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Culture in early childhood education: Insights into Saudi preschool teaching

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ABSTRACT

Culture is constructed by society and in turn constructs the identity of a people. The patterns of behaviors, practices, and values shared by a group of people represent and reflect their ethnic, religious, and gender orientations. Knowledge about people's cultural backgrounds contributes to our understanding of the role of education in shaping past, present, and future generations. Therefore, this study explores preschool teachers' cultural views regarding the teaching of young children in a Saudi early childhood education setting. A phenomenological qualitative research approach is used in this study. Data are collected through semistructured focus group interviews with 10 preschool teachers who teach young children in public preschools located in the western region of Saudi Arabia. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data reveals two main themes in the teachers' narratives: i) Religion-based instruction; and ii) Gender-related issues. The participants in this study reported engaging in a set of practices that showed how their cultural identities, including their nationality, gender, religious beliefs, and history, influenced their roles as educators. Within the rich cultural context of Saudi culture, the teachers reported being strongly committed to their social and spiritual values when teaching young children.

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1.   INTRODUCTION

Culture is a very complex and interrelated concept that encompasses different meanings. It is defined as a complex entity that includes various parts, such as knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, and customs [1]. A broader view of culture also includes attitudes and the communication paths that affect individuals' thoughts, perceptions about events, and interactions with others [2]. Some scholars have also viewed culture as rooted historically in the belief-based heritage of a particular nation or region [3], while others have asserted that religion is a culture in itself [4]. It is difficult to view culture from one perspective; instead, we consider cultural identity as everything that can be recognized or distinguished. From the above definitions, we can agree that culture consists of the historically accumulated knowledge, tools and attitudes that pervade the child's proximal ecology, including the cultural 'practices' of nuclear family members and other kin [5]. In education, this combination is embodied in people's behaviors as cultured beings so that they can play their roles as educators in accordance with their respective cultural values and norms [6].

Anthropologists and social scientists have asserted that culture influences cognition and information processing, and the way norms intervene in socializing tends to relate to learning styles and preferences [7]. For example, the culture to which people belong, whether Western or non-Western, appears in the binary of teaching styles that opposes individualism to collectivism. Western cultures are characterized as

individualistic and provides more autonomy to people in terms of their beliefs, values, and behavioral patterns. In contrast, non-Western cultures are characterized as collectivistic, that is, they are characterized by shared values and group patterns, beliefs, and behaviors [8]. Researchers have reported that teachers' beliefs based on culture, whether individualistic or collectivistic, shape their behaviors in the classroom and their pedagogical practices, as the latter relate to motivation, encouragement, and critical thinking [9]. Kaur and Noman [10] also noted that in non-Western societies, teachers with collectivist cultural beliefs align their pedagogical practices, which relate to their roles as educators, with their conception of the social, cultural, and religious purpose of education. In this sense, the educational patterns found in a given society are determined by what is considered to have cultural value [11].

The ways in which young children are educated across different nations is based on these nations' respective cultures and the way education is viewed as a way to transmit to younger generations the cultural and social practices that are valuable there [12], [13]. The diversity and wealth of human cultures around the globe have shaped the way in which education has evolved in different parts of the world [14], [15]. For example, to some extent, people in the Middle Eastern region have common cultural values that are reflected in the ways in which young learners are educated and knowledge is transmitted to them [16]. In Saudi culture, which is part of the homogenous culture of this particular region, there is a strong interrelation among culture, religion, and education [17], [18]. In this sense, people value a set of practices and learning styles over others, especially in early childhood education, where there is an overlap between the culture-based child rearing styles that are preferred by society at large and the development-oriented child learning methods that are proposed by professionals. Some researchers have reported that conflicts have arisen between what is valued as culturally appropriate in learning practices and what is considered developmentally inappropriate for young children [19]–[24].

