressing my love and support to them.

It is my recommendation, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advised and as reflected in Chapter 9, that inquirers should fully participate with and love the participants. During this process, those inquirers must always be mindful of the need to balance what they have collected and seen, along with what they have to offer according to the general context in which they interact. I hope that it will be a voice that resonates with officials in my country so that we can all strive to reduce these stories in the eyes of children when they enter primary school. This tenth chapter concludes the discussion with suggestions and recommendations that I hope will provide the motivation to implement transformative solutions that will branch out from the end of this research journey, throughout which I carried all of this love, establishing more paths that will lead to engaging and encouraging little hearts that will carry a similar love forward to the future.

## 10.3. Study Objectives and Questions

My study had a broad objective that formed the basis on which I set the sub-objectives and from which the study questions emerged. Specifically, my exploration encompassed children's transition from kindergarten to primary school from their points of view as well as from the points of view of stakeholders. This somewhat extensive scope required me to design tools that fit each category and that could provide me with valid and enriching data.

Based on CHAT as the main theoretical framework undergirding this study, I selected my study sample to feature all of those involved in or influencing the issue of child relocation, encompassing a wide and diverse population: children, nursery and first-grade teachers, nursery and primary school principals, policy makers, parents, and nursery supervisors. I

also perceived the need to include elementary school, nursery, and first-grade curriculum developers. Accordingly, the study questions were formulated to guide the study in its exploration of the situation of children's transition from nursery to first grade. Specifically, the questions addressed stakeholder background, business practices, rules, and historical and cultural context while reflecting Dewey's (2005) principles of continuity and interaction from his theory of experience since the continuity of children's experience during their transition period constituted a critical factor to consider. The questions also sought to uncover the problems and challenges facing stakeholders. Finally, I analysed and applied all of the data collected to forge the proposed framework based on Michael Fullan's (2003) framework for educational change. I then formulated interview questions according to the cognitive backgrounds of the study sample members.

Ultimately, four main questions emerged to guide the study, each of which generated related and detailed sub-questions. The following discussion reviews these questions and the results obtained after analysing the collected data. For a summary of the results, please consult Figure 9.4 in Chapter 9.

- **Research Question 1**

    **How do stakeholders conceptualise the transition process from nursery to first grade?**

This question was employed in focus groups and semi-structured interviews to plumb the thoughts of the study sample consisting of individuals from different levels in the educational community related to the study issue. These stakeholders included educational policy makers, curriculum developers for nursery and first grade, nursery and first-grade supervisors, primary school principals, nursery principals, nursery and first-grade teachers, and the parents of nursery and first-grade children. The interviewees' responses were characterised by an overall sense of ambiguity regarding their understanding of the transition process. As a result, I could be fairly certain that the concept of children moving from nursery to first grade is unknown in the Omani educational community. Nonetheless, all of the stakeholders agreed on the importance of this stage for children, which has the potential to make them stable and interactive or, alternatively, deficient in these qualities.

- **Research Question 2**

  **What factors affect children's needs during their transition from nursery to first grade from the stakeholders' perspectives, and how do these factors affect those needs?**

This question covered a wide range of study data, as it was directed to both children and stakeholders among the study participants. The intent behind the question was to reveal the reality of children's transition from nursery to first grade in the Omani educational system in terms of practices, experiences, curricula, rules of childhood education, the tasks of the parties concerned with the transitional stage, and the influences of the surrounding cultural and historical environment, as well as past experience. In addition, the collected data represent various elements of CHAT, such as mediation, division of labour, rules, and historical and cultural context, along with Dewey's principles of interaction and continuity.

Agreement among the stakeholders emerged, which was confirmed by the observation results, highlighting the lack of practices aimed at facilitating the transition process for children. Specifically, this process was characterised by unorganised, informal, random, and provided by teachers and school staff. Furthermore, the MOE was not found to offer any official programmes that address the issue of transition. These results confirm the ambiguity of the concept as lacking any formal attention or associated proposals. However, the dearth of clearly defined and applied guidelines clashed with the stakeholders' belief in the importance of this stage. Contrariwise, the interviewees attributed the lack of a targeted implementation to weak educational policies. Current laws also impose certain limitations, the most important of which is that nurseries are not part of the official educational ladder.

Additionally, companies issue ready-made nursery curricula that are then acquired and approved by the MOE. Each nursery then chooses fitting lessons from these curricula. In contrast, the MOE sponsors the development of first-grade curricula by specialists in the Ministry's curriculum department. There is no communication or coordination between the two parties. The first-grade curricula do not build upon knowledge contained in the nursery curricula. In addition, the teaching methods for the first grade are traditional and are often conducted in the classroom, as the stakeholders described and observation confirmed.

Thus, the methods for conveying learning to first-grade children belie their expressed need to learn in nature, along with learning motor skills and sports, such as swimming.

Every stakeholder stressed a weakness in teacher training in terms of confronting various educational issues. This shortfall especially applies to nursery teachers whose qualifications are typically limited to a general diploma and entail taking simple courses that do not offer in-depth knowledge. Focused practical training is absent from college courses or in service. The study's observation phase confirmed most of the first-grade teachers' inability to interact or deal properly with various behaviours or attitudes of children in their classes. Nevertheless, the children expressed their desperate need for a teacher in their drawings and narratives. Most of the stakeholders attributed the teachers' difficulties to weak financial funding targeted at dealing with issues arising in schools among students, which seems at odds with the large sums of money allocated annually to education, as seen in the official statistics announced each year. Others might have been looking for a way to rationalise their shortcomings, which might even have extended to not addressing the issues at all.

Interestingly, the stakeholders and children alike were in agreement about the children's needs, while my observations revealed that children's greatest needs encompassed friends, teacher care, and an appropriate environment for learning with games and entertainment. They loved times that represented fun and play to them, such as break and home time, buying from the canteen and playing in the school yard with their friends. Emerging from my analysis was the impact of friends not moving to their new class with them, which appeared to cause the greatest distress to them and hindered their adaptation. Many children talked about and drew this situation, and the stakeholders' expressed agreement with the children's perceptions. In working with the children and observing them in the school setting, I was struck by the familiarity and interaction of those who were friends, brothers, or relatives sitting together. Sadly, I also witnessed loneliness, fear, and crying from those who did not know anyone in their new and unfamiliar environment.

Of course, the parent–child relationship was mostly absent in the school, yet the presence of parents manifested greatly in children's drawings, which should be unsurprising, as their home life is important to children. This factor was clear in my observations and confirmed

in the interviewees' responses. In addition, many of the stakeholders believed that parents cared more about the academic level than other aspects of the child, while parents seemed divided on the matter, as one mother denied this emphasis while another mother confirmed it. In addition, certain children were clearly afraid of bullying, and their fear was reflected in some children's lack of adaptation, which I also noticed.

Without a doubt, the continuity of experience was almost non-existent, as was evident in all of the collected data. Continuity was absent from the curricula, educational environment, and system. The nursery environment was full of colours, games, and a comfortable table that often-hosted play times, a single book featuring mostly drawings, and one teacher who had an assistant for children's services. In contrast, the first grade is part of the formal school system, with six textbooks for different subjects, different teachers for each subject, an expectation of self-reliance in accessing all services, homework, reading and writing, an intense formal class schedule, and the absence of games and colourful elements. At the end of KG2, children are suddenly forced to move to a new environment lacking any thread to grasp at to experience continuity. The fear evinced by KG2 children regarding this interruption was evident in their desire to move their friends, teachers, and toys with them, a wish that was not likely to be granted.

- **Research Question 3**

    **What is the impact (positive or negative) of transition practices implemented during children's transition from nursery to first grade from the stakeholders' points of view?**

The stakeholders' responses exposed an almost total lack of interest in the issue of children's transition from KG2 to the first grade, whether the topic was legislation or implementation. As I noted and some of the teachers and school principals confirmed in their interviews, any efforts to help the children cope with the transition process were random, unorganised, and based on the personal initiative of school staff members. Because such actions were few in number, unfocused, short-term, and did not consider all aspects that could make a difference, they did not have any impact. Some teachers may welcome incoming children with balloons and some cartoon characters or give them gifts of sweets and chips. After the first day or two, they are, in essence, left abandoned in the

classroom, with no activities and no friends, so none of them know each other. The teacher might take them on a quick, unorganised tour intended to familiarise them to the school's facilities that may be more bewildering than helpful. A first-grade class holds many pupils, with the number ranging between 32–34. Unsurprisingly, the children at the end of the queue are unlikely to hear the teacher's voice, making the well-intended tour ineffective. My observations revealed children who remained the same throughout the observation period, belying the efforts of the teachers who implemented these practices and talked about them as if they were an achievement. At best, such achievements appeared to me to be very limited and incomplete in the current situation.

- **Research Question 4**

   **What is the best framework to bring about positive change in Omani children's transition process from nursery to first grade?**

The results discussed previously underscore the need to develop a framework that considers the identified shortcomings and gaps while building a comprehensive approach to address the issue of Omani children's transition from KG2 to the first grade. As an educational model, the proposed framework should cover all of the aspects revealed by the stakeholders and children. Accordingly, in establishing the foundation of the proposed framework, I chose Fullan's (1991) framework, which has seen extensive use in addressing educational issues. Driving this choice were the areas of deficiency I identified and the data I found, which were collected according to CHAT (Hogsnes, 2015) and Dewey's principle of continuity from his theory of experience (Dewey, 1998). Fullan's framework, CHAT, and Dewey's ideas yielded a unique framework for addressing the issue of the transition process involving Omani children from KG2 to first grade.

## 10.4. Study Contributions

One aspect of this research aimed at identifying gaps in the educational literature related to the weakness of methods intended to remedy the issue of children's transition from nursery to first grade (for more details, see Chapter 1, section: 1.2 on p:2). Thus, my study will contribute at the research level to filling a wide gap in the educational literature, both on the global level and in the Arabic literature, regarding children's transition to primary

school. To the best of my knowledge, this study is among the first, especially in the Omani and Arab contexts, to examine the agency of children in Oman and explore pertinent issues related to their transition from K2 to the first grade. Therefore, the impact of the social and cultural conditions affecting children's motivations in their new environment remains ambiguous. Furthermore, the problems associated with this transition also remain ambiguous, such as difficulties that affect the social and emotional state of the student and, in turn, his academic development. This contribution reflects Saairanen and Kumpulainen's (2014) suggestion that research can help scholars understand social effectiveness, children's participation, and the extent of their learning.

