2021

Investigating Saudi Preschool Teachers' Beliefs Toward Emergent Literacy Skills And Practices: A Mixed Methods Study

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INVESTIGATING SAUDI PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' BELIEFS TOWARD EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS AND PRACTICES: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of the University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2021

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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to investigate Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices. To this end, an explanatory, sequential mixed methods research design was adopted. The study involved two phases. The first involved a Q methodology approach to answer the overarching questions, "What are Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices?" and "What are the emergent literacy skills and practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider most important for children's literacy development?"

Thirty participants ranked forty statements in a quasi-normal distribution that ranged from the most important to most unimportant in relation to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices. Their sorting was then subjected to principal component analysis. The results of the first phase identified four perspectives of preschool teachers regarding emergent literacy skills and practices.

Perspective A has been identified as "surface and out-of-context literacy teaching" which supports teaching simple literacy practices in isolation. It recognizes letter knowledge as the most important skill and underestimates early writing and print awareness. *Perspective B* was identified as "skill-based literacy teaching" which advocates the direct teaching of literacy skills as well as more progressive skills such as advanced phonological awareness. It also recognizes phonological awareness and letter knowledge as the most important emergent literacy skills as they underpin awareness and print motivation. *Perspective C* supports teaching literacy through

"direct teaching, as well as contextual teaching through reading", an approach that was classified as diverse in that focuses on teaching skills and being child-centered. The most important practices identified by this perspective involved print motivation as well as letter and phonological awareness. *Perspective D* approaches teaching literacy through hands-on experiences which consider the role of the classroom environment. The most important skills acquired by this perspective involve print awareness.

In the second phase of the study, a constructivist grounded theory approach was used to further elucidate the results from the first phase, investigating those factors perceived by teachers and their respective contributions to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and best teaching practices. To this end, ten participants participated within four focus group interviews. Three main themes emerged to explain teachers' perceptions of those factors that contribute to the development of their beliefs. The first was a commonly held belief, retained across all perspectives, representing the pervasive influence of culture and society. The second theme was teachers' respective backgrounds and their need to understand emergent literacy and teaching practices. The third theme represented the influence of educational policy and school administration. An explanation of how each factor contributes to teachers' beliefs was addressed in granular detail.

Keywords: early childhood education, teachers' beliefs, Q methodology, constructivist grounded theory, emergent literacy, mixed methods.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved brother (Rabea), I pray every day for his safe return and to be with us soon.

I also dedicate this work to my two darling sons (Faez and Anas), and my little angel (Dina); having you encourages me to study and learn more about early childhood.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, all praise due to “Allah,” whose by his favor this work has been accomplished. I express my sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Ernest, for his endless support, motivation, and patience. He taught me to be independent and to never give up. Completion of this work would not have been possible without his insightful supervision. My most profound appreciation also goes to Dr. LaChenaye for my methodologies and for always answering my questions and guiding me through the process of this work. My thanks to her generosity in helping me as, without her expert knowledge and guidance, this work would not have been completed.

Many thanks to all members of my thesis committee for their time and support. My appreciation also goes to Dr. Kirkland as she was the first face I saw during the first occasion I walked on the campus of the University of Alabama at Birmingham. I will never forget her kind welcome as she took care of my application and accepted me within the early childhood program. I also express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Summerlin as she inspired me to specialize in literacy and encouraged me to learn more about early years’ literacy. Also, I will be forever grateful for Dr. Causey’s kindness and support. I would never forget the summer courses and our training at the summer enrichment camp as I have learned a lot from her. Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Taibah, whom I have never met in person, but she was very kind in accepting my invitation to be a part of my committee without any hesitation. Her excellent research into early years’ literacy in Saudi Arabia inspired me and taught me a great deal.

Warm thanks also to my dear friends Najlaa, Ahlam, Shushan, and Eman for their endless support and encouragement. You will always be in my heart. I will never forget the days we spent together in Birmingham.

My acknowledgments would be incomplete without expressing my thanks to my parents who planted the love of knowledge and reading within me. I cannot remember a day without seeing my father holding a book in his hands. Their support and prayers paved the road to my doctoral journey. May Allah give them both long life, health and keep them safe. Special thanks go to my lovely brothers and sister who always prayed for me and looked after me. I also owe many thanks to my parents-in-law who love me like their daughter and supported me throughout many years in which they were away from their only son.

Finally, but most importantly, heartfelt thanks go to my lovely husband, Safwan, who supported me and led me on a path to achieve my dream. He was ever patient and looked after our children during my studies. I will always be grateful to him. Many thanks also to the jewels of my heart, my children Faze, Anas, and Dina. Thank you for being patient during the days I spent away studying.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory
ECE	Early childhood education
GWA	Gulf Women Association
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MOE	Ministry of Education
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
P	Participants from public preschool
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
R	Participants from private preschool
SAL	Spoken Arabic Language
SV	Sort Value

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Alphabet knowledge	Children's ability to identify letters and understand that "letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named" (Head Start, 2003, p. 23).
Concourse	A "concourse (from Latin *concursus*, 'a running together,' as when ideas run together in thought), and it is from this concourse that a sample of statements is subsequently drawn for administration in a Q sort" (Brown, 1993, p. 94).
Emergent literacy	The "reading and writing knowledge and behavior of children who are not yet conventionally literate" (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002, p. 8).
Mixed methods	"A type of research design in which qualitative and quantitative approaches are used in types of questions, research methods, data collection and analysis procedures, and/or inferences" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 711).
Operant subjectivity	"Operant means that when individuals are given a sample of statements to be sorted according to some preference or judgment or feeling about them, they operate with them in such a way as to indicate their viewpoints; and this is independent of any constructed effects (such as those of rating scales) on the part of the investigator" (Smith, 2001, p. 320).
Phonological awareness	"The ability to perceive the sounds of speech that are derived from syllables, including the syllable as a whole, the rhyme unit of the syllable, and the individual phonemes" (Arrow & McLachlan, 2014, p. 49).
Print awareness	"Children's ability to understand that print—rather than pictures—carries the meaning, reading occurs