That being said, cultural prominence in a given culture or society is defined as the idea that the most well-known elements, such as ideas, beliefs, and practices, remain most prominent and highly esteemed [25]. Recognizing the importance of the influence of prominent cultural elements on early education practices has led experts, academics, and well-known organizations in the profession to consider culturally responsive teaching skills as teaching competencies when teaching young children, especially in nations where the population is diverse, such as the United States or US [26]–[28]. On the other hand, in a more homogenous social context, such as Saudi society, where both teachers and students share the same sociocultural background, cultural responsiveness is based on the idea of one unified culture for all. The practices associated with the most prominent culture might offset culturally responsive teaching from a Western perspective, yet these practices are considered the norm in other cultures [29]. This unique and prominent culture influences the way children are taught based on that cultural perspective, and it also dictates what teachers deem important educationally and culturally [30].

The uniqueness of Saudi early childhood education is shown in the nature of the Saudi education system itself. Saudi children are enrolled in kindergarten schools according to age, for example, children from ages 3 to 4 are enrolled in Kindergarten 1 and those from 4 to 5 are in Kindergarten 2. When a child turns six years old, he or she moves into Kindergarten 3 or the preliminary level, which is the year immediately before elementary school. In both preprimary and primary grades—first to third grade—both boys and girls can be enrolled in the same school. Segregation based on gender in public education starts in elementary schools. All male students are enrolled in male-only schools where all students, teachers, and administrators are male. Likewise, female students are enrolled in female-only schools where all students, teachers, and administrators are female [31]. Children at all levels learn about different subjects mainly related to their own lives and divided into meaningful themes. Some learning units are designed to address a child's self-identity by exploring all aspects of the child's surroundings, such as who am I, my family, my friends, my home, my book, and my clothes. Other units are designed for children to develop a sense of nationalism and citizenship by exploring the ecological and historical characteristics of the country, such as my home country and water and sand. In addition, some units are specifically designed to teach only religious content, such as *Ramadhan* (the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset) and *Hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims are required to make). These units are mainly designed to provide children with religious-based information, knowledge, and practices related to two pillars of Islamic faith [32].

Culture and religion are indispensable parts of Saudi education. The spirit of Islam has been viewed as the culture, heritage, and history of this particular sacred geographic region from the time it witnessed the birth of Islamic faith–more than 1,400 years ago–to the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [33]. The unique religious character of the country is reflected in its educational policy, which was issued in 1970 and highlights the main goals and objectives of education [34]. For early education, nine principles are outlined to be considered when instructing young children. For example, one of the principles states that teachers should nurture the instincts of children and look after their moral, mental and physical growth in a natural

environment similar to that provided by their family and which complies with the requirements of Islam' and teach children good conduct and help them to acquire the virtues of Islam by giving them a positive example [35]. The previous quotes, taken from the policy records, demonstrate that an early religious orientation for young children is an important part of Saudi early education philosophy. This essential trait was also reflected in the latest initiatives included in the report on early childhood education (ECE), which was released as part of the 2015 position statements on Saudi Early Learning Standards (SELS). In the statement, faith appreciation was clearly present through wording that recommended establishing Islamic behaviors, such as being courteous and respectful to others, which are considered the manifestation of the principles, values, and customs of Islam [36]. It can be clearly seen that a religious culture is viewed as being part of Saudi philosophy for the education of young children.

Given the dearth of research on the status of early childhood education in the Saudi context, which is the most culturally and religiously conservative society among Middle Eastern countries, this paper sheds light on the cultural context of Saudi preschool. This paper focuses on a specific cultural context to present the perspectives and cultural views of a group of Saudi preschool teachers using a thick rich description approach. The main question guiding this investigation is: How do Saudi preschool teachers describe their cultural views regarding teaching young children in Saudi preschool settings? Two subquestions are developed out of this main question to provide further understanding: i) How do religious beliefs shape teachers' instructional practices?; and ii) How are gender differences viewed in Saudi preschool settings and culture? To understand the unique Saudi context, the following section presents a general overview of the nature and culture of early childhood education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