Additionally, the methodologies adopted by the Arab scholars still do not regard the children as active agents who can express their experiences. Therefore, the current study's findings may be of interest to other Arab researchers who plan to conduct studies in the same area, leading to a better understanding of children's experiences of their world, whether in preschool or primary school. Furthermore, from the children's drawings and narratives in the present study, several sociocultural resources emerged that the children identified as mediating their sense of agency in the preschool and first-grade settings. These revelations thus offer insight to stakeholders in these settings into the sociocultural resources that can help children exercise their sense of agency. In this context, Smith (2011) stressed that researchers must view children as subjective participants (knowers and social actors) rather than objective participants. In addition, the insights derived from the current study's application of ethnographic methods centred around visual drawing and narratives, which have been recommended as the most suitable methods for collecting data from children, may inspire researchers engaging in future Arabic studies in the field of childhood to incorporate these methods into their endeavours to enrich the data they unearth.

At the local level, as well as in the context of educational policies, the study findings fill a wide gap in the literature concerning how children's law and policies in Oman conceptualise children's agency, the relationship between the structure of childhood education settings in Oman and children's agency, and the motives of Omani children during their transition to first grade. As a result, these findings will help to address the children's needs during this period, which will improve their socio-emotional status and

academic achievement. In a similar vein, understanding children's motives during their transition to first grade will facilitate developing the learning environment in Omani primary schools to accommodate educating children in a way that meets their demands as active agents. Lastly, the findings will validate the usefulness of visual drawings and narratives in different sociocultural contexts, as the process of socialisation in Oman differs from that in other contexts where previous studies have been conducted.

## 10.5. Study Limitations

As is common in research endeavours, especially in the case of studies related to human social implementations, the current study has several limitations. The biggest challenge was that my study time coincided with the spread of Covid-19. Lockdowns and other restrictions precluded visiting a library or mingling with fellow researchers in order to enrich our discussions about our research and benefit from our interactions. The greatest impact occurred in my country, Oman, during the data collection process, as I had to conduct most of the interviews via Zoom. The implementation of the application for children was also delayed due to the school closures. Nonetheless, I was able to finish my research in a timely manner after physical classes were allowed to resume in Omani schools. With the resumption of in-person classes, the necessary procedures and precautions that were put in place further complicated the research process and added a layer of difficulty, however.

Another limitation arose from the study's examination of multiple contexts within the literature review process. It was necessary to obtain information on experiences and practices around the world related to the issue of children's transition from nursery to first grade in the interest of conducting a sound and comprehensive study. This process was not easy. Much of the research published in English describes the experiences of countries whose first language is not English. Therefore, it is possible that non-English resources might offer contradictory as well as confirmatory findings that were not included in the current study's considerations. In addition, accessing limited Arab resources was difficult, and the resources found did not cover the study issue as expected.

The methodology applied in the current study poses another limitation. As mentioned in Chapter 5, this study was based on children's agency by exploring children's opinions on an issue that concerns them in ways that suit them and conducting field observations in addition to using more traditional research methodology to gather stakeholders' opinions. Analysis and interpretation followed data collection. That said, this approach, which presented a valuable opportunity to explore in depth the perceptions of the child participants regarding their transition from KG2 to first grade, has rarely been used in the Arab context. In fact, the success of this or any other methodology depends on various factors related to the capabilities of the researcher who collects the data and creates meaning in order to avoid bias that may obstruct this methodology during analysis and interpretation.

One of the most difficult limitations was related to the use of multiple study tools in the form of focus group interviews, semi-structured individual interviews, children's drawings and visual narrations, and observation. Regarding the interviews, obtaining the sample of participants was a time-consuming and laborious process since the study purposes demanded a wide and diverse sample that included policy makers, first-grade curriculum developers, nursery curriculum developers, first-grade supervisors, nursery supervisors, nursery directors, first-grade principals, first-grade teachers, nursery teachers, parents of first-grade children, and parents of nursery children. One person would suggest another potential participant. Participants worked in different buildings. I would reach out to several people and obtain approval from a few of them, or several days might pass without receiving a response as I continued the search process. The need to conduct two interviews with some participants (i.e. a focus group and an individual interview) added complexity to the data collection process due to the need to coordinate with 10 other people to determine a suitable time to conduct the focus interview. Using Zoom made some aspects of the process easier, allowing each participant to choose to engage while in a comfortable place. I scheduled individual interviews at separate times, each according to the participants' availability. In the case of these interviews, some participants' work circumstances sometimes required rescheduling our sessions.

Conducting research involving children was, of course, one of the biggest challenges in my study, as I was often aware of the unequal power differential between me (an adult

researcher) and the participant (a child; see also the discussion in Chapter 5, section: 5.4.4. on p:126). I tried reducing the power of this disparity by allowing them the freedom to draw what they wanted. But there are still some of them disturbed the desired balance. I set specific topics for the children to draw – likes and dislikes – which meant they could not follow the typical custom of a child when picking up a pen of beginning to draw whatever comes to mind. Some children did not draw anything, and I tried to talk to such children and persuade them to draw. When some children's drawings reflected their imaginations and had no meaning, I would try to explain what was needed so they could re-draw the picture. At such times, I felt that they were drawing what I wanted and not what they wanted. At the beginning of the data collection procedures involving the children, I obtained their consent and asked them to help me with my research; however, although they agreed to help, they were also constrained by the need to follow my instructions in order to satisfy my requirements. Nevertheless, I tried my best not to influence their responses, especially when they were talking about their drawings, as I would ask them open-ended questions to encourage them to talk and describe their creations.

However, in reality, some of the children might have answered my questions in order to meet what I wanted. Therefore, it is certain that, as Rosenblatt (1982) described, the meaning that hides in children is like an iceberg that reveals only the visible part above the water, but the bulk of the iceberg lies beneath the surface. However, the children did better than I expected, perhaps because I was worried that the ice would be harder to find than I experienced in reality.

Lastly, the process of observation and attending entire school days was one of the most difficult aspects of the study in terms of obtaining approval from the school principals and then the classroom teachers, along with what I felt was a representation of something other than reality on the part of the principals and teachers. In observing the children's reactions, I could see that they were not accustomed to that. Then recording that huge number of events. Which is followed by how to deal with it and take what matches the objectives and questions of the study.

## 10.6. Further Research

The results of this study suggest several areas for future investigations in the interest of expanding scholarly knowledge about the issue at hand, such as:

- Studying the impact of the practices involved in transitioning children from KG2 to first grade that have been implemented in European and East Asian countries in terms of reducing the problem of adaptation to school from the point of view of teachers and parents.
- Exploring the needs of nursery and first-grade teachers to enable them to facilitate the transition of children from nursery to first grade.
- Designing learning environments that support children's transition from nursery to first grade.
- Providing a vision for a curriculum that suits children's requirements to facilitate their transition from nursery to first grade considering international experiences.
- Conducting a tracking and comparison study between children who went through programmes to facilitate the transition in the 3 years following the first grade academically, socially, and psychologically.

## 10.7. What is the Next?

The current study supports lofty aspirations for the future, as described by Arab poet Mahmoud Darwish in the following exhortation:

*"As much as you dream, the earth expands."*

This study represents the beginning of understanding the issue of children's transition to primary school and the associated factors influencing their experience and future prospects. Overall, this research journey has been enjoyable despite the troubles and obstacles I encountered along the way. Although many interesting points emerged, more data are needed to complete this picture, which can be gained through further research on the issue that examines various aspects, as reviewed in the previous point. Findings should also be presented at conferences and seminars in order to inform other scholars about the results. I have begun that process by presenting two parts of it at international conferences. The

study will also be made available to the educational community by sharing the link after it is developed by the university. I will also seek to convey the findings of this thesis in terms of a framework for addressing the issue of interest, which can provide guidance to educational decision-makers in Oman, as I belong to the MOE, which is responsible for this process.

# References

Abbas, S. (2007). *The effectiveness of enrolment in nursery in developing autonomy, school compatibility, and academic achievement: the study of first grade children in Karary locality* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Omdurman Islamic University, Faculty of Education, Sudan.

Abdelhamid, M. (2007). The relationship between enrolment and adaptation for children in school: a descriptive field study. *Psychology. Egypt. 20*(73–74), 102–119.

Abdulrazzak, N. L. (2014). *My rights are divine: A closer look at children's right in the Muslim Arab world*.

Abdulwareth, S. (2005). The effectiveness of suggested program in developing the emotional intelligence skills for kindergarten teachers. *Journal of Education and Psychology*, *19*, 1–42.

Abu Harb, Y. (2007). Children played, in the past and present, as seen by preschool teachers in the Sultanate of Oman. *The Educational Journal*, *22*(85), 251–293.

Adams, E. (2006). *Drawing insights*. The Campaign for Drawing.

Ahmed, D. (2018). The effectiveness of a training program for kindergarten teachers in behavior management in the Sultanate of Oman. *The Educational Journal*, *32*(127), 277–319.

Ahmed, D., Alrobkhy, R., & Altobi, Z. (2015). The effectiveness of the project's approach in developing some language skills among a sample of pre-school children in the Sultanate of Oman. *Journal of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies*, *41*(154), 185–240.

Aikman, K. G., Belter, R. W., & Finch, A. J., Jr. (1992). Human figure drawings: Validity in assessing intellectual level and academic achievement. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 48*, 114–120.

Ainsworth, M., & Bowlby, J. (1991). An ethological approach to personality development. *American Psychologist*, *46*, 333–341.

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ainsworth, M. D., Blehar, M., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (2015). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation.* (2nd ed). Taylor & Francis Group.

Akkerman, S., & Bakker, A. (2011). Boundary crossing and boundary objects. *Review of Educational Research*, *81*(2), 132–169.

Al Balushi, S. (2010). The teacher's role in developing creativity in kindergarten. *Journal of Educational Development*, *9*(57), 11–12.

Al Dhofri, S. (2016). Predicting pre-school teachers' burnout levels through three efficacy beliefs in Sultanate of Oman. *Arab Childhood Journal*, *17*(66), 105–115.

Al Lawati, R., Al-Mahrezi, R., Hafedh, H., & Salama, A. (2005). *Kindergarten management problems in the Sultanate of Oman: A field study*. Master Thesis. Faculty of Education. Sultan Qaboos University.

Al Maamari, S., & Saleh, E. (2018). *Problems facing children in pre-school education: A study applied to smart student centers in the Governorate of Muscat*. Master Thesis. College of Arts and Social Sciences. Sultan Qaboos university.

Al-Busafi, M., Zayed, K., & Al-Hadabi, B. (2016). Attitudes of kindergarten teachers in the Sultanate of Oman towards kinetic education. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies*, *10*(3), 478–507.

Al-Farsi, F. (2009). *Effectiveness of proposed educational activities for the children of nurseries in Al Batinah region north of Oman*. Institute of Arab Research and Studies.

Al-Felfli, H., Ghanem, A., & Al-Murtadha, I. (2018) The effect of the quality of educational nursery on the development of creative thinking for first grader in private education schools in the capital Sana'a, Republic of Yemen. *International Journal of Excellence*, *9*(16), 19–218.