	from left to right, and letters written on a page convey meaning and match the words that teachers speak when reading" (Hawken, Johnston, & McDonnell, 2005, p. 233).
Print motivation	Children's interest and pleasure in books and reading.
P sample	The participant in the Q study.
Q methodology	Q methodology provides a scientific approach for studying subjectivity, while at the same time maintains the intensity and individuality of the humanistic approach (Brown, 1980). Q is the first and foremost methodology interested in human subjectivity (Ellingsen, Størksen, & Stephens, 2010).
Q sample	A collection of statements about the topic being investigated which are drawn from a concourse.
Teachers' beliefs	"Teachers' attitudes about education-about schooling, teaching, learning, and students have generally been referred to as teachers' beliefs" (Pajares, 1992, p. 316).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Beliefs are the best predictor of the choices people make during their lives (Bandura, 1986; Dewey, 1933; Farrell & Ives, 2015). This view leads to the perspective that understanding teachers' beliefs helps in understanding teachers' behaviors (Pajares, 1992). Nespor (1987) suggested that teachers' beliefs are one of the most significant foundations for teachers to modify the supplementary goals of the subject; it frames the justification for their actions. Teachers' beliefs have a significant impact on their teaching by employing their influence on teaching styles and practices (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Recent research evidenced the influence of teachers' beliefs on classroom environment and practices (Alisaari & Heikkola, 2017; Brighton, 2003; Katz & Shahar, 2015; Kim, Kim, Lee, Spector, & DeMeester, 2013; Polly et al, 2013; Klehm, 2014).

More specifically, mounting evidence suggests that teachers hold beliefs about language learning and teaching, and such beliefs frame their instructional practices (Davis & Wilson, 1999; Gebel & Schrier, 2002; Johnson, 1992; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991; Woods, 1996, as cited in Kuzborska, 2011). Thus, since emergent literacy skills develop during the first years of children's lives and are essential for later literacy acquisition (Mason & Allen, 1986, McGee & Lomax, 1990), this study aimed to investigate preschool teachers' beliefs toward the significance of emergent literacy skills and practices on children's literacy development in Saudi Arabia.

Emergent Literacy View

It is generally acknowledged that literacy refers to the ability to read and write conventionally. However, according to the emergent literacy view, the beginning of reading and writing appears when the individual realizes that written language makes sense (Goodman, 1986). Emergent literacy is a term used to describe children's early literacy skills and was first developed in 1966 by Maria Clay, a pioneer in investigating children's early reading behavior (Clay, 1966; Teale & Sulzby, 1987). The term emergent literacy has been recognized as a view that supports the early literacy skills which appear before children can read and write conventionally (Giles & Tunks, 2015; Morrow, 2012). It explains a child-centered, meaning-making method for early literacy learning (Morrow & Dougherty, 2011). The emergent literacy view suggests that reading and writing develop simultaneously as a result of young children's experiences with oral and written language (Sulzby & Teale, 1999; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982); emergent literacy is defined as "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing and the environment that support[s] these development[s]" (National Research Council, 2001, p. 186).

Thus, the fundamental idea behind emergent literacy is that the acquisition of literacy is a continuing phenomenon that starts in children's early years and therefore does not need to be limited to formal education in school (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Children's emergent literacy skills reinforce their acquisition of more complex reading skills like decoding, comprehension, and fluency when they start formal reading instruction in school (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Furthermore, preschool experiences are considered a critical stage that supports children's acquisition of prerequisite literacy

skills, as well as their progress in literacy (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991). That being said, investigating teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy practices is essential because, as indicated previously, teachers' beliefs influence their practices (DeFord, 1985; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991; Polly et al, 2013; Klehm, 2014; Katz & Shahar, 2015; Alisaari, & Heikkola, 2017). Also, their practices influence children's knowledge about literacy, because children acquire knowledge about literacy through their interactions with the environment around them (Goodman & Altwerger, 1981; Adams, 1994; Katz & Shahar, 2015).

The Five Skills of Emergent Literacy

A review of emergent literacy literature underlines five areas of emergent literacy: print awareness, print motivation, phonological awareness, letter awareness, and early writing (e.g. Sulzby & Teale, 1991; van Kleeck, 1990; Smith, 1989; Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1992). The first skill is print awareness; Clay (1979) argued that enhancing children's conceptualization of print and their connection with print should be the main goal in preschool years. Children develop the concept of print through their experiences (Otto, 2010). The second skill is print motivation, which refers to children's interest in literacy. Children's literacy environments influence their motivation toward literacy. For instance, children who have access to a variety of books tend to spend time by themselves looking at books (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997). Research showed that print motivation was linked to emergent literacy skills as well as later literacy development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Whitehurst, & Angell, 1994).

The third skill is alphabet knowledge, which refers to children's knowledge of letter forms, names, and corresponding sounds (Piasta & Wagner, 2010), and it includes letter-name knowledge and letter-sound knowledge (Piasta et al, 2016). Letter-name knowledge refers to children's capability to recognize letters and know that "letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named" (Head Start, 2003, p. 23). The fourth skill is phonological awareness, which refers to children's ability to manipulate and distinguish the sounds in the words (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1999; Anthony & Francis, 2005). The fifth, and last, skill is early writing. According to the emergent literacy perspective, children's attempts to write at an early age play an essential role in their literacy development. Studies showed that allowing children to practice writing through different activities—such as invented spelling—reinforced other emergent literacy skills, such as alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness (Clay, 1979; Aram & Biron, 2004; Bissex, 1980). In conclusion, for a good emergent literacy program, each of the above-mentioned skills should be included (Head Start, 2000; IRA & NAEYC, 1998).

An Overview of the Context of the Study: Saudi Arabia

Social context impacts children's literacy development; the purposes of literacy differ among different countries and cultures; social expectations and the value of literacy in a particular culture impacts literacy acquisition (Mason & Allen, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1990; Clay, 1971; Otto, 2010). Thus, it is necessary to provide an overview of the context of the study: Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is the biggest country in the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabian Peninsula was influenced by numerous important civilizations and cultures because of its strategic location between three major continents. Most importantly, Saudi Arabia is the most conservative Islamic country because the two holiest places for Muslims are located in Saudi Arabia: Makkah and Medina. Given this fact, it is axiomatic to say religion has an essential influence on Saudi society, especially education. Education in Saudi Arabia went through many changes. In the eighteenth century, before the establishment of any formal organization for education, Najd (the center of Saudi Arabia) considered spreading education as a major goal through cooperation with the Wahhabi movement, which aimed to spread Islamic education to citizens. The ultimate goal of this movement was to ensure that Muslims would understand Islamic commandments through classes for reading, writing, and reciting the Qur'an and Hadith. The first form of education in Saudi Arabia, called *Kuttab*, took place in mosques (Alsunbul, Metwally, Khatib, & Abduljawwad, 2008, p. 473).