2.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is based on cultural-historical activity theory rooted in the sociocultural approach to learning and development based upon the work of social constructivist Vygotsky [37], [38]. Vygotsky theorized human development in its various social, cultural, and historical dimensions, showing the social nature of humankind as humans live and interact in various ways in structured social systems. Humans are encultured in the ways they act and are shaped through their values and heritage resources [39]. By analyzing chronological processes of change, we can understand how a society develops [40]–[42]. Moreover, the history of the society in which a child is raised shapes the ways in which the child will be able to think, act, and learn [43]. More specifically, as a child engages in social interactions with others within the same culture, the child's activity somehow illustrates facets of shared values from the past that have been transmitted to the present. In this sense, the culture of a given society at any point in time is a product of that society's past history transmitted to the present, which becomes the contextual foundation for future development [44]–[46].

3.   RESEARCH METHOD

This research was based on a phenomenological approach focusing on the 'lived experiences' of the participants in their professional and instructional roles as preschool teachers. According to Creswell and Creswell [47], the phenomenological approach in qualitative research focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group of individuals who have first-hand experience with the phenomenon being studied. The unique feature of phenomenological research design is its descriptive nature; indeed, the researcher seeks to describe as accurately as possible the structure of the phenomenon [48].

For our study, we chose to conduct a focus group interview to provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena embedded within the research participants' cultural views and perspectives. Focus group interviews are valuable because they promote a comfortable atmosphere of disclosure in which participants can share their views, experiences, and attitudes about a particular topic. In our study, the interview was semistructured with a focus on open-ended questions that allowed more space for the teachers to reflect on their own views. Some examples of the questions used to direct the discussion include the following: i) How would you describe your philosophy for children's early education?; ii) What do you believe is important for you to teach children?; iii) How would you describe your teaching style in relation to your cultural and religious beliefs?; iv) How do you view gender differences in your classroom?; and v) What is your communication style with children's parents? During the interview, the participants were encouraged to speak and comment freely on others' responses to extend a meaningful dialogue. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher and conducted outside the classroom at the teachers' convenience and availability.

3.1. Participants

A total of 10 preschool teachers were invited to participate in the study. All of them worked in public preschools funded by the government and located in the western region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The 10 preschool teachers who participated in this study were all women, as according to the Saudi education policy, only female teachers can work with preschool children aged 3-6 years old. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1. Prior to the focus group meeting, the participants were informed that their participation would be completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. Each participant was also provided with a letter of consent that included further information about the research purpose and benefits and the intended use of the data. To guarantee confidentiality at the time of data transcription, all the participants were assigned specific codes to ensure their anonymity. In addition, institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained from the author's university (Protocol Number E160217005).

Table 1. Participants' demographic information

Participants	Specialization	Degree	Years of experience
T1	ECE	Bachelor's	17 Years
T2	ECE	Bachelor's	16 Years
T3	ECE	Associate's	23 Years
T4	ECE	Bachelor's	16 Years
T5	Psychology	Bachelor's	22 Years
T6	ECE	Associate's	23 Years
T7	ECE	Bachelor's	4 Years
T8	ECE	Bachelor's	7 Years
T9	ECE	Bachelor's	6 Years
T10	ECE	Associate's	18 Years