Al-Ghamdi, H. (2010). *The evolution of the education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Al-Rashed Library.

Al-Hamed, M., Ziyada, M., Al-Otaibi., B;& Metwally. M. (2007). *Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: A vision of the present and an anticipation of the future* (4th ed.). Al-Rashed Library.

Al-Hanai, Z. (2018). *Kindergartens in the Sultanate of Oman*. Al-Warraq Publishing House.

Al-Harahisha, S. (2019). *Reading, writing and arithmetic skills possessed by first-grade children enrolled in the nursery program as their teachers find*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Al Al-Bayt University, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Jordan.

Al-Hazmi, M. A. (2016). Development of kindergarten institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in light of the German model. *Journal of the College of Education*, Issue: 171, Part Four.

Al-Henaee, K. (2013). *Effectiveness of a collective educational program to develop the concept of children deprived of parents in the Sultanate of Oman* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman.

AL-Khafaf, I. (2017). The development of moral intelligence in children aged 5-6-7 years. *Journal of Psychological and Educational Sciences*, *5*(2), 134–160.

Al-Khatila, H. (1999). Evaluation of the status of pre-school education (kindergarten) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Riyadh. King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology.

AL-Marhoon, S., Jimiaan, I. (2018). A training program for kindergarten teachers to improve their classroom control skills. *Journal of Educational Sciences Studies*, *45*(4).

Al-Nawafli, A. (2013). *Effect of televised violence on aggressive behaviour in a sample of preschool children in the Sultanate of Oman.*

AL-Qaryouti, I. (2016). Attitudes of kindergarten teachers in the Gulf Cooperation Council towards educational inclusion: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Sciences*, *17*(4), 407–436.

Al-Rahbi, F., & Al-Nuaimi, T. (2018). *Preschool education in the Sultanate of Oman from the perspective of the family and kindergarten teachers: The states of Seeb and Bidbid are an example* (unpublished master's thesis). College of Arts and Social Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

AL-Saadi, S. (2010). A comparative study of the social behaviour of primary school students enrolled and not enrolled in nursery. *Educational Studies*, *3*(10), 69–112.

Al-Shehhi, A. (1997). *The philosophy of nurseries in the Sultanate of Oman: Analytical and descriptive theory*. Institute of Arab Research and Studies.

Al-Sheikhi, H. (2016). The relationship between educational attainment in mathematics for first and fourth grade children in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their prior or non-enrolment in nursery. *Journal of the College of Education. Egypt*, *32*(1–2), 235–282.

Al-Yazidi, B. (2007). *Professional development for kindergarten teachers in the Sultanate of Oman, reality – problems – development trends* (Unpublished master's thesis). Cairo University, Arab Republic of Egypt.

Alabri, M. (2018). *Devolving decision-making to private schools of the Sultanate of Oman: A practical exploration of challenges and potentials*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of York, UK.

Albeez, N. (2008) *Evaluating the objectives of the kindergarten stage in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. (unpublished master's thesis). King Saud University, College of Education.

Alm, A. (2018, November9). *Training program for childhood songs curricula.* http://agatoftkdf.blogspot.com. In Arabic.

Almoharby, D. (2010). Shuratic decision-making practice: A case of the Sultanate of Oman. *Humanomics*, *26*(1), 4–17.

Alotaibi, M. (2011). *A visionary vision towards requiring kindergarten in the State of Kuwait*. Alotaibi. Retrieved February 2, 2021.

ALSaadi, H. (2014). Training proposal to enhance the professional competencies of kindergarten female teachers in South Batinah Province in Oman. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, *11*(2), 317–361.

ALShanwani, H. (2012). Evaluating the kindergarten program in terms of the information, skills, and attitudes needed to practice work for kindergarten graduates according to the academic level and rate from the viewpoint of the students.

Alswafi, G., Abdulrahman, L., & Abdulrahman, A. (2019). *The effectiveness of a training program to develop the basic educational competencies of kindergarten teachers in the Sultanate of Oman* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. School of Major Language Studies, Malaysian Islamic Sciences University, Malaysia.

Aludain, A. (2000, January, 4). Human rights in Islam. *Yemen Times*. http://www.yementimes.com.

Anning, A., & Ring, K. (2004) *Making sense of children's drawings*. Open University Press.

Arfat, S. (2013). Islamic perspective of children's rights: An overview. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *2*, 299–307. http://www.ajssh.leena-luna.co.jp/.

Arksey, H., & Knight, P. (1999). *Interviewing for social scientists: An introductory resource with examples*. Sage.

Arvastson, G., & Ehn, B. (2009). *Etnografiska observationer*. Studentlitteratur

Atheer, (2016). *A study of Omani volunteers shows serious results and offers solutions*. Atheer. https://www.atheer.om/archives/24915/دراسة-لمتطوعين-عمانيين-تُظهر-نتائج-خطي/.

Aturupane, H., Glewwe, P., & Wisniewski, S. (2013). The impact of school quality, socioeconomic factors, and child health on students' academic perfor- mance: Evidence from Sri Lankan primary schools. Education Economics, 21(1), 2–37.

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2020). The shape of the Australian Curriculum (version 5.0). Retrieved January 16, 2025. https://www.acara.edu.au

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Preschool education*. ABS. Retrieved January 13, 2026 from https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/preschool-education/latest-release.

Azeed, Z. (2013). Geographical concepts of primary school children which enrolled and not enrolled in nursery. *Journal of the College of Basic Education*, *19*(80), 689–706.

Baines, E., & MacIntyre, H. (2019). Children's social experiences with peers and friends during primary school mealtimes. *Educational Review*, *74*(2), 165–187. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2019.1680534

Baresford, B. (1997). *Personal accounts. Involving disabled children in research.* Social Policy Research Unit.

Barker, J., & Weller, S. (2003). 'Is it fun?' Developing children centered research methods. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 23, 33–58.

Barthes, R. (1977). The rhetoric of the image. In R. Barthes (Ed.) *Image, music, text* (trans. S Heath, pp. 32–51). Hill & Wang.

Bawakeer. (2021). *Educational projects*. Bawakeer Schools. Retrieved October 10, 2023 from
https://bawakeerschools.com.

Bell, J. (2014). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers*. McGraw-Hill
Education.

Berg, B. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Berk, L. (1994). Vygotsky's theory: The importance of make-believe play. *Young Children*, *50*(1),
30–38. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42728322.

Berlin, L. J., Dunning, R. D., & Dodge, K. A. (2011). Enhancing the transition to kindergarten: A
randomized trial to test the efficacy of the 'Stars' summer kindergarten orientation
program. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *26*(2), 247–254.

Bernier, S., Simpson, Rose, G. C., & Chad A. (2012). Positive and negative reinforcement in
increasing compliance and decreasing problematic behavior. *National Teacher Education
Journal*.

Bland, D. (2018). Using drawing in research with children: Lessons from practice. *International
Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *41*(3), 342–352.

Blieszner, R. (2014). The worth of friendship: Can friends keep us happy and healthy?
*Generations*, *38*(1), 24–30.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss, Vol. 1: Attachment.* Basic Books.

Boylan, F, Barblett, L., Lavina, L., & Ruscoe, A. (2024). Transforming transitions to primary
school: Using children's funds of knowledge and identity. *European Early Childhood
Education Research Journal*, *32*(4), 704–718.

Bragg, S. (2011). Now it's up to us to interpret it: Youth voice and visual methods. In P. Thomson
& J. Sefton-Green (Eds.), *Researching creative learning: Methods and Issues* (pp. 88–
103). Routledge.

Brewer, D., Augustine, C., Zellman, G., Ryan, G., Goldman, C., Stasz, C., & Constant, L. (2007).
*Education for a new era design and implementation of K-12 education reform in Qatar*.
Rand Corporation.

Brinkmann S. (2014). Interview. In T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. Springer.

Brooker, L. (2007). Changing the landscape of early childhood. In J. Moyles (Ed.), *Early years
foundations: Meeting the challenge* (pp. 7–22). Open University Press.

Brooker, L. (2008). *Supporting transitions in the early years*. Open University Press.

Bryce, T. G. K., & Humes, W. M. (2018). *Scottish education*. Edinburgh University Press

Budniewski, K. L. (2007). *New student transition program into elementary school. (*published
Master Thesis) http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12648/4694

Burns, M. (2022). Ready or not to adopt a pedagogy of play for children starting school in Scottish primary schools – Is this a major transition for teachers? *International Journal of Educational and Life Transitions*, *1*(1). https://ijelt.dundee.ac.uk/articles/10.5334/ijelt.28

Burt, K., & Roisman, G. (2010). Competence and psychopathology: Cascade effects in the NICHD study of early childcare and youth development. *Development and Psychopathology*, *22*(3), 557–567.

Butler-Kisber, L. (2010). *Qualitative enquiry: Thematic, narrative and arts-informed perspectives*. Sage.

Caiman, C., & Lundegard, I. (2014). Pre-school children's agency in learning for sustainable development, *Environment Education Research*, *20*, 437–459.

Carr, M. (2013). Making a borderland of contested spaces into meeting place. In P. Moss (Ed.), *Early childhood and compulsory education. Reconceptualising the relationship* (pp. 92–111). Routledge.

Carrington, S. (2007). Real policy, real change. transforming secondary school cultures through image based research. In J. Moss (Ed.), *Researching education: Visually – digitally – spatially* (pp. 107–125). Sense Publishers.

Carver, R. (2001). *Continuity and interaction in the context of practice*. Seattle.

Casas, F., Saporiti, A., Gonzales, M., Figuer, C., Rostan, C., & Sadurni, M. (2006). Children's rights from the point of view of children, their parents and their teachers: A comparative study between Catalonia (Spain) and Il Molise (Italy). *International Journal of Children's Rights*, *14*, 1–75.

Center for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE). (2025). *Classroom management: Creating and maintaining positive learning environments maintaining positive learning environments*. NSW Department of Education. Retrieved January 16, 2025 from https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory. A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.

Christensen, P., & James, A. (Eds.) (2000). *Research with children: Perspectives and practices*. Falmer Press.

Christensen, P., & James, A. (Eds.) (2008). *Research with children: Perspectives and practices*. Routledge.

Christensen, P. H. (2004). Children's participation in ethnographic research: Issues of power and representation. *Children and Society*, *18*(2), 165–176.

Cicourel, A. (1974). *Theory and method in a study of Argentine fertility*. John Wiley.

Ciesielska, M., Boström, K., & Öhlander, M. (2018). Observation methods, In (Eds.), *Qualitative methodologies in organization studies* (pp. 33–52).

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, M. F. (2000) *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass Inc.

Cleverley, J. (1985). *The schooling of China*. George Allen & Unwin Australia Pte. Ltd.