However, a huge development in modern education in Saudi Arabia began in 1953 with the establishment of the Ministry of Education under King Fahd as the first Minister of Education. In 1958, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with other members of the Arabic League, decided to apply three primary levels of education: a six-year elementary, a three-year intermediate, and a three-year secondary (Alhamed, Zeyadh, Alotabi, & Metwally, 2007), which continue until the present time. Another significant improvement of education in Saudi Arabia occurred in 1961 when the Ministry of Education started to consider the importance of educating women; 16 primary schools for

girls were built during the first decade of the 1960s, which contained 148 staff members to educate 5,200 girls ("State University", n.d.).

Early childhood education was under the supervision of private education until 1966 when the Ministry of Education opened the first public preschool in Riyadh, the capital city. In 1970, the document of education policy in Saudi Arabia specified a set of goals for early childhood education. These goals revolved around three major ideas: active, knowledge, and cooperation. In addition, religiously oriented education is evidenced through these goals. Educational philosophy in Saudi Arabia is constructed on a foundation of Islamic instructions, which demand seeking knowledge for all Muslims (Al Salloom, 1995; Sunbul, Metwally, Alkhatib, & Abduljawad, 2008).

Since these goals were issued, and given the Ministry of Education's continued commitment to the development of early childhood education, these programs have continued to grow until today. For example, in 2006 the number of public and private preschools reached 1,512 and consisted of 104,000 children and 12,178 teachers and administrators (Ministry of Education, 2006). According to the General Authority of Statistics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the number of preschools in 2015 was 2,559. Furthermore, special considerations for early childhood education were included in Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision, which was released in 2016 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

For a long time, the definition of literacy was limited to conventional reading and writing forms such as decoding and spelling. However, the evolution of emergent literacy perspective shifted the view of literacy by arguing that literacy development

begins long before children can read or write conventionally; emergent literacy recognizes children's scribbles as actual literacy behaviors and recognizes the essential influence of these behaviors on children's literacy development (Clay, 1966; Clay & Cazden 1990; Goodman, 1986; Sulzby & Teale, 1991, Ferreiro & Teberosky; 1982; Giles & Tunks, 2015; Morrow 2012).

Children's early literacy experiences should be a priority for early educators because children's early literacy experiences and knowledge influence their acquisition of reading skills such as decoding, fluency, and comprehension when they receive formal reading instruction at school (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Also, preschool experiences have been recognized as the most critical stage to reinforce the prerequisite literacy skills and later literacy development (Snow et al, 1991; Deming, 2009; Lipsey, Farran, & Hofer, 2015; Ludwig & Miller, 2007; Puma et al, 2012).). Neuman, Copple, and Bredekamp (2000) indicated, "although reading and written abilities continue to develop throughout the life span, the early childhood years—from birth through age eight—are the most important period for literacy development" (p. 3).

Also, teachers' beliefs and practices are an important issue faced by educators. The fact that preschoolers spend a significant amount of time with their teachers suggests that exploring teachers' beliefs and practices regarding emergent literacy bears merit. Peña-López (2009) indicates that teachers' beliefs influence the classroom environment they create. Mounting evidence suggests that teachers hold theoretical beliefs about language learning and teaching, and such beliefs frame their instructional practices (Davis & Wilson, 1999; Gebel & Schrier, 2002; Johnson, 1992; Richardson et al, 1991; Woods, 1996, as cited in Kuzborska, 2011). Teachers' beliefs and practices are critical

for developing and understanding education; they relate to teachers' strategies, and they impact students' learning environment (Peña-López, 2009). Furthermore, teachers' beliefs are one of the significant foundations for teachers to modify the goals of the subject; teachers' beliefs frame the justification for their actions (Nespor, 1987).

Significance of the Study

Although the literature on teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy is available (e.g. Hawken et al, 2005; McLachlan, Carvalho, de Lautour, & Kumar, 2006; Norling, 2014; Sandvik, van Daal, & Adèr, 2014), the majority of this existing literature was conducted in Western contexts. Besides, a search of the literature in the Saudi Digital Library and other libraries in Saudi Arabia displays little or no research on teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy practices. Thus, this study is an attempt to bridge the gap in the existing literature.

Furthermore, the significance of teachers' knowledge cannot be denied. Teachers' knowledge has an essential influence on teachers' decisions (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Shulman 1986, 1987; Baum & King, 2006; Hu, Fan, Yang, & Neitzel, 2017); "to help teachers change their practice, we must help them to expand and elaborate their knowledge system" (Borko & Putnam, 1995, p. 37). That being said, examining teachers' beliefs could be used as an indicator of their knowledge (Goodman, 1986) about emergent literacy and therefore the results from this study might help to inform teachers' education policies as well as teachers' professional development programs in Saudi Arabia. Neuman et al (2000) argued for the persistent need for a professional preparation

and development program to educate teachers about the development of literacy as well as research-based literacy-teaching strategies.

In addition to this mixed method study, Q methodology techniques were chosen for the first phase of the study. Q methodology aims to provide a better understating of beliefs as Ellingsen et al (2010) suggested, "Q provides a technique to study systematically qualitative aspects of human subjectivity in a way that reduces the interference of the researcher's preconceptions. Furthermore, subjectivity is of specific interest in Q, because its goal is to obtain a better understanding of the participants' subjectivity" (p. 396). Thus, adopting Q methodology in this research will add much more value to understating the phenomena being investigated as indicated by Pajares (1992), "When specific beliefs are carefully operationalized, the appropriate methodology is chosen, and design thoughtfully constructed, their study becomes viable and rewarding" (p. 308).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to examine the beliefs of Saudi Arabian preschool teachers toward the importance of emergent literacy skills and practices on children's literacy development. As indicated previously, teachers' beliefs influence their practices, which in turn influence children's emergent knowledge, which children develop through their interaction with the environment around them.