3.2. The role of the researcher

It is challenging for researchers to conduct phenomenological inquiries because they face their own attitudes and thoughts, which might interfere with the investigation [49]. Researchers in this type of research are advised to 'bracket' those attitudes and thoughts as much as they can and be receptive to their participants [48], [50]. Thus, when conducting focus group interviews, the researcher can play various roles, including that of moderator, listener, observer, and eventually inductive analyst [51]. In this study, during the focus group interview, the researcher moderated the discussion to produce a narrative that revealed all information that could help express participants' cultural views regarding educating young children. The researcher used a coding strategy and thematic analysis to summarize the narrative and identify meaningful themes. The process of meaning production is presented in Figure 1. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, as all participants and primary researchers were Arabic speakers. After the data were included in a report, they were translated into English through the peer review process. A professional assistant fluent in Arabic and English was asked to examine the data, check the accuracy of the translation and verify the translation process.
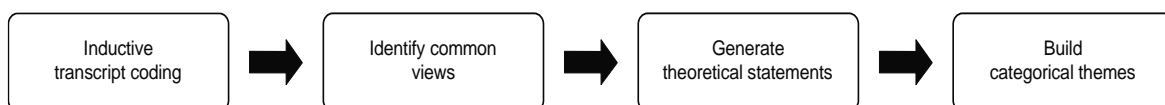

Figure 1. Meaning production process

4.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the qualitative data obtained revealed commonalities among preschool teachers' cultural views regarding educating young children that were strongly based on their cultural and religious orientation. The respondents' views, thoughts, and beliefs expressed in this section of the paper underlie cultural commonalities that influence their roles and instructional philosophy. The analysis highlighted two main themes (religion-based instruction and gender-related issues).

4.1. Religion-based instruction

Islam is the most widely followed religion in Middle Eastern countries. Specifically, 97.10% of the citizens in Saudi Arabia are Muslims, and the Islamic faith is the official religion practiced by the

government and population [52]. Unlike in Western countries (e.g., the United States), where attempting an explicit commitment to a particular faith in public schooling is considered a violation of the separation of church and state [53], religious instruction is explicitly delivered in Saudi education. Indeed, Islamic beliefs and practices are strongly present. In the Saudi philosophy of education, schools have a major role in educating students according to religious values. To illustrate this philosophy, teacher T9 mentioned the significance of the time spent in storytelling as an investment in religious orientation practices. She specified, "*We do tell different stories with different religious meanings, such as stories that are mentioned in Quraan about prophets or using cartoon videos for some stories from Islamic heritage, such as 'The Good Man and the Dog' and 'The Elephant People' as children enjoy these stories. These stories constitute narratives from the heritage of Prophet Muhmmad and are considered Islamic literature that should be taught in schools*".

In Saudi preschools, children are guided to develop spiritual and Islamic virtues and values. Teachers instruct children on good conduct and help them become virtuous according to Islam by modeling ethics in their teaching practices. In this sense, socially oriented activities such as working cooperatively in groups are appreciated, and children are encouraged to engage in such activities. The following quote from teacher T3 illustrates this orientation, "*In my classroom, I consistently work on the value of cooperation and encourage children to work as group members*". Further, she expressed her belief as "*the hand of Allah is with the group*". This expression is an aphorism from Prophet Muhammad's legacy [Peace Be Upon Him] that indicates the value of group work and refers to aid or assistance from a higher power that supports people who work actively in a group.

Teachers who participated in this study expressed a deep appreciation for the unified Muslim community by noting the importance of social relationships among children and teachers in the classroom. This theme represented a favored teaching style among Saudi teachers who valued the establishment of positive and warm relationships among children in the classroom. For example, teacher T5 described her perspective on strengthening relationships among children in her classroom by saying, "*We are one family and children are brothers and sisters within it*". Furthermore, she recalled a phrase from *Hadith* (corpus of the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, revered by Muslims as a major source of religious law and moral guidance) indicating how the legacy of Prophet Muhammed strengthened the act of caring in Muslim society, "*None of you is a real believer until you have love for your brother as you do for yourself. Clearly*", a religious spirit underlined this teacher's beliefs and educational practice. As noted earlier, the education philosophy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been mainly informed and inspired by the Islamic faith. The teacher had freely expressed her personal and religious beliefs regarding the way children are encouraged to view each other in the classroom in terms of brotherhood bonds. The word 'brother', which is mentioned in the *Hadith*, describes a depth of emotional connections and reflects a sense of compassion and kindness as a highly appreciated social, cultural, and religious value.