Cohen, L. Manion, L. Morrison, K., & Cohen, P. L. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). Taylor & Francis.

Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline*. Harvard University Press.

Cole, M., & Engeström, Y. (1993). A cultural historical approach to distributed cognition. In G. Salomon (Ed.), *Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations* (pp. 1–46). Cambridge University Press.

Connolly, M., & Doolan, M. (2007). *Lives cut short: Child death by maltreatment*. Dunmore Publications for the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Corsaro, W. A., & Molinari, L. (2000). Priming events and Italian children's transition from preschool to elementary school: Representations and action. *Social Psychological Quarterly*, 63, 16–33.

Corsaro, W. A., & Molinari, L. (2005) *I Compagni: Understanding children's transition from preschool to elementary school*. Teachers College Press.

Cotton, D. R. E., Stokes, A., & Cotton, P. A. (2010). Using observational methods to research the student experience. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *34*(3), 463–473.

Cox, M.Y. (1993). *Children's drawings of the human figure.* Erlbaum.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). (2000). United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies. https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed). SAGE Publications.

Dadvand, P., Niewenhuijsen, M. J., Esnaola, M., Forns, J., Basagaña, X., Alvarez-Pedrero, M.(2015). Green spaces and cognitive development in primary schoolchildren. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, *112*, 7937–7942.

Datnow, A. (2002). Can we transplant educational reform, and does it last? *Journal of Educational Change*, *2*(3), 215–239.

David, T., Goouch, K., & Powell, S. (2011). Play and prescription. The impact of national developments in England. In M. Kernan & E. Singer (Eds.), *Peer relationships in early childhood education and care* (pp. 49–60). Routledge.

Debby R. E., Stokes, A., & Cotton, P. A. (2010). Using observational methods to research the student experience. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *34*(3), 463–473.

Decaro, J. A., & Worthman, C. M. (2008). Return to school accompanied by changing associations between family ecology and cortisol. *Developmental Psychobiology*, *50*, 183–195.

Deguara, J. (2019). Young children's drawings: A methodological tool for data analysis. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *17*(2), 157–174

Demir, M., Jaafar, J., Bilyk, N., & Mohd Ariff, M. (2012). Social skills, friendship and happiness: A cross- cultural investigation. *Journal Of Social Psychology*, *152*(3), 379–385.

Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2019) *Belonging, being and becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/201802/belonging_being_and_becoming_the _early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf

Desvousges, W. H., & Frey, J. H. (1989). Integrating focus groups and surveys: Examples from environmental risk surveys. *Journal of Official Statistics*, *5*, 349–363.

Dewey, J. (1974). *Erfaring og opdragelse* [Experience and Education]. Dreyer.

Dewey, J. (1997). *How we think*. Dover Publications.

Dewey, J. (1998). *Experience and education: The 60th anniversary edition*. Kappa Delta Pi.

Dewey, J. (2001). *Democracy and education*. The Pennsylvania State University. https://nsee.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/KnowledgeCenter/BuildingExpEduc/BooksRepo rts/10.%20democracy%20and%20education%20by%20dewey.pdf

Dewey, J. (2005). *Demokrati og uddannelse* [Democracy and Education]. Forlaget Klim.

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, *40*, 314–321.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2007). Children's transition to school: Changing expectations. In A.-W. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.), *Informing transition in the early years. Research, policy and practice* (pp. 92–104). Open University Press, McGraw-Hill.

Dockett, S., Perry, B., & Kearney, E. (2010). *School readiness: What does it mean for Indigenous children, families, schools and communities?* (Issues Paper No. 2). Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

Downing, J., Keating, T., & Bennett, C. (2005). Effective reinforcement techniques in elementary physical education: The key to behavior management. *The Physical Educator*, 114–122.

Driessnack, M., & Furukawa, R. (2012). Arts-based data collection techniques used in child research. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing*, *17*, 3–9.

Dunlop, A.-W. (2018). The child's curriculum as a Gift: Opening up the early-level curriculum in Scotland. In C. Trevarthen, J. Delafield-Butt, & A-W. Dunlop (Eds.), *The child's*

*curriculum: Working with the natural values of young children* (pp. 212–234). Oxford University Press.

Dunlop A-W. (2021). On the margins, getting by, persevering, or flying high? The intersection of wellbeing, attainment, and transitions in a Scottish longitudinal study. *Frontiers in Education*, *5*, 600–778.

Early, D. M., Pianta, R. C., Taylor, L. C., & Cox, M. J. (2001). Transition practices: Findings from a national survey of kindergartens teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 28*(3), 199–206.

Education Council of Sultanate of Oman. (2021). *Education in the Sultanate of Oman*. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from

https://www.educouncil.gov.om/en/page.php?scrollto=start&id=15

Einarsdóttir, J. (2013). Transition from preschool to primary school in Iceland from the perspective of children. In K. Margetts & A. Kienig (Eds.), *International perspectives on transition to school. Reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice* (pp. 69–78). Routledge.

Ellili-Cherif, M., & Romanowski, M. (2013). Education for a new era: Stakeholders' perception of Qatari education reform. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, *8*(*6*), 1–17.

Elmore, R. F. (2009). Institutions, improvement, and practice. In A. Hargreaves & M. Fullan (Eds.), *Change wars* (pp. 221–235). Solution Tree.

Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Orienta-Konsultit Oy.

Engeström, Y. (1999). Activity theory and individual and social transformation. In Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen, & R.-L. Punamaki (Eds.), *Perspectives on activity theory* (pp. 19–38). Cambridge University Press.

Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive learning at work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, *14*(1), 133–156.

Erikson, R. J. (1985). Play contributes to the full emotional development of the child. *Education*, *105*, 261–263.

Faber Taylor, A., & Kuo, F. E. (2009). Children with attention deficits concentrate better after walk in the park. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, *12*, 402–409.

Fabian, H. (2007). Informing transitions. In A. W. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.). *Informing transitions in the early years: Research, policy and practice* (pp. 3–17). Open University Press.

Fabian, H. (2013). Towards successful transitions. In K. Margetts & A. Kienig (Eds.), *International perspectives on transition to school, reconceptualising beliefs, policy and practice* (pp. 45–55). Routledge.

Fanack. (2020, August 10). *Population in Oman*. https://fanack.com/ar/oman/population-of-oman/.

Ferrer, M., & Fugate, A. (2022). *The importance of friendship for school-age children*. IFAS. http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

Fishman, S., & McCarthy, L. (1998). *John Dewey and the challenge of classroom practice*.

Fleer, M. (2014). *Theorising play in the early years*. Cambridge University Press.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2000). *The interview from structured questions to negotiated text*. In (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 645–672). Sage Publications.

Foot, K. A. (2013). *Analyzing evolving social work practices via cultural-historical activity theory: Examples from the HUSK Project*. Paper presented at the Workshop of the HUSK Work Group on Evidence-informed Human Service Practice, School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley.

Fox, L., Dunlap, G., & Cushing, L. (2002). Early intervention, positive behavior support, and transition to school. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 10*(3), 149–157.

Freire, P. (1998). Reprint: Cultural action for freedom. *Harvard Educational Review*, *68*(4), 476–522.

Fullan, M. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change* (2nd ed.). Cassell.

Fullan, M. (2003). *Change forces with a vengeance*. Routledge Falmer.

Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability. System thinkers in action*. Corwin.

Fullan, M. (2006). *Turnaround leadership*. Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal. Three keys to maximizing impact*. Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M., Cuttress, C., & Kilcher, A. (2009). 8 forces for leaders of change. In M. Fullan (Ed.), *The challenge of change. Start school improvement now* (2nd ed., pp. 9–20). Corwin.

Fullan, M., & Kirtman, L. (2019) *Coherent school leadership: Forging clarity from complexity*. ASCD.

Garcia, M. A. U. (2014). *Transition from preschool to first grade primary school in Mexico: The perceptions of teachers, headteachers and parents* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of York, UK.

General Secretariat for Development Planning (2009). *Qatar's second national human development report: Advancing sustainable development Qatar National Vision 203*0. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/qhdr_en_2009.pdf.

Giger, J. N. (2017). *Transcultural nursing: Assessment and intervention* (7th ed.). Mosby.

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, *204*(6).

Glassman, M. (2001). Dewey and Vygotsky: Society, experience, and inquiry in educational practice. *Educational Researcher*, *30*(4), 3–14.

Gopnik, A. (2011). *Why preschool shouldn't be like school*. Slate. http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2011/03/why_preschool_shouldnt

Goulart, M., & Roth, W. (2010). Engaging young children in collective curriculum design. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, *5*(3), 553–562.

Goulomb, C. (2002). *Child art in context: A cultural and comparative perspective*. APA.

Grbich, C. (2012). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction*. SAGE.

Greene, S., & Hill, M. (2005). Researching children's experience: Methods and methodological issues. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds.), *Researching children's experience* (pp. 1–21). Sage.

Griebel, W., & Niesel, R. (2009). A developmental psychology perspective in Germany: Co-constructions of transitions between family and education system by the child, parents and pedagogues. *Early Years*, *29*(1), 59–68.

Groeneveld, M. G., Vermeer, H. J., Linting, M., Noppe, G., Van Rossum, E. F., & Van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2013). Children's hair cortisol as a biomarker of stress at school entry. *The International Journal on the Biology of Stress*, *16*, 711–715.

Gross, J., Hayne, H., & Drury, T. (2009). Drawing facilitates children's reports of factual and narrative information: Implicational for educational contexts. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *23*(7), 953–971.

General Secretariat for Development Planning (GSDP) (2009). *Qatar's second national human development report: Advancing sustainable development Qatar National Vision 203*0. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/qhdr_en_2009.pdf

Gunnar, M., & Quevedo, K. (2007). The neurobiology of stress and development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *58*, 73–145.

Habib, K. (2016). The effect of introducing study materials in the nursery curriculum on the academic achievement of first-grade children in Kuwait. *The Educational Journal*, *30*(1–12), 61–98.

Hall, E. (2015). The ethics of 'using' children's drawings in research. In D. Yamada-Rice & E. Stirling (Eds.), *Visual methods with children and young people: Academics and visual industries in dialogue* (pp. 140–163). Palgrave Macmillan.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography: Principles and practice*. Tavistock Publishers.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography. Principles in practice*. Routledge.

Harcourt, D. (2011). An encounter with children: Seeking meaning and understanding about childhood. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *19*(3), 331–343.

Harcourt, D., & Einarsdottir, J. (2011). Editorial: Introducing children's perspectives and participation in research. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *19*(3), 301–307.

Harding, J. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis from start to finish*. Sage.

Hardman, J. (2015). Pedagogical variation with computers in mathematics classrooms: A cultural historical activity theory analysis. *Psychology in Society*, *48*, 47–76.

Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2012). *The global fourth way. The quest for educational excellence*. Corwin.

Hargreaves, A., Lieberman, A., Fullan, M., & Hopkins, D. (Eds.) (2010). *Second international handbook of educational change. Part 1*. Springer.

Hart, C., & Brando, N. (2018). A capability approach to children's well-being, agency and participatory rights in education. *European Journal of Education*, *53*(3), 293–309.

Hart, R. (1997) *Children's participation*. Earthscan Publications Ltd.

Hattie, J. (2017). *Visible learning: 250+ influences on student achievement*. https://visible-learning.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/VLPLUS-252- Influences-Hattie-ranking-DEC-2017.pdf

Hedegaard, M. (2007). The development of children's conceptual relation to the world, with focus on concept formation in preschool children's activity. In H. Daniels, M. Cole, & J. V. Wertsch (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky* (pp. 246–275). Cambridge University Press.

Hedegaard, M. (2014). The significance of demands and motives across practices in children's learning and development: An analysis of learning in home and school. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, *3*, 188–194.

Hirst, M., Jervis, N., Visagie, K., Sojo, V., & Cavanagh, S. (2011). *Transition to primary school: A review of the literature*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Hogsnes, H. (2015). Children's experiences of continuity in the transition from nursery to school: The potential of reliance on picture books as boundary objects. *International Journal of transition in Childhood*, *8*, 3–13.

Hogsnes, H., & Moser, T. (2014). Understandings of good transitions and continuity between kindergartens, schools and after schools. *Nordisk barnehageforskning*, *7*, 1–23.

Hope. G. (2008). *Thinking and learning through drawing in primary classrooms*. Sage.

Horn, R. (1998). *Visual Language: Global Communication for the 21st Century. MacroVU*.

Houen, S., Danby, S., Farrell, A., & Thorpe, K. (2016). Creating spaces for children's agency: 'I wonder' formulations in teacher-child interactions. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *48*(3), 259–276.

Huang, C. H., & Lin, F. (2013). Using activity theory to model the Taiwan Atayal students' classroom mathematical activity. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, *11*, 213–236.

Huf, C. (2013) Children's agency during transition to formal schooling. *Ethnography and Education*, *8*(1), 61–76.

Hughes, C. (2015). The transition to school. *Psychologist*, *28*, 714–717.

Hurwitz, S. C. (2003). To be successful: Let them play! *Child Education*, *79*, 101–102.

Ibrahim, H., & ALkenani, R. (2016). The effectiveness of a program based on cooperative and competitive games in developing basic and social motor skills among preschool children in the Sultanate of Oman. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies*, *10*(3), 636–652.

Ibrahim, Y., Mehdi, I., & Ibrahim, I. (2019). Competition among first-grade students enrolled and not enrolled in kindergarten.

Ihmeideh, F. M., Ibrahim A., & Al-Qaryouti, I. A. (2016) Exploring kindergarten teachers' views and roles regarding children's outdoor play environments in Oman. *Early Years*, *36*(1), 81–96.

Illing, J. (2014). Thinking about research: Theoretical perspectives, ethics and scholarship. In T. Swanwick (Ed.), *Understanding medical education: Evidence, theory and practice* (pp. 331–347). Wiley- Blackwell.

Issan, S. A. (2013). *Private education in the Sultanate of Oman: Obstacles and challenges*. Peri Global. http://www.periglobal.org/sites/periglobal.org/files/The%20period%20of%20change%20Privatization%20Oman.pdf.

Jaafar, S. B. (2011). Performance-based accountability in Qatar: A state in progress. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *41*(5), 597–614.

Jacobsen, K. J. (1993). *Intervju – Konsten att lyssna och fråga* [Interview – The art of listening and asking]. Studentlitteratur.

Johnson, J. M. (2001). In-depth interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 103–119). Sage Publications.

Julkunen, I. (2013). *Critical examination of the research in practice and the development of social services in HUSK: A practice research perspective*. Paper presented at the Workshop of the HUSK Work Group on Evidence-informed Human Service Practice, School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley.

Kazem, A. M. (2016). The prevalence of developmental difficulties for Omani children according to the gender variables and the educational program. *Journal of the Federation of Arab Universities for Education and Psychology*, *14*(4), 39–78.

Khalaf, M. (2019). Emotional awareness for children aged (5-6-7). *Journal of the College of Basic Education. Special Issue: Proceedings of the Nineteenth Scientific Conference*, 210–228.

Khayyat, A. b. M. J. b. A. (2010). *The contribution of the nursery stage in preparing for the primary stage in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Umm Al Qura University, College of Education, Saudi Arabia.

Kilani' H., & Al-Qaryouti, I. (2016). What is the status of Omani parents on their children's healthy lifestyle? *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies*, *10*(4), 750–757.

King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 257-270). SAGE Publications.

King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. SAGE.

Kohlberg, L. (1927-1987). The child as a moral philosopher. The Grand Theories (pp. 21–27).

Koszalka, T. A., & Chun-Ping, W. (2004). A Cultural Historical Activity Theory [CHAT] analysis of technology integration: Case study of two teachers. *Association for Educational Communications and Technology*, *27*, 19–23.

Kragh-Müller, G., & Isbell, R. (2011). Children's perspectives on their everyday lives in childcare in two cultures: Denmark and the United States. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *39*, 17–27.

Kramp, M. (2004). Exploring life and experience through narrative inquiry. In K. deMarrais & S. D. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations for research* (pp. 103–121). Erlbaum.

Kress, G. (2010) *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Kuutti, K. (1996). Activity theory as a potential framework for human-computer interaction research. In B.A. Nardi (Ed.), *Context and consciousness: Activity theory and human-computer interaction* (pp.17-44). MIT Press.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Sage Publications

La Paro, K. M., Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2000a). Kindergarten teachers' reported use of kindergarten to first grade transition practices. *Elementary School Journal*, *101*, 63–78.

La Paro, K. M., Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2000b). Teachers' reported transition practices for children transitioning into kindergarten and first grade. *Exceptional Children*, *67*, 7–20.

Labitsi, V. (2008). 'Climbing to reach the sunset': An inquiry into the representation of narrative structures in Greek children's drawings. International Journal of Education Through Art, *3*(3), 185–193.

Ladd, G. (1999). Peer relationship and social competence during early and middle childhood, *Annual Review of Psychology*, *50*, 333–359.

Laksov, K. B., Dornan, T., & Teunissen, P. W. (2017). Making theory explicit – An analysis of how medical education research(ers) describe how they connect to theory. *BMC Medical Education*, *17*, 1.

Lam, M. S., & Pollard, A. (2006). A conceptual framework for understanding children as agents in the transition from home to nursery. *Early Years*, *26*(2), 123141.

Laverick, D. (2008). Starting school: Welcoming young children and families into early school experience. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *35*(4), 321–326.

Lee, P., & Bierman, B. (2015). Classroom and teacher support in nursery: Associations with behavioral and academic adjustment of low-income students. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, *61*(3), 383–411.

Leeds, J. A. (1989). The history of attitudes towards children's art. *Studies in Art Education*, *30*(2), 93–103.

Leont'ev, A. N. (1978). *Activity, consciousness, and personality* (trans. M .J. Hall). Prentice-Hall. (Original work published 1975)

Leu, H.R., & Schelle, R. (2009). Between education and care. Critical reflections on early childhood policies in Germany. *Early Years*, *29*(1), 5–18.

Li, D., & Sullivan, W. C. (2016). Impact of views to school landscapes on recovery from stress and mental fatigue. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, *148*, 149–158.

Lingard, L., & Kennedy, T. J. (2010). Qualitative research methods in medical education. In T. Swanwick (Ed.), *Understanding medical education: Evidence, theory and practice* (pp. 325–335). Wiley-Blackwell.

LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Pre- kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *23*(1), 124–139.

Lodge, C. (2007). Regarding learning: Children's drawings of learning in the classroom. *Learning Environments Research*, *10*(2), 145–156.

Lofland, J. (1971). *Analyzing social settings*. Wadsworth.

Lorimer, M. R. (2016). Cultivating aesthetic and creative expression: An arts-based professional development project for migrant education. *Art Education*, *69*, 35–43.

Love, J., Logue, M., Trudeau, J., & Thayer, K. (1992). *Transitions to kindergarten in American schools: Final report of the National Transition Study*. US Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning.

Lowenfeld, V., & Brittain, W. L. (1967). *Creative and mental growth* (4th ed). Macmillan.

LT Scotland (2011). *Curriculum for excellence fact file – 3 to 18 transitions*. www.LTScotland.org.uk/commstoolkit. Accessed 5 February 2021.

Luquet, G.-H. (1913) Les dessins d'un enfant. Librairie Felix Alcan in Barrett.M ; Light. P. Symbolism and Intellectual Realism in Children's Drawing.

Marcon, R.A.(2000, June–July). *Educational transitions in early childhood, middle childhood, and early adolescence: Head Start vs. public school pre-nursery graduates*. Paper presented at the National Head Start Conference, Washington, DC

Mårtensson, F., Boldemann, C., Soderstrom, M., Blennow, M., Englund, J.-E., & Grahn, P. (2009). Outdoor environmental assessment of attention promoting settings for preschool children. *Health Place*, *15*, 1149–1157.

Matthews, H., Limb, M., & Taylor, M. (1999). Young people's participation and representation in society. *Geoforum*, *30*, 135–144.

Mauthner, M. (1997). Methodological aspects of collecting data from children: Lessons from three research projects. *Children & Society*, *11*, 16–28.

Mayall, B. (2000). Conversations with children. Working with generational issues. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.). *Research with children: Perspectives and practices* (pp. 120–135). Falmer Press.

Mazeed, Z. (2013). Geographical concepts for first grade students enrolled and not enrolled in kindergarten. *Journal of the College of Basic Education*, *19*(80).

McGrath, C., Palmgren, P., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, *41*(9), 1002–1006.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B. (1979). Qualitative data as an attractive nuisance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *24*, 590–601.

Ministry of Education. (2009). *Statistical information for the year 2007/2008*. Department of Private Education.

Ministry of Education. (2005). *Pre-school classes project guide*. Sultanate of Oman. https://home.moe.gov.om/?GetLang=en

Ministry of Education. (2008). *Pre-school education*. Sultanate of Oman.
> https://home.moe.gov.om/?GetLang=en

Ministry of Education. (2012). *Global schools*. The Horizon Press.

Ministry of Education. (2016). *Basic education in the Sultanate of Oman: The theoretical framework.* Oman Printers and Stationers.

Ministry of Education. (2017). *Organizational guide for the nursery and the kindergarten*

Ministry of Education. (2021, November 30). Educational Portal.
> https://home.moe.gov.om/pages/14/show/16.