Research Questions

1. What are Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices?
2. What are the emergent literacy skills and practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider as most important for children's literacy development?
3. What are teachers' perceived factors contributing to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and teaching practices?
4. Do perceived contributing factors differ among teachers with differing beliefs and practices, and if so, how?

Theoretical Framework

Social interaction plays a major role in the development of emergent literacy; Teale (1986) indicated that substantial distinctions in emergent literacy experiences occur within the social and cultural group. Goodman (1986) refers to literacy as a cultural phenomenon because language evolved due to society's need for communication; children invent their literacies as a result of their interactions with their literate environment. She defined reading and writing as "human interaction with print when the reader and writer believe that they are making sense of and through written language" (Goodman, 1986, p. 6).

That being said, the current study aims to investigate teachers' beliefs due to the idea that teachers' beliefs influence their practice and activity, and these activities can be considered a significant source for children's literacy development. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted this concept under his sociocultural theory, and therefore his theory will be

chosen as a theoretical framework for this study. According to Vygotsky (1978), much essential learning by the child happens through social interaction with an expert tutor. Vygotsky recognized activity as a unique, significant character for human development. He suggested that young children learn to talk and use language as a result of their interaction with adults or expert tutors through engagement in the activity of making meaning (Vygotsky, 1978; Holzman, 1995; Karpov, 1995). Also, the emergent literacy view introduces the idea of development, and one of the main principles of Vygotsky's theory is developmental learning or "learning leading development" (Holzman, 1995).

Limitations

The limitations of this study are:

1. Representatives of the population: Q methodology required a small number of participants as indicated by Ernest (2001): “Q methodology is interested in discovering possibilities, only a few people or a number of ‘case studies’ are needed to define some of the possible belief structures that might exist about an issue” (p. 348). Therefore, the sample will not be representative of the population of teachers in Saudi Arabia.
2. Generalization of the findings: the small number of participants and selecting the participants from one city will limit the generalizability of the findings of the study. Anandarajan, Paravastu, and Simmers (2006) suggested, “this small sample technique provides depth rather than generalizability and is particularly appropriate for sensitive topic research" (p. 326).

3. Teachers' background knowledge: the fact that not all preschool teachers hold an early childhood education degree may affect their understanding and choices among the phenomenon being studied.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

At the beginning of this chapter, an overview of education in Saudi Arabia, the context of the study, is discussed. Then, since the aim of the study was to examine teachers' beliefs on emergent literacy skills and practices, a literature review of beliefs and their influences on practices is provided. Then, a discussion of emergent literacy perspectives and emergent literacy skills is provided. Finally, the literature review about teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills in different contexts is discussed.

Education and Early Childhood Education in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is the biggest country on the Arabian Peninsula. The Arabian Peninsula evidenced numerous important civilizations and cultures because of its strategic location, which is located between three major continents. On September 23, 1932, (the national day of Saudi Arabia) a royal decree was issued by King Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud to unify the provinces of the state, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was born (Faraj, 2008). The population of Saudi Arabia is 31.7 million, of whom 36% are foreign (General Authority for Statistics, 2017). The official religion of Saudi Arabia is Islam. Muslims come from all around the world to visit the two holiest places—Makkah and Medina—which are located in Saudi Arabia.

Education in Saudi Arabia went through many changes. In the eighteenth

century, before the establishment of any formal organization for education, Najd (the center of Saudi Arabia) considered spreading education as a major goal through cooperation with the Wahhabi movement, which aimed to spread Islamic education to citizens. The ultimate goal of this movement was to ensure that Muslims would understand Islamic commandments through classes for reading, writing, and reciting the Qur'an and Hadith. The first form of education in Saudi Arabia, called Kuttab, took place in mosques (Alsunbul, Metwally, Khatib, & Abduljawwad, 2008, p. 473).

However, a huge development in modern education in Saudi Arabia began in 1953 with the establishment of the Ministry of Education under King Fahd as the first Minister of Education. In 1958, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with other members of the Arabic League, decided to apply three primary levels of education: a six-year elementary, a three-year intermediate, and a three-year secondary (Alhamed, Zeyadh, Alotabi, & Metwally, 2007), which continue until the present time. Another significant improvement of education in Saudi Arabia occurred in 1961 when the Ministry of Education started to consider the importance of educating women; 16 primary schools for girls were built during the first decade of the 1960s, which contained 148 staff members to educate 5,200 girls ("State University", n.d.).

Early childhood education was under the supervision of private education until 1966 when the Ministry of Education opened the first public preschool in Riyadh, the capital city. In 1970, the document of education policy in Saudi Arabia specified a set of goals for early childhood education. These goals revolved around three major ideas: active, knowledge, and cooperation; the goals of early childhood education are to provide the best play opportunities, to allow children to practice their creative activities thorough

teaching them the appropriate basic skills along with their attitude toward cooperative working (Alhamed, 2007). A few years later, the Ministry of Education made an extraordinary effort in providing preschool education. For example, in (2006) the number of public and private preschools rose to 1,512, consisting of 104,000 children and 12,178 teachers and administrators (Ministry of Education, 2006). In 2018, the Minister of Education in Saudi Arabia announced that the number of preschools had grown to 3,684 which have 300,000 children and more than 25,000 teachers.

Concerning preschool teacher education programs, in 1978 the individual leads of the Gulf Women Association (GWA) started the first education program for preschool teachers, which was implemented under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs. This program provided two years of theoretical foundation courses, followed by a one-year field-based experience. Also, in the same year, King Saud University in Riyadh offered the first bachelor's program for preschool teachers' education. Also, a two-year diploma was offered by community colleges all over the country under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Education; these diplomas were upgraded to a four-year bachelor's degree after a decade (Abdul-Jawad, 2010).

The History of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education was under the supervision of private education until 1966 when the Ministry of Education opened the first public preschool in Riyadh, the capital city. In 1970, the document of education policy in Saudi Arabia specified a set of goals for early childhood education. These goals revolved around three major ideas: active, knowledge, and cooperation; the goals of early childhood education are to provide

the best play opportunities, to allow children to practice their creative activities thorough teaching them the appropriate basic skills along with their attitude toward cooperative working (Alhamed, 2007). The idea of the formal kindergarten was first introduced in 1975 (Rabaah, Doaa & Asma, 2016) when the first preschool was opened in Makkah in 1975 with 10 classes, 200 children, and 17 employees, including 14 teachers (King Khalid Database, 2015). The fast growth of preschool started to take place in the late 1970s and the rest of the twentieth century (Aljabreen & Lash, 2016). For example, in 1980, 19 preschools and kindergarten schools were opened, with 2,000 children, 166 teachers, and other staff. Ten of these preschools opened in Riyadh, followed by three preschools in each of the five major cities, Jeddah, Medina, Taif, Hofuf, and Dammam; followed by two preschools in each of Abha, Buraidah, and Arar (Abduljawad et al, 2008).