Another perspective presented by teacher T6 illustrated certain views about Islamic socialization through the statement that "*Our preschool curriculum appreciates socialization and belonging to a unified Muslim community. I believe that group work can promote and develop morals and ethical behaviors that are developed through patience, tolerance, sharing, caring, and compassion*". This quote was an example of the ways in which social activities are viewed as nurturing children's good conduct and morals based on religious beliefs. Furthermore, the sense of a unified community was also apparent in the language that the teachers preferred to use. For example, preschool teacher T1 referred to the language she uses in the classroom to reflect a sense of cohesive community, "*I consider my classroom a small community that extends to a broader community outside, and I frequently use words representing this unified identity such as 'we have', 'our classroom', and 'for us'*". This quote reflected the teacher's appreciation for the notion of community-based interactions; indeed, the teacher verbalized this appreciation in the positive wording she used, which in turn influenced children's behaviors and interactions.

4.2. Gender-related issues

Most societies, especially in the Middle East, assign different roles in their sociocultural organization on the basis of gender. Hence, the role of education in these societies might be influenced by this organization [54], [55]. As previously mentioned, early childhood education in Saudi society has complied with many factors related to children's social, cultural, and religious orientation. Generally, the social structure in a society reflects a certain degree of gender segregation, which, in turn, influences how boys and girls view each other [56]. Even though children, as individuals, are not strictly separated, they absorb social norms from their surroundings. In the classroom setting of our study, the teachers reported some of their intentions regarding the interactional relationships between boys and girls during the daily programs, which might be attributed to the cultural norms that disseminate certain ideologies regarding the two sexes in social life. Seemingly, parents had some preferences about the relationship between boys and girls. For example, teacher T4 shared a mother's concern about one of her children, "*One of the concerns that a mother once shared with me is how boys and girls play as peers. She preferred her daughter to interact*

with girls during playtime rather than boys, as she believes that girls should not be exposed to 'boyish' styles of play".

Teachers also differentiated between boys and girls in the types of interactions in the learning environment and the influence of gender. For instance, teacher T2 observed children's preferences through their interactions during the classroom activities, "*I've noticed some differences in how girls and boys interact during playtime. Girls prefer to work together, while boys enjoy working individually*". A similar observation was conveyed by teacher T4 when she described that, "*At different times of the daily program in her classroom, girls have common interests, as do boys. I noticed that boys like to work independently, but they work with peers as they build blocks, for example. And girls work more collaboratively and play together as a group. they even take turns more smoothly than boys*".

Participants also reported that gender-based differences were found in parent-teacher communication. Teachers expressed that they were conservative in their communication with the parents when they were involved, especially in communication with the children's male family members. To illustrate this communication mode, teacher T7 responded that she had direct contact usually with the mother, "*We do not have direct contact with the father. Alternatively, sometimes we communicate with a caregiver like a grandmother or one of the relatives. In urgent cases, we communicate with the father via phone, text, or written letter*".

In Saudi preschools, the fathers have no access to the school facilities; therefore, direct communication with the school's staff can be done only by phone or written messages. This customary form of communication is influenced by a conservative social norm that entails cultural barriers. The issue of preferred communication style based on gender also emerged each time the teachers talked about their relationships with the families, as they limited their contact with female members of the family (mothers). For instance, teacher T10, in sharing her preference when she contacts the children's families, said, "*I usually do not have regular phone contact, but children's mothers can call me when it is urgent and requires an immediate response. Otherwise, I use smartphone applications for communicating, texting, and sending pictures*". To inform families about children's progress, the teachers preferred to speak with the mothers as representatives of the 'children's family', rather than with the fathers. For example, teacher T8 stated, "*I inform the family about the child's progress via the evaluation cards sent home and ask the mothers to contact me to discuss the evaluation or if they have any questions*". Notably, teachers mostly used the word 'mother' in their responses to refer to the child's family as a customary way of communication. As mentioned above, this is because of conservative cultural norms and customs, which dictate that same-sex exchanges dominate teacher–parent communication in Saudi preschools.