Ministry of Education. (2023) *Basic education. Oman educational portal*. Retrieved November 3, 2023 from
> http://www.moe.gov.om/portal/sitebuilder/sites/eps/english/ips/right_menu/edu_system/edusystem/basic.aspx.

Ministry of Education and Culture. (2017). *Finnish country note on transitions in ECEC: Review of policies and practices for transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. Publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan. (2016). *Country note on transitions between ECEC and Primary Education Japan*. Retrieved November 12, 2020 from https://web-archive.oecd.org/2017-12-05/436771-ss5-country-background-report-slovenia.pdf.

Ministry of Education and Culture. (2017). *Finnish country note on transitions in ECEC. Review of policies and practices for transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-263-481-8.

Ministry of Finance. (2016). *The state's general budget for the financial year 2015*. Ministry Press.

Ministry of Health. (2019). *Annual health report 2019*. Department of Health Information & Statistics. Directorate General of Planning and Studies Ministry of Health Sultanate of Oman.
> https://www.moh.gov.om/documents/274609/4243161/9/2019+السنوي+الصحي+التقريرafb3559-6f77-9e79-1251-e3d0a26b4861

Ministry of Information. (2003). *Oman 2002–2003*. Government Printing.

Ministry of Legal Affairs (2014). *The child law*. http://www.mola.gov.om/
> Download.aspx?Lid=182

Ministry of Planning. (2020). *Central statistical organization. Education indicators*. Retrieved November 13, 2020 from   http://www.cosit.gov.

Ministry of Social Development. (2021, November 11).
> https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://www.

mosd.gov.om/&ved=2ahUKEwjA2IOTqOuLAxV07AIHHTJRI64QFnoECBkQAQ&usg=
AOvVaw0Vb57A1rnmbEV7kPgnAT32

Mitchell, L. M. (2006). Child centred? Thinking critically about children's drawings as a visual research method. *Visual Anthropology Review*, *22*(1), 60–73.

Mizen, P., & Yaw Ofosu-Kusi., Y. (2013). Agency as vulnerability: Accounting for children's movement to the streets of Accra. *The Sociological Review*, *61*, 363–82.

Mohammed, A. (2009). *School readiness, academic achievement, and social behavior for primary school children enrolled and not enrolled in nursery* (Unpublished master's thesis). Mustansiriya University, College of Basic Education, Iraq.

Montessori Oman. (2021, December 6). Official website of Montessori Oman. http://www.montessorioman.com/index.php.

Morati, L., & Harcourt, D. (2012). Living ethical dilemmas for researchers when researching with children. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, *20*(3), 234–243.

Moreno, T., & Dongen, J. (2006). *Transitions in the early years: A learning opportunity*. Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Munsoor, F. (2020). Kindergartens in Kuwait from play to automatic self-activity. *Al-Arabi Magazine.* http://www.3rbi.info/Article.asp?ID=3816.

Musa, M. (2002). *Reading readiness for first grade children among enrolled and non-enrolled children in nursery* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Baghdad, Baghdad.

Muscat Daily. (2013). Available from: http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/From- access-to-success-The-story-of-Oman-s-school-education-system- 2pri#ixzz45WKpXbQk
 [Accessed 31/11/2023].

Nasreddin, E. (2010). *Emotional intelligence and its relationship to innovative thinking among a sample of first-grade children who enrolled and non-enrolled in nursery in the Jeddah governorate* (Unpublished master's thesis). Um Al Qura University, College of Education, Saudi Arabia

National Center for Statistics and Information. (2018). National Center for Statistics & Information.
https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/LibraryContentDoc/bar_Statistical%20Year%20Book%202018_a8b32d59-cdc9-4987-ba29-1e7ce78d5cca.pdf

National Center for Statistics and Information. (2019). *Statistical yearbook*.
https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/LibraryContentDoc/bar_Statistical%20Year%20Book_%207-5-2020_3d83f732-9fdf-4523-a64d-8c9dac8c19cb.pdf

National Center for Statistics and Information. (2020). *Statistical yearbook*. https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/LibraryContentDoc/bar_Statistical%20Year%20Book%202020%20%20Issue%2048_be9e58d8-e44a-41d8-ae4c-77e2d0d34bc6.pdf

National Center for Statistics and Information. (2021). *Statistical yearbook*. https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/LibraryContentDoc/bar_Statistical%20Year%20Book%202021%2049%20Issue_897e15ef-3c8f-438b-8ae4-415070caea09.pdf

National Center for Statistics and Information. (2023). *Monthly statistical bulletin*. Vol:34.Oman.https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/LibraryContentDoc/bar_bar_Monthly%20Statistical%20Bulletin%20April%202023_0e1b09c7-e72b-49f7-b1ea-18af99f47a5c.pdf.

Nelson, J. M. (2011). Social policy reforms in Latin America: Urgent but frustrating. *Latin American Research Review*, *46*(1), 226–239.

Newby, P. (2014). *Research methods for education*. Pearson Education.

Nicholson, T., & Townsend, M. (2011). Children's friendships – Real and imaginary. In Rakie-Davies (Ed.), *Educational psychology: Concepts, research and challenges* (pp. 200–214). Routledge.

Nimmon, L., & Stenfors-Hayes, T. (2016). The handling of power in the physician-patient encounter: perceptions from experienced physicians. *BMC Medical Education*, *16*, 114.

Natural Learning Initiative. (2012). *Benefits of connecting children with nature: Why naturalize outdoor learning environments*. http://naturalearning.org/sites/default/files/Benefits%20of%20Connecting%20Children%20with%20Nature_InfoSheet.pdf

NSW Education Standards Authority. (2025). Transitioning to school. Retrieved January 16, 2025 from https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au

Nussbaumer, D. (2012). An overview of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) use in classroom research 2000 to 2009. *Educational Review*, *64*(1), 37–55.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2016). *Education in China: A snapshot*. Retrieved February 2, 2021 from https://www.oecd.org/education/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf.

Official Gazette. (1996). *Royal decree No. 54/96 approving the Sultanate's accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child*. https://qanoon.om/p/1996/rd1996054/.

Official Gazette. (2014a). *Royal decree 22/2014 promulgating the Law of the Child*. https://decree.om/2014/rd20140022/

Official Gazette. (2014b). *Royal decree 22/2014 promulgating the Law of the Child*. https://qanoon.om/p/2014/rd2014022/.

Official Gazette. (2023). *Royal decree No. 52/2023 issuing the Social Protection Law*.

https://qanoon.om/p/2023/rd2023052/.

OIC. (1990). *The Cairo declaration on human rights in Islam*. http://www.oic-oci.org/english/article/human.htm.

OIC. (2005). Covenant on the rights of the child in Islam. *Humanomics*, *26*(1), 4–17. http://www.refworld.org/docid/44eaf0e4a.html.

Omanuna, the Official Oman eGoverment Services Portal. (2021, November 17). https://www.oman.om.

Owtram, F. (2004). *A modern history of Oman: Formation of state since 1920*. I. B. Tauris

Parent, S., Lupien, S., Herba, C., Dupére, V., Gunnar, M., & Séguin, J. (2019). Children's cortisol response to the transition from preschool to formal schooling: A review. *Psychoneuro Endocrinology*, *99*, 196–205.

Pehlivan, H. (2008). Mythological drawings from Turkish elementary school children. *Elementary Education Online*, *7*(1), 150–156.

Perry, B., Dockett, S., & Petriwskyj, A. (2014). *Transitions to school-international research, policy and practice*. Springer Netherlands.

Persson, E., & Degotardi, S. (2009). Education for sustainable development in early childhood education: A global solution to local concerns. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *41*(2), 977–111.

Piaget, J. (1971). The theory of stages in cognitive development. In D. Green, M. Ford, & G. Flamer (Eds.), *Measurement and Piaget* (pp. 1–11). McGraw-Hill.

Pianta, R., & Cox, M., (1999). *The transition to kindergarten*. Paul H. Brookes.

Pink, S. (2005). *Doing visual ethnography*. Sage.

Poland, B. (1995). Transcription quality as an aspect of rigor in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *1*, 290–310.

Ponitz, C. C., Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Brock, L. L., & Nathanson, L. (2009). Early adjustment, gender differences, and classroom organizational climate in first grade. *The Elementary School Journal*, *110*(2), 142–162. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/605470.

Punch, K. F., & Oancea, A. (2014). *Introduction to research methods in education* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Punch, K.F. (2009) *Introduction to Research Methods in Education.* London: Sage.

Punch, S. (2002). Research with children: The same or different from research with adults? *Childhood*, *9*(3), 321–41.

Rand-Qatar Policy Institute (2007). A *new system for K–12 education in Qatar: Research brief*. Retrieved February 4, 2021 from http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9248/index1.html.

Ready, D. D., LoGerfo, L. F., Burkam, D. T., & Lee, V. E. (2005). Explaining girls' advantage in kindergarten literacy learning: Do classroom behaviors make a difference? *Elementary School Journal*, *106*, 21–38.

Reeves, S., McMillan, S. E., Kachan, N., Paradis, E., Leslie, M., & Kitto, S. (2015). Interprofessional collaboration and family member involvement in intensive care units: emerging themes from a multi-sited ethnography. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, *29*, 230–237.

Rimm-Kaufman, S.E., & Pianta, R.C. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to nursery: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Applied Development Psychology*, *21*, 491–511.

Robson, E., Bell, S., & Klocker, N. (2007). Conceptualizing agency in the lives of rural young people. In R. Panelli (Eds.), *Global perspectives on rural childhood and youth: Young rural lives* (pp. 48–135). Routledge.

Rogers, S., & Evans, J. (2008). *Inside role-play in early childhood education. Researching young children's perspectives*. Routledge.

Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. M., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher–student relationships on students' school engagement and achievement a meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research*, *81*(4), 493–529.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1982). The literary transaction: Evocation and response. *Theory into Practice*, *21*(4), 268–77.

Rosenkoetter, S., Schroeder, C., Rous, B., Hains, A., Shaw, J., & McCormick, K. (2009). *A review of research in early childhood transition: Child and family studies. Technical report #5*. Human Development Institute, National Early Childhood Transition Centre. http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc/.

Roth, W.-M. (2007). The ethico-moral nature of identity: Prolegomena to the development of third-generation cultural-historical activity theory. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *46*(1–2), 83–9.

Roth, W., & Lee, Y. (2007). Vygotsky's neglected legacy: Cultural-historical activity theory. *Review of Educational Research*, *77*(2), 186–232.

Rubin, J. A. (1984) *Child art therapy: Understanding and helping children grow through art* (2nd ed.). Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Russ, S., Herbert, J., Cooper, P., Gunnar, M., Goodyer, I, Groudace, T., & Murrary, L. (2012). Cortisol levels in response to starting school in children at increased risk for social phobia. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, *37*, 462–474.