As the essential role of preschool education continued to be recognized, the Ministry of Education made an extraordinary effort in providing preschool education. In 2006, the number of public and private preschools rose to 1,512, consisting of 104,000 children and 12,178 teachers and administrators (Ministry of Education, 2006). Also, between 2013 and 2014, the total number of preschools and kindergartens has grown to 2,559 (King Khalid Database, 2015); 1,385 of these preschools are public schools administrated by the Ministry of Education, 942 are private schools with more classes and higher enrollment, and 232 schools are under the Ministry of Social Affairs (Alshehri, 2014). In 2015, Saudi Arabia's five-year strategic plans aimed to increase the number of preschools to a total of 1,500 schools in five years by an average of 300 schools each year (Rabaah, Doaa & Asma, 2016).

However, in 2012, the enrollment of children was only 10%, which means 90% of children enrolled in first grade without attending preschool or kindergarten (Qasabi, 2012). In 2019, the Ministry of Education announced that the preschool enrollment ratio is only 17%, which, as they indicated, is considered very low. The ministry acknowledges the fundamental role of early childhood education, and they have launched programs to develop and expand early childhood education services. The ministry is aiming to increase the preschool enrollment ratio to 30% by 2020 and 72% by 2030 (Thumairy, 2019).

Early Childhood Curriculum Approaches in Saudi Arabia

In recognition of the significance of early childhood, the development of the early childhood education curriculum went through many stages. The first stage (the traditional curriculum) started with the beginning of early childhood education in 1952. The content of this curriculum is based on a set of books and curricula such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science. This curriculum depends on receiving information from the teacher and memorizing it; the child plays the role of the receiver; the whole education process is initiated by the teacher. This curriculum lacks the interaction between the teacher and the children (Alomar, 2013).

The second stage began in 1975 when they adopted the project approach, which did not differ much from the traditional curriculum, especially in focusing on teaching the child the principles of reading and writing. However, the curriculum showed interest in other skills such as scientific skills, physical skills, and social skills, but the whole

education process was still initiated by the teacher or, as it is called, a teacher-centered education (Alomar, 2013).

The Self-learning Curriculum

The third stage began in 1986 when “the self-learning curriculum” was launched. This curriculum considers a pioneering and distinguished educational project, where the collaboration took place between many departments, including official efforts by the General Presidency for Girls' Education, and the efforts of a regional organization (the Arab Gulf Program to support the United Nations Organizations Development), and the effort of an international organization (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO) (Alomar, 2013).

The curriculum aimed to a) Improve Saudi’s teachers and raise their level of efficiency and job performance, b) Create a united reference and a fixed source of information for all the people who work in early childhood education, c) Pay attention to integrated and comprehensive development for all groups of people who work with children in all regions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, so that all preschool children benefit. (Alomar, 2013).

The curriculum contains two sections. The first section includes a basic theoretical book that sets out the intellectual and educational frameworks and requirements of the profession and links them to the learning policy of Saudi Arabia. This section is an essential guide and source for the preschool teacher which helps her to improve her teaching performance. For example, it includes information about educational principles, children's needs and behaviors, educational environment, the daily

schedule, preparing for the school years, creating a relationship with the families, and so on.

The second part of the curriculum is the "practical curriculum", which consists of ten units. Five of these units (the water, the sand, the food, the habitat, and the hands) are presented in detail—each of them is presented in a separate book—and the other five units (clothing, family, friends, my safety and health, my book) come in one book. Each book explains the unit and its goals and provides practical activities for each of the three levels of kindergarten. Each unit would last two to four weeks (Alomar, 2013).
Although this curriculum still in use today, many respectful attempts have been taken to develop early childhood education in Saudi Arabia. For instance, in 2007, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project (KAAPEDP) was announced, which is known as *Tatweer*, and it aimed at reforming the Saudi education system, which includes early childhood education (Alyami, 2014). In 2015, in cooperation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Ministry of Education and *Tatweer* announced the Saudi Early Learning Standards (SELS) (Alghamdi, 2016).

Early Literacy in the Self-learning Curriculum

Many studies previously attempted to investigate some of the factors relating to the self-learning curriculum. Conserving the theoretical aspect, (Komais, 2007) indicated that the child-centered curriculum, which focuses on children's development and thereby constituting a Piagetian perspective, has hitherto neglected the influence of the socio-cultural context of children's development. The study of Al-Ameel et al. (2009) revealed

that the units within the Self-Learning Curriculum fit with children's needs, environment, and experiences, although they fail to keep up with advancing national and global standards. In addition, the findings indicated that the self-learning curriculum allocates listening and speaking more attention than it does reading or writing activities. The study also indicated that, despite the availability of the library center (in addition to reading and writing activities), the children did not reach the level of literacy anticipated (Al-Ameel et al., 2009 as cited in Alothman, 2017)

The Self-Learning Curriculum recognized literacy as one of many skills that requires training. Literacy within the Self-Learning curriculum is presented from a maturational viewpoint which depends on the reading-readiness approach (Al-Othman, Gregory, Jessel, & Khalil, 2015).

Studies of early literacy in Saudi Arabia

Even though the research related to the early acquisition of literacy has been widely investigated in different languages, including English, studies about the early literacy development of native Arabic speakers are relatively limited. Al-Othman and colleagues' (2015) study aimed to bridge this gap by investigating the influence of adopting a new curriculum within a culturally and lingually divergent context. Their results showed that the daily schedule incorporated many literacy-related activities. Their findings also revealed that there was a general deficit in terms of motivation towards children's literacy.