This qualitative analysis focused on teaching perspectives to highlight how cultural practices might influence early childhood education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Teachers in this study revealed that they held common beliefs and behaved in similar ways; they also spoke about current policies in Saudi Arabian culture. Remarkably, this study showed the prominent presence of cultural values perceived by the teachers. The nature of early childhood education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia appears to have unique characteristics that are reflected in teachers' instructional practices. For instance, practices related to religious instruction and gender orientation were found to be influenced by culturally and socially inherited values that were rooted in that particular culture. In this section, the cultural interpretation of policies and practices is discussed in the general sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. The chart summarizes the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings as cultural interpretations as seen in Figure 2.
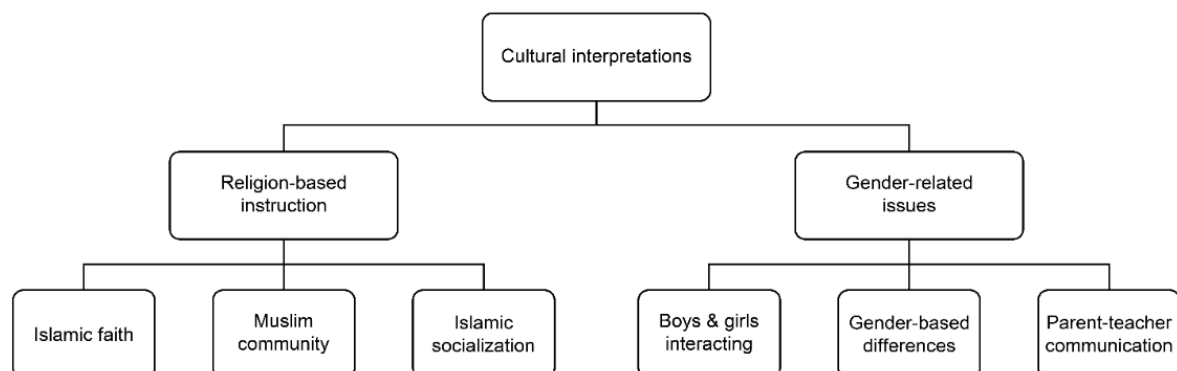

Figure 2. Themes and sub-themes of the findings

Cultural interpretations revealed a unique commitment to religious instruction. Among the different cultural practices reported, some beliefs and practices showed the interrelatedness of education, religion, and history. Morality and religiosity based on Islamic faith have long been integral to education and child rearing in typical Saudi families [57]. Although spirituality is conceptualized as an individual matter in any faith or region of the world, religion is ultimately deeply embedded in particular cultural and ontological realities. According to King and Boyatzis [58], religion is increasingly conceptualized as an organized sociocultural-historical system, and spirituality as an individual's personal quest for meaning, satisfaction, and wisdom. Historically, Middle Eastern culture has been categorized as a past-oriented culture in the sense that religion and spiritual beliefs are highly respected, preserved, and transmitted over generations [59]. In Saudi preschools, children are taught about religious principles, historical events, and role models in daily programs; in this context, these instructional programs are considered culturally appropriate and socially valued. These practices contribute to and shape children's spirituality later on. Robinson [60], as shown by Grajczonek [61], asserted that people's spiritual and religious experiences took place in early childhood and that it was important to engage in long-lasting spiritual practices at an early age.