Saber, N. (2008). The role of nursery in school adaptation for first-grade children. *Journal of Kirkuk University: Humanities*, *3*(2), 79–93.

Sahlberg, P. (2011). PISA in Finland: An education miracle or an obstacle to change? *CEPS Journal*, *1*(3), 119–140.

Said, E. (1987). *Orientalism*. Vintage Books.

Sairanen, H., & Kumpulainen, K. (2014). A visual narrative inquiry into children's sense of agency in preschool and first grade. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, *3*(2), 141–174.

Salama, A. (2007). *The nursery curriculum and its effect on academic achievement in the first cycle of basic education in the administrative unit of the city of Al-Duaym* (Unpublished master's thesis). Bakht al-Rida University, College of Education, Sudan.

Salem, O. (2014, January 22). FNC passes child rights law after three-day debate. *The National*. http://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/fnc-passes-child-rights-law-after-three-day-debate.

Salmi, S., & Kumpulainen, K. (2019). Children's experiencing of their transition from preschool to first grade: A visual narrative study. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, *20*, 58–67.

Samouei, F. (2012). *The concept of self-development in children aged 5–7 years* (Unpublished master's thesis). Mustansiriya University, College of Basic Education, Iraq.

Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C. H. (2013). *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*. Routledge

Schaefer, D. R, & Dillman, D. A. (1998). Development of a standard e-mail methodology. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *62*, 378–397.

Schratz, M., & Steiner-Löffler, U. (1998). Pupils using photographs in school self-evaluation. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers* (pp. 235–251). Falmer Press.

Schulting, A. B., Malone, P. S., & Dodge, K. A. (2005). The effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes. *Developmental Psychology*, *41*(6), 860–871.

Seidman, I. E. (1991). *Interviewing as qualitative research.* Teachers College Press.

Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.) (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. National Academy Press.

Shumann, T. (2007). *Nurseries and kindergartens*. Al-Rashed Library.

Shura Council. (2016). *The statement of Her Excellency the Minister of Education*.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Sage Publications.

Simola, H., Kauko, J., Varjo, J., Kalalahti, M., & Sahlström, F. (2017) *Dynamics in education politics. Understanding and explaining the Finnish case*. Routledge.

Sirkko, S., Kyrölampi, K., & Puroila, A. (2019). Children's agency: Opportunities and constraints. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *51*, 283–300.

Smith, A. B. (2011). Respecting children's rights and agency: Theoretical insights into ethical research procedures. In D. Harcourt, B. Perry & T. Waller (Eds.). *Researching youth children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children* (pp. 11–25). Routledge.

Smith, A. B. (Ed.). (1996). *The quality of childcare centres for infants in New Zealand*. The New Zealand Association for Research in Education/Department of Policy Studies.

Smith, A., Fountain, S., & McLean, H. (2002). *Civic education in primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Serbia: An evaluation of the first year, 2001–2002 and recommendations*. UNICEF and UNESCO.

Smyth, E., & Privalko, I. (2022). The long road to secondary school: Background, home learning environment, and transition difficulties in Scotland. *Research Papers in Education*, *38*(6), 847–864.

Snape, D, & Spencer, L. (2003). The foundations of qualitative research. In J. Ritchie & L. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp.1-23). Sage Publications.

Soman, A. (2014). The effect of enrolment or lack of nursery in developing the reading and writing skills of students of the lower basic stage in Umm Habiba Elementary School in Jordan. *An-Najah University Journal for Research: Humanities*, *28*(4), 791–834.

Sommer, D., Pramling Samuelsson, I., & Hundeide, K. (2010). *Child perspectives and children's perspectives in theory and practice (Vol. 2)*. Springer Science+Business Media.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

St John, S., & Wynd, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Left behind: How social and income inequalities damage New Zealand children*. Child Poverty Action Group, Tauris.

Star, S. L., & Griesemer, J. R. (1989). Institutional ecology, 'translations' and boundary objects: Amateurs and professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39. *Social Studies of Science*, *19*(3), 387–420.

Stewart, D., & Shamdasani, P. (1990). *Focus groups: Theory and practice*. SAGE publications.

Stiles, D. A., & Gibbons, J. L. (2000). Manual for evaluating individual and social values expressed in international adolescents' drawings of ideal woman and man. *World Cultures*, *11*, 181–221.

Stiles, D. A., Gibbons, J. L., & Schnellman, J. (1987). The smiling sunbather and the chivalrous football player: Young adolescents' images of the ideal women and men. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, *7*, 411–427.

Study in the States. (2020). *Kindergarten to grade 12 students*. Retrieved February 1, 2021 from https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/get-started/kindergarten-to-grade-12-students.

Sully, J. (1896). *Studies of childhood*. Longmans Green.

Taylor, S., & Littleton, K. (2006). Biographies in talk: A narrative discursive research approach. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, *2*(1), 2238.

Team GIIS. (2023). *The transition from kindergarten to elementary school in Tokyo: What to expect*. Global Indian International School. Retrieved November 4, 2024 from https://globalindianschool.org/jp/tokyo/blog-details/the-transition-from-kindergarten-to-elementary-school-in-tokyo-what-to-expect.

Tekin, K. A. (2015). Improving child rights in the Gulf: Expectations from the brand-new child law of Oman. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *50*, 12–19.

Tekin, K. A. (2016) Attitudes of Omani early childhood preservice teachers toward bilingual early childhood education: Benefits, challenges, and solutions. *Child and Youth Services Review*, *37*(1), 78–91.

Thomas, G. V., & Silk, A. M. J. (1990). *An introduction to the psychology of children's drawings*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Toohey, K., & Day, E. (2001). *Home to school/nursery to grade 1: Incommensurable practices?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics, St. Louis, MO.

UNESCO. (2006). *Comparative, regional analysis of ECCE in four Arab countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Sudan)*. www.unesco.org.

UNESCO. (2014) Institute for Statistics. http://data.worldbank.org/topic/education

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx.

Uusitalo-Malmivaara, L., & Lehto, J. E. (2013). Social factors explaining children's subjective happiness and depressive symptoms. *Social Indicators Research*, *111*(2), 603–615.

Valverde, G., & Näslund-Hadley, E. (2010). *The state of numeracy education in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Inter-American Development Bank.

Van den Berg, A., & Van den Berg, C. (2011). A comparison of children with ADHD in a natural and built setting. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, *37*, 430–439.

Vaughan, J. (1993). Early childhood education in China. *Childhood Education*, *69*(4), 196–200.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Walford, G. (2008). Selecting sites, and gaining ethical and practical access. In G. Walford (Ed.), *How to do educational ethnography* (pp. 16–38). Tufnell Press.

Walker, K. (2007). Review of research: Children and their purple crayons: Understanding their worlds through their drawings. *Childhood Education*, *84*(2), 96–102.

Wang, C., & Burris, M. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, *24*, 369–387.

Wellington, J. (2015). *Educational research: Contemporary issues and practical approaches*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Westra, L. (2014). Child law: Children's rights and collective obligations. Springer International Publishing Switzerland.

Wildenger, L., & McIntyre, L. (2012). Investigating the relation between nursery preparations and child socio-behavioral school outcomes. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *40*, 169–176.

Wiseman, A. W. (2013). Policy responses to PISA in comparative perspective. In H-D. Mayer & A. Benavot (Eds.) *PISA, power and policy. The emergence of global educational governance* (pp. 303–322). Symposium Books.

Wood, E. (2005). Young children's voices and perspectives in research: methodological and ethical considerations. *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood*, *3*(2), 64–76.

Yang Q., Yang J., Zheng L., Song, W., & Yi, L. (2021). Impact of home parenting environment on cognitive and psychomotor development in children under 5 years old: A meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Pediatrics*, *9*, 658094.

Yazidi, B. (2007). *Professional development of nursery teachers in the Sultanate of Oman: Reality, problems, development trends* (Unpublished master's thesis). Cairo University, Egypt.

Yeom, J. (1998). Children's transition experiences from kindergarten to grade one. *Canadian Children*, *23*, 25–33.

Young, P. (2007). *Drawing among high school students: Literate practice and/or bridge to literate practice?* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Calgary, Canada, 2007, ProQuest AAT NR33821.

Yuen, F. C. (2004). 'It was fun. I liked drawing my thoughts': Using drawings as a part of the focus group process with children. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *36*(4), 461–482.

Zhong, S. (1989). Young children's care and education in the People's Republic of China. In P. Olmsted & D. Weikart (Eds.), *How nations serve young children: Profiles of child care and education in fourteen countries* (pp.1-37). High/Scope Press.

University
of Glasgow

College of Social
Sciences

**Needs of Omani children during their transition from nursery to 1ˢᵗ grade
Interview schedule for stakeholders at the Ministry of Education**

Date of interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee:_____

positions: _____

Location:_____

Time start: _____ Time end: _____

Zainab Mohammed ALGharibi
PhD student.
School of Education
College of Social Sciences
University of Glasgow, UK.
Mobile NO.: 97111167- e-mail: xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

**The concept**

1. What does the term 'transition' mean to you in your work position?
2. Do you think this stage is important in a child's life? Why?
3. What do you think about the boundary objects that are supposed to be present in nurseries and primary schools to help the student with a smooth transition? Do you have examples of it?
4. Do you think that these boundary organisms help create continuity of experience in the child and thus facilitate the transition process? How is that?

**Division of roles and implementations.**

5. What (if any) role do you think early childhood polices should play in preparing children for school?
6. In your position, what role have you had with transitions across the age ranges in general? Has this changed over time?
7. Could you please tell me what usually happens at the nursery/school when a child is about to start school- What, if any, arrangements are there for info to parents, school visits, etc?
8. How do you think the resources and the means are organized in the classroom/school in 1ˢᵗ grade? When can a child accesses them?

9. What do you think are the most important things that parents, nursery teachers, or 1<sup>st</sup> grade teachers can do to facilitate a child's transition to school?
10. How much of your work is concerned with early years and transitions, working at individual, group or systemic levels? (changing the child or context?)
11. Are there any interventions or programs ministry of education (The source of educational policies) have been involved with?  If yes, what psychological theories underlie these? E.g. problem-solving frameworks, ecological models.
12. Do you think that the curriculum in the nursery and first grade levels considers the continuity of experiences for children to facilitate the transition process? To what extent does this affect the transition process?
13. Do you implement any kind of Transition Activities? Yes/No. What type of Transition Activities do you implement?

**Children needs and expectations**

14. What do you think concerns children the most when they start school? Why?
15. What do you think concerns parents the most when their child starts school? Why?
16. What do you think parents expect from school? How does this differ from their expectations of the nursery?