Furthermore, the study suggested that teachers differed in their understanding of extant literacy practices. The study called for additional research to investigate the

acquisition of Arabic literacy. The study concluded by raising many questions, including "What are the earliest literacy practices that can be considered important linguistically and culturally for preschoolers in Saudi Arabia?" (Al-Othman et al., 2015, p. 2521)

Gahwaji's (2016) study also aimed to bridge the gap by investigating the influence of two different literacy instructional models on children's literacy development in Saudi Arabia. The first model is a tutorial instructional program while the other model is educational games program. The results of the study suggested that educational games influence children's literacy skills more effectively than the tutorial program.

A Brief Explanation About the Nature of the Arabic Language

The Arabic language is written in an alphabet with 28 basic letters. All of the basic letters represent constant sounds except three letters (ا,و , and ي), which can represent constant (/ʔ/, /w/, /j/) or long vowel sounds (/aː/, /uː/, /iː/). Short vowels are represented by diacritical symbols, which are placed above or under the consonant (= /a/; = /u/; = /i/). These symbols are used to determine the consonant and vowel sounds, and also provide grammatical and syntactic information. Thus, these symbols change the meaning of the word, the part of the speech and the verb tense (Al Ghanem & Kearns, 2015).

However, symbols are not provided in all texts. Orthography in Arabic has two forms, the first form is called vowelized, which is when the symbols are provided in the text. The second is the unvowelized, which is when the text is written without the symbols, or else to say it in another way, without short vowels. Reading unvowelized text

required the readers to apply a sufficient knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and contextual interpretation. Thus, texts for beginning readers are fully vowelized. Although there is a high one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and their graphic representation in Arabic, Elbeheri et al listed many of the characteristics of the written form in Arabic, which disregarded the advantage of this level of transparency. One of the important characteristics of Arabic orthography is the letters' form. Many letters look alike. For instance, some letters are distinguished by one dot above or under the letter (Elbeheri et al, 2011). Furthermore, for many letters, the form of the letter changes according to its position in the word (Taibah & Haynes, 2011).

Concerning Arabic phonology, there are 35 phonemes in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The Arabic language is highly diglossic. In defining the term diglossic, Saiegh-Haddad (2005) indicated that there are two features of a diglossic language, "The first is a differentiation between the written and the oral modes. The second is a rigid socio-functional complementarity of two separate sets of functions performed by two remarkably distinct, though linguistically related codes" (p. 562). With that being said, the Arabic language is considered a very representative case of diglossic; the Spoken Arabic Language (SAL) differs from that of the formal language which is used in books (usually referred to as Modern Standard Arabic). In the SAL, some letters' phonemes are substituted with the phonemes of another letter. Gherwash's (2017) study suggested that the existence of diglossic phenomena in Arabic could be one of the reasons for the lack of a "reading culture" or of reading for pleasure across the Arabic-speaking world.

Beliefs and Practices

Philosophers, anthropologists, and social psychologists have participated in investigating beliefs and their impact on actions. Their definitions of beliefs have one thing in common, which is that beliefs are a person's thoughts or assumptions toward the world and what he thinks is true (Richardson, 1996). Goodenough (1976) defined beliefs as a person's thoughts that are "accepted as guides for assessing the future, are cited in support of decisions, or are referred to in passing judgment on the behavior of others" (p. 151). Also, Michael Borg's (2001) definition indicated that "a belief is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior." These two definitions agree that beliefs guide and influence a person's actions.

Davis and Andrzejewski (2009) compared beliefs to the lens of a magnifying glass; they clarify and control the understanding of an unclear picture or situation. To illustrate, teachers usually use their beliefs to make sense of unclear situations. A growing body of research evidenced that teachers' beliefs influence their teaching decisions, planning, and practices (DeFord, 1985; Bandura, 1986; Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Richardson et al, 1991). Most recently, in Basturkmen's (2012) review of teachers' beliefs, a correspondence between teacher's beliefs and their practices was evidence in six studies (Cundale, 2001; Farrell and Kun, 2008; Kim, 2006; Maloney-Berman, 2004; Tam, 2006; Vibulpol, 2004).

Nespor's (1987) study aimed to summarize the final results of a well-known study called the Teacher Believe Study, which is intensive two-year research that focuses on investigating the structures and functions of teachers' beliefs. Eight teachers from three school districts participated in this study. Data collection consisted of videotaping the teacher during a whole semester, as well as interviewing the teachers using two types of interviews. The first type of interview was a semi-structured and wide-ranging conversation called a "repertory grid" interview, which tended to investigate teachers' attitudes and beliefs about teaching, about their students, about student behavior, and about the context in which they worked. The second type of interview focused on the ways the teachers explained their teaching practices. These interviews were called "stimulated recall" because they involved showing the teachers the videotapes of their classrooms and asking them to talk about and defend what was happing in the classroom.

The findings of these interviews and observations indicated that teachers' practices within a content area differed based on the nature of their beliefs. Teachers' beliefs were found to be one of the significant causes for teachers modifying the supplementary goals of the subject. Teachers' beliefs framed the justification for their actions. To put it briefly, the subject matter area sets significant bonds on teachers' methods of teaching; however, besides these bonds, teachers' beliefs about teaching may shape the final way they present content.

Furthermore, the purpose of Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd's (1991) study was to determine the relationship between teachers' beliefs about teaching reading comprehension and their classroom practice. Thirty-nine teachers from six different elementary schools participated in this study. For data collection, the researchers used

interviews and observation. The interview consisted of questions on teachers' beliefs about teaching reading comprehension, and about learning to read in general, as well as questions on their private beliefs, asking them to share their opinions of particular students. All teachers were observed twice during their reading comprehension; the observers were asked to accurately record teachers' talk and to briefly record students' and teachers' actions. To analyze the data, the researchers used Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method, which depends on coding teachers' statements from the interview to generate the categories that they used to predict teachers' practices in the classroom.

The analysis of the observation provided detailed descriptions of teachers' practices as well as a comparison of the predicted information from the beliefs interviews to the actual practice. Even though the study experienced inconsistency between beliefs and practice in some cases, the overall findings proved that teachers' beliefs impact their classroom practice in teaching reading comprehension. The researchers were successfully able to predict teachers' practices based on their beliefs interviews. With regards to the inconsistency, the researchers conducted a follow-up case study to explore it. The findings of the case study indicated that the contradiction between beliefs and practices could indicate that the teacher is experiencing a change process.