The difference between male and female ideologies also involved cultural interpretations in the way boys' and girls' relationships, as well as teacher–parent communications, were shown to derive from the gendered binary that exists within Saudi society. Most Middle Eastern societies, including Saudi society, have traditionally and historically been based on gendered divisions [16], [62], [63]. Although gender segregation is not allowed or practiced in preschools, some discrimination based on gender was noticed among children and their parents. This issue might reflect a cultural influence since both males and females showed that they approached children's social surroundings differently based on gender. Gender-based role modelling has traditionally and culturally been valued as a parenting practice that shapes children's progress and behaviors [64]. Hence, boys are encouraged and expected to grow up to become as assertive as their fathers, and girls are encouraged to grow up to embody caring and feminine features [65], [66]. Children spontaneously and unconsciously absorb from adults some customs and social ideologies, including how all genders relate to each other. Over time, children engage in thoughts and actions—especially in their early years—in which they shape a value system that may remain with them for the rest of their lives [65]. From an educational standpoint, Phillips and Scrinzi [67] explained that interactions between adults and children influence interactions among children; how they interact with others, how they perceive themselves, and how they develop and learn.

When teachers established relationships with children's families, the influence of Saudi culture was evident. For instance, 'family', in this particular context, mostly meant the 'mother' of the child because she was a female family member. Teachers reported preferring to regularly and directly communicate only with the female members of a child's family. Notably, teachers perceived that communication was based on conservative values, especially when that communication occurred with the male members of the child's family. This complex interpretation may be deeply rooted in the ways in which the family is associated with gender, race, and power in Saudi culture [66]. Indeed, the term 'family', as noted in the Arab Family Studies book, has been conflated with the term 'women' and broadened to combine 'family' with 'women and children'; occasionally, men are absent [68]. Reflecting on this complexity, Joseph [68] noted that in reality, on the ground, what counts as 'family' in the Arab region is highly variable within and across countries. As a result, fathers might be excluded from children's learning experiences to some extent, especially during the preschool years.

As we have seen, cultural ideologies determine, to a great extent, teaching patterns, parental styles, and social interactions in which children naturally develop. The interplay between culture and early childhood education has historically shaped school experiences, as shown in what children learn and how teachers teach within a specific value system [69]. According to Giorgetti *et al*. [70], educators count as effective agents for a cultural transition; that is, the acceptance and rejection of some educational elements and practices occur as a result of the diversity of cultural beliefs and values. Within the international context, cultural diversity is gaining more popularity among educators as high-quality education can only be provided by considering nurturing children's optimal development intellectually, socially, culturally, psychologically, and spiritually. For instance, in some Western societies, such as the US., considered a highly diverse population with multiple ethnicities, there is a serious call for teachers to adopt culturally responsive teaching to ensure that all children are involved and no one is left out [28]. Helping children reach optimal development cannot be achieved without considering the social and cultural aspects of their well-being. As noted by Sanders and Farago [71], the development of children is embedded within the local value system and understanding of what childhood is. In this sense, children's development becomes adaptive rather than optimal and local rather than universal. It can be stated that our understanding of the dominant culture that is valued and practiced in any society helps us understand the education philosophy underlying teaching practices that in some Eastern societies -such as Saudi society- are found to be culturally and religiously oriented.

5.   CONCLUSION

This research addressed teachers' perspectives and cultural views about the teaching of young children in a Saudi preschool setting. Religious and conservative cultural traits were found to significantly influence teachers' views, beliefs, and practices in this particular region of the world. It was shown that different people use different cultural perspectives when developing their teaching philosophy, which in turn is reflected in the way they interact and teach. The participants in this study reported engaging in a set of practices that showed how their cultural identities, including their nationality, gender, religious beliefs, and history, influenced their roles as educators. Within the rich cultural context of Saudi culture, the teachers reported being strongly committed to their social and spiritual values when teaching young children. One aspect of this commitment was reflected in the unique customary way in which social interaction and communication took place in the preschool setting.

This study contributes to the literature on the influence of culture on teaching practices based on which children's education is shaped. What is considered important and valued in a certain culture represents what people contribute to this culture; moreover, sometimes this culture shapes children's social, emotional, and even spiritual development. In this specific region of the world, education in preschool is designed to be part of children's social, spiritual, and moral development. The information gained from this culture-specific investigation provides useful knowledge for educators interested in multicultural education or teachers who might encounter similar cultural conditions worldwide.

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