**Impacts**

17. What are the benefits to transition work in early education?
18. What aspects of your experience do you think works best in term of transition? Why do you think that is?
19. What do you think are the main issues/problems/concerns for children transitioning from preschool to primary first grade?
20. What do you think is the most effective way to teach young children? How do you think your ideas have been developed during your teaching career?

**Challenges**

21. What are the challenges to transition work in early education?
22. In your experience, which groups of children are particularly vulnerable during transitions?  How do you support these groups?
23.  What constraints, if any, operate in the class/ school /environment

**Ending**

24. Is there anything that we haven't talked about so far that you think I should know about?
25. Would you like to add anything to the information you have given me?
26.

**Consent Form**
**For parents and participants in the interview and focus groups**

**Needs of Omani children during their transition from the nursery to 1ˢᵗ grade**

Zainab Mohammed ALGharibi

PhD student

School of Education

College of Social Sciences
University of Glasgow, UK

Mobile NO.: 97111167. E-mail: xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

**Please tick as appropriate**

Yes ☐ No ☐      I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes ☐ No ☐      I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes ☐ No ☐      I consent to interviews being audio-recorded/ video

Yes ☐ No ☐      I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

Yes ☐ No ☐     I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

**I agree that:**

Yes ☐ No ☐     All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

Yes ☐ No ☐     The material of research data will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

Yes ☐ No ☐     The material of research data may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Yes ☐ No ☐     I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Yes ☐ No ☐     I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree to take part in this research study                    ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study           ☐

Name of Participant ………………………… Signature ……………………………………………
Date …………………………………
Name of Researcher …………………………………… Signature…………………………………

Date …………………………………

Tw*o copies of this consent form should be completed: One copy to be retained by the participant and one copy to be retained by the researcher.*

University
of Glasgow

College of Social
Sciences

# Needs of Omani children during their transition from the nursery to 1ˢᵗ grade
## Interview schedule for parents.

Date of interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee:_____

positions: _____

Location:_____

Time start: _____ Time end: _____

Zainab Mohammed ALGharibi
PhD student
School of Education
College of Social Sciences
University of Glasgow, UK
Mobile NO.: 97111167
email: xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

**Concepts**

1. Transition, what do you believe this transition is all about?
2. how would you describe practices and activities which should implemented during your child transition from nursery to 1ˢᵗ grade?
3. Do you think that these activities and practices support the continuity your child's experience which help him/her with this transition? How?

**Division of roles and implementations.**

4. What contact did you have with the school between then and when _ _ _ _ started?
5. Were you involved in any other activities related to starting school? (Formal and informal). If yes, how useful were these?
6. Does talk about things that happen at school? What seems to be important for him/her?
7. What steps have been taken to overcome these fears by the school? And by you? Are there any other institutions that you think it is necessary to provide something in this regard?
8. What involvement do you and other family members have with your child's school? e.g., parent help consultation included in assessment learning activities to do at home.
9. How do you feel your child has managed the transition?

**Children needs and expectations.**

10. Can you tell me about what happened when _ _ _ _ started school. -First day -First few weeks
11. How do you think felt about starting school? Expectations vs reality
12. Now that your child has been at school for _ weeks, what does he/she thinks about school? Likes, dislikes, concerns?
13. Would you have changed anything, if so, what?
14. What are/were the fundamental issues for your child as he/she transition/ed to primary first grade?
15. What do you think your child was most concerned about?
16. What do you think teachers are most concerned about when children start school?
17. Do you think there are any particular skills that it helpful for children to have when they start school?

  - academic
  - behaviour (e.g., listening skills)
  - social
  - personal (e.g., self-care)

18. What skills do you think teachers like children to have when they come to school? If different to parent's/caregiver's valued skills

## Impacts

19. Tell me how you felt about your child starting school. -probe for advantages/disadvantages
20. What feedback have you been given about your child's progress?
    How do you feel about your child's progress?
21. Could you review the year of nursery for your child and tell me about how you think the year has gone in preparing him/her to school?
22. Can you identify the most common issues and problems children might face during their transition to primary first grade?
23. Could you give me some advice for future parents about what might help them prepare for the transition?

## Challenges

24. Is there anything that seemed to make your role difficult to manage your child transition?
25. What are some barriers that you feel may prevent you from engaging in transition practices?
26. Can you give me several challenges for the school and the teacher to help your child with the transition?

## Ending

Is there anything that we haven't talked about so far that you think I should know about?
Would you like to add anything to the information you have given me?

University
of Glasgow

College of Social
Sciences

**Parental Consent Form**
**Needs of Omani children during their transition from the nursery to 1ˢᵗ grade**

Zainab Mohammed ALGharibi
PhD student
School of Education
College of Social Sciences
University of Glasgow, UK
Mobile NO.: 97111167
e-mail: xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

**Please tick as appropriate**

Yes ☐ No ☐      I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes ☐ No ☐      I understand that my child participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw him/her at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes ☐ No ☐      I consent to the drawing activities being audio-recorded/ video.

Yes ☐ No ☐      I acknowledge that my child will be referred to by pseudonym.

**I agree that:**

Yes ☐ No ☐      All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.

Yes ☐ No ☐       The material of research data will be treated as confidential and always kept in secure storage.

Yes ☐ No ☐       The material of research data may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Yes ☐ No ☐       I waive my child copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Yes ☐ No ☐       I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I agree that my child takes part in this research study      ☐

I do not agree for my child to take part in this research study      ☐

Name of child…………………………………………………………………………

Name of Parent……………………….… Signature ………………………………………

Date ……………………………………

Name of Researcher …………………………………… Signature…………………………

Date ……………………………………

*Two copies of this consent from should be completed: One copy to be retained by the participant and one copy to be retained by the researcher.*

**Plain Language Statement for Parents**

### 1. Study title and researcher details

**Study title**: Needs of Omani children during their transition from nursery to 1$^{st}$ grade
**Researcher:** Zainab AL-Gharibi
**PhD Supervisors:** Dr. Julie McAdam, Dr. Cathy Fagan.

### 2. Invitation paragraph

Dear parents,

Dear parents,

Firstly, I would to take this opportunity to send my best wishes to your child for a happy and useful year at _____ nursery. Your child is being invited to participate in a study that will take place during the KG2 Spring semester and then again in the Fall semester of first grade.

The details of the study are explained in this plain language statement. Please read the following information carefully before deciding whether to take part. You can ask questions if you find anything unclear. Take your time to decide whether you wish your child to take part or not.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

This interview is a major data collection instrument in a PhD study, which aims to explore the needs of Omani children during their transition from nursery to first grade. The questions in the study concern the meaning and practices of the children's transition process, both in school and in the context of educational policy. Therefore, this focus group interview aims to explore your opinions, knowledge, experience and practices with regard to such a transition process and how educational policy has dealt with it.

The study is concerned with an important topic, namely children's transition from nursery to first grade and how this can be managed smoothly. Despite its importance and sensitivity, the issue has been absent from the agenda of our educational policies. Hence, your response will be important in understanding and developing this topic in the Sultanate of Oman.

**4. Why has my child been chosen?**

I have been given permission to implement a research project at the nursery of _____ starting in _____. Your child will be chosen by the kindergarten staff from a group of children who able to draw and enjoy drawing. Then I will ask the children who would like to participate and feel that they would enjoy it, so the participation will be according to their choice.

**5. Does my child have to take part?**

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your child's participation in the study is entirely your decision. Even if you agree to them participating in the study, you are still free to withdraw them at any time and without giving a reason. You will have the option of being able to remove the data relating to them from the research at any point.

**6. What will happen to my child if he/she takes part?**

As the children will only be between 6 and 7 years of age, I am asking parents for permission for their children to take part in the project. If permission is received, I will be making a home visit or meeting them in any suitable place (coffee shop, school) simply to talk to the parents of the child involved. This will be in order to explain more fully what the research is about and to collect some background information about the child (for example, if he/she is in the same nursery school for KG1 stage? Does he/she have brothers/sisters in the same nursery school? etc.). It will also allow the child to meet me before the start of the activity.

If your child takes part, he/she will participate in drawing and visual narrative activities that will take place during KG2 children in second semester (Spring 2022). The study will ask the children to make some drawings (for example, of things they like to do in kindergarten, such as playing, reading, drawing, meeting friends, etc., as well as in first grade). and to describe their drawings. The children will be recorded by video during the discussion phase. These tasks will allow me to get to know more about how the children experienced the move from nursery to primary school. Children will attend a classroom session where they will take part. The required drawing will be completed by the child within half an hour to 45 minutes. I shall then follow the same children in their first semester of first grade (Fall 2022) with the same activities.

**7. Will my child taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines in both personal and research data. Regarding personal information, all the information which is collected about his/her(name, position, department) in the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. To avoid recognition, pseudonyms will be used for all children and teachers whenever quoting them in my notes. Moreover, I will immediately dispense with the names as soon as I decide on the pseudonyms. As for research data, any views expressed will not be attributable to any individuals in the reported findings. All the data collected during this interview will be for the purpose of research, as required for completion of my PhD thesis. It will not be used for any other purpose and will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. It will be kept in a secure space (in OneDrive) allotted to me on the university's website. Only I can access it for ten years, which is the legal period specified by the University of Glasgow.

**8. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the study will be submitted to University of Glasgow as a PhD thesis. A copy of the results and recommendations of the study will be submitted to the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. It could contribute to improving the transition of children from nursery to first grade. In addition to publishing articles in academic journals that contribute to presenting a picture of the state of the transition issue in Oman. In addition, I will be pleased to send you a summary of the interview results if you desire.

**9. Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is organised and funded by Zainab AL-Gharibi, PhD student at the University of Glasgow.

**10. Who has reviewed the study?**

The study has been reviewed by my supervisors Dr. Julie McAdam, Dr. Cathy Fagan and the University of Glasgow, School of Education, College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

**11. Contact for further information**

If you have any questions regarding the project in general or your child's involvement than please do not hesitate to get in touch with either myself on 97111167 or email xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

For further information or concerns regarding the conduct of this research. Please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor DR. Julie McAdam on 0141 330 6888 or by email at: Julie.E.McAdam@glasgow.ac.uk. For more ethics information please contact College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer by Dr Muir Houston, email at Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk.

If you are happy for your child to be included in the implementation part of the research, then please complete the consent slip enclosed and post it back to me by the principal of nursery of_____.

Finally, I would like to wish you and your child many happy years with the rest of his/her academic career.

Yours Sincerely,

Zainab Mohammed ALGharibi
PhD student
School of Education
College of Social Sciences
University of Glasgow, UK.
Mobile NO.: 97111167- email: xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

# Appendix 6: Ethical approval

## Form college of Social Sciences research Ethics Committee. University of Glasgow.

Ethical approval removed due to confidentiality issues.

# Appendix 7: Ethical approval

## Form Ministry of Education-Oman.

Ethical approval removed due to confidentiality issues.