In a recent study, Watson (2015) aimed to investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their educational practices. Namely, the study intended to investigate the relationship between a teacher's beliefs about grammar and her teaching strategies when teaching writing. The study used the case study approach to examine beliefs; the participant was a teacher who had been teaching for 10 years and who was

recognized as an advanced skills teacher. To better understand the complication of beliefs and practice, the study used a multi-method approach to collect data. In particular, the researcher conducted a nine-hour observation as well as a stimulated recall interview to collect the data. Besides, the participant completed a think-aloud protocol in which she graded two writing samples: one for a high-ability student, and the other for a low-ability student. Developing a descriptive framework was the main focus of the analytical procedure. To that end, the researcher summarized the transcripts of the observations. Then, the interview was coded, and these codes were used as themes to organize the rest of the data. The findings showed a strong correspondence between adopted beliefs and educational practice. For example, the participant viewed grammar as boring and unimportant, which is consistent with her practice, which places grammar as a secondary concern in writing.

An Overview of The History of The Evolution of Emergent Literacy Perspective

Emergent literacy has been defined as the "reading and writing knowledge and behavior of children who are not yet conventionally literate" (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002, p. 8). Moreover, the National Research Council (2001) defined emergent literacy as "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing and the environment that supports these developments" (p. 186). The term emergent literacy has been used to reveal the idea that the acquisition of literacy is best understood as a developmental continuum, which appears early in children's lives, rather than restricting the acquisition of literacy via attending school, which has been suggested by other perspectives such as reading

readiness. Such perspectives build barriers between the "prereading" behaviors and the "real" reading which children learn at school. However, the emergent literacy perspective considers prereading skills as essential features of literacy development (Mason & Allen, 1986; McGee & Lomax, 1990; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1999). The term emergent literacy has been universally acknowledged as a view that endorses nonconventional early literacy skills (Giles & Tunks, 2015). Also, the emergent literacy view suggests that reading and writing developed simultaneously as a result of young children's experiences with oral and written language (Sulzby & Teale, 1999; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982).

Before moving further in the discussion of emergent literacy, an overview of the history of early literacy research shall be provided. Prior to the evolution of the emergent literacy perspective, other perspectives have been dominant. In fact, until the second decade of the twentieth century, very little research had been conducted regarding children's early reading and writing. However, in the 1920s, a shift in thinking started when educators began to consider early childhood as a "period of preparation" and the term *reading readiness* was coined, though it was limited to reading. Reading readiness was in reality influenced by Gesell's ideas, which were dominant during that period. Maturationalists believed that development is guided and controlled by maturation, and therefore readiness to read is an outcome of neural ripening (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Between the late 1950s and 1960s, the idea of readiness changed from being a result of maturation to being a result of experiences. For instance, in 1968 Durkin wrote:

> The literature still shows some remnants of the maturational concept of readiness, but as a whole, articles and books are now dominated by opposite conceptions highlighting the contribution of environmental factors. Or, to put the characterization of the current sense in the framework of the nature-nurture debate, today the spotlight happens to be on nature … (p. 48)

Also, research projects such as Durkin's (1966) have suggested that the reading readiness paradigm was inappropriate theoretically and practically; this conclusion occurred as a result of the appearance of two trends: cognitive approaches and their influence on education, as well as the view of early years as an essential period in development. This shift resulted in the rise of the emergent literacy concept and research (Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

The term emergent was first developed in 1966 by Maria Clay, who was a pioneer in investigating children's early reading behavior (Teale & Sulzby, 1987). In Clay's (1967) research, she concluded, "There is nothing in this research that suggests that contact with printed language forms should be withheld from any five-year-old child on the ground that he is immature" (p.24). Numerous research in early literacy was established and was inspired by the work of Clay (Mason, 1980; Goodman & Altwerger, 1981; Sulzby & Otto, 1982; Bissex, 1980). Taele and Sulzby (1986) wrote to justify their adoption of the term emergent literacy:

> We use the *emergent* to suggest that development is taking place, that there is something emerging in the child that had not 'been' there before. Growth in writing and reading comes from within the child and as the result of environmental stimulation….we have employed the term emergent because it is 'forward-looking.' It suggests development….we feel it is useful as a blanket term that characterizes the manner in which young children are learning more and more about the culturally elaborate writing system that is used around them (xx).

Mason and Sinha (1992) argued that the emergent literacy perspective is influenced by Vygotsky's model of learning and development. They stated that children acquire literacy in their preschool years through exploration and adult assistance; assisting children does not mean direct instruction. The role of social interaction has been addressed by Guthrie

and Kirsch (1984) when they state, "The environment, the social expectations, and the reading activities that others may expect are crucial in determining whether a person is literate"(p. 353).

Furthermore, the emergent literacy perspective contains the principles of the child-centered and constructivist approach (Morrow, 2011). Goodman (1986) referred to literacy as a cultural phenomenon because language evolved out of society's need for communication; children invent their literacies as a result of their interactions with their literate environment. She defined reading and writing as "human interaction with print when the reader and writer believe that they are making sense of and through written language" (Goodman, 1986, p. 6).

Researchers have argued that the acquisition of literacy has been misunderstood (Coltheart, 1979; Durkin, 1987; Mason, 1984; Mason & Sinha, 1992; Teale & Sulzby, 1986), which leads to radical opinions toward educational support, such as refusing all support by educators of literacy before first grade (Mason & Sinha, 1992). Children's early knowledge of literacy influences their later literacy acquisition. Whitehurst and Lonigan (2001) stated that children's knowledge about literacy in the early years facilitates their acquisition of reading skills like decoding, comprehension, and fluency when they start formal reading instruction in school (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Furthermore, preschool experiences are considered by many as a critical stage that supports children's acquisition of prerequisite literacy skills as well as their progress in literacy (Snow et al, 1991). Neuman et al (2000) argued that children's early years, especially from birth to eight, are the most significant time for literacy development.

It is evidenced that emergent literacy skills are important for later success in literacy. One of the issues that have led to misunderstanding emergent literacy depends on the way emergent literacy is used to measure early reading. For instance, even though letter recognition and decoding are essential elements in learning to read, it should not be the only measure of learning to read; other skills such as the function of print, understanding that print reveals meaning, phonological awareness, and invented writing have fundamental roles in early literacy development (Mason & Sinha, 1992). Thus, a comprehensive or balanced literacy program should include all important emergent literacy skills, not focus on one or two and ignore the others (Head Start, 2000; IRA & NAEYC, 1998). Hawken, Johnston, and McDonnell (2005) wrote:

> Although there has been a great deal of debate as to how much of each skill should be taught, researchers have generally acknowledged that by kindergarten, children should (a) have mastered book knowledge/print awareness skills; (b) have beginning phonological awareness skills, such as rhyming, identifying initial sounds in words, and segmenting words into syllable units; and (c) be able to identify at least 10 letters (Good & Kaminski, 2002; Head Start, 2000; Snow & Paez, 2004; Whitehurst & Massetti, 2004; Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

That being said, a view of the literature on these essential emergent literacy skills will be provided.

Emergent Literacy Skills

The following discussion will summarize some of the earliest research which was influenced by the emergent literacy perspective. This research underlines the most important emergent literacy skills.

In their syntheses of emergent literacy research, Gunn, Simmons, and Kameenui (1995) identified five areas or skills of emergent literacy that most emergent literacy

research shared. The first of the skills is *Awareness of the print*, which "refers to a child's knowledge of the forms and the functions of print." "Forms" is defined as knowledge of the *conventions of the print.* It happens when children realize that print carries meaning, starts at the top of the page, runs from left to right, and moves to the following page when it is turned. Children understand the function of the print when they recognize that print conveys a message and many purposes could be inferred from that message.

The second skill is the *Relationship of print to speech*, which refers to children's "ability to map oral language onto print" (p. 10); children's ability to differentiate between oral language and written language, and to notice the physical, situational and structural differences between written and oral language. The third skill is *Comprehension of text structure,* which consists of children's understanding of text structure or grammar, and helps them to comprehend written and oral language. The fourth skill is *Phonological awareness,* which is children's capability to identify spoken words as a series of sounds; it is "a specific auditory skill which is of crucial importance to reading ability in an alphabetic system" (p. 11). Children can master some of the prior phonological awareness skills like rhyming and alliteration before school, and it has been evidenced in children who cannot read or spell. The fifth and last skill is *Letter knowledge,* which forms the basis for identifying the relationship between letters in spelling and sounds in pronunciation (Ehri & Sweet, 1991)

Furthermore**,** Goodman (1986) summarized her conclusions about literacy development in the five roots of literacy. The first root of literacy development is the development of print awareness in situational contexts. The research indicated that print awareness seems to be a common phenomenon among most children; ethnic, geographic,

racial, or linguistic differences do not impact the ability to read environmental print. The second root is the development of print awareness in connected discourse. Most children seem to have a fair experience with books. The studies show that the ability to handle books seems to be universal for all children, and between three and five years of age, children realize that print carries meaning.

The third root is the development of function and forms of writing. Writing and reading are not "mirrors of each other"; they have similarities and differences, but they also have influences on each other. Most children seem to believe that they can write and have the ability to discuss writing's functions more than the ability to discuss reading functions. The fourth root is the use of oral language to talk about written language. Children's experiences with written language allow them to develop oral language about written language. The fifth and last root is metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness about written language. This root concerns children's abilities to talk about the language itself and how it works. Children's metalinguistic statements reflect either personal or public views (Goodman, 1986).

The Five Skills of Emergent Literacy

Five skills have been concluded from the previous research on emergent literacy skills (e.g. Sulzby & Teale, 1991; van Kleeck, 1990; Smith, 1989; Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1992) and will be the base of the present study. These skills are print awareness, print motivation, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and early writing. These emergent literacy skills develop before school through socio-cultural experiences with print (Bowman & Treiman, 2004)

Print Awareness

Print awareness or print knowledge has been recognized by major research as an important skill of emergent literacy (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008; Piasta & Wagner, 2010). McGinty and Justice (2009) stated that print knowledge is "the ability to understand forms, features, and functions of print" (p. 81). The term print knowledge describes children's knowledge of particular forms and functions of written language which includes children's understanding that print is organized in a particular way, such as being read from left to right and from up to down. It also includes the concept of a word, which means understanding that print has different functions based on the context; it is their understanding that print conveys a message (Badian, 2001; Ehri & Sweet, 1991; Morrow et al, 1990; Piasta, Justice, McGinty & Kaderavek, 2012).

McCormick and Mason (1984) believed that children should realize that print holds a meaning before participating in a word analysis; they suggest that children must go through three levels of development before they read. At the first level, the function of the print, children must know that particular concepts have printed representation. Children at this level are learning to relate their oral language to print. At the second level, the form of the print, children's awareness of the printed forms of words improves; they show interest in print, which allows them to notice the structural characteristics of print. Also, children at this level begin to use the letter-sound relationship to learn and remember words. At the third level, coordination of the form and function of print, children recognize letter patterns and letter sounds as well as the meaningfulness of print, which is considered an indicator of their flexible view of the letter-sound relationship (McCormick & Mason, 1984).

Clay (1979) argued that enhancing children's conceptualization of print and their connection with print should be a main goal during the preschool years. Children develop the concepts of print through their social-cultural experiences and literacy-based instructions with adults around them at a very young age (Otto, 2010; Pullen & Justice, 2003).

A growing body of research has investigated maximizing children's print knowledge through shared reading. These researchers were inspired by evidence which suggests that children and teacher spend little time talking about the print during shared reading (Evans, Saint-Aubin, & Landry, 2009). However, adults can help children increase their knowledge and attention to print by doing some modifications. These modifications are called verbal and nonverbal print references, which include talking about and discussing the print (Justice, Kaderavek, Fan, Sofka, & Hunt, 2009)

Piasta, Justice, McGinty, and Kaderavek (2012) investigated the influence of increasing four-year-old children's knowledge about print during shared reading. Teachers in 85 experimental classrooms used verbal and nonverbal print references during shared reading to increase children's awareness of print. The results showed that children's print knowledge in the experimental group was higher than the control group. Also, the results showed a positive relationship between print knowledge and later literacy skills (reading, spelling, comprehension).

Print Motivation

Print motivation refers to children's interest in literacy. Literacy interest refers to children's willingness to and enjoyment of participating in literacy-related activities

(Frijters et al, 2000; Hume, Lonigan, & McQueen, 2015). Literacy interest has been linked to the acquisition of other emergent literacy skills and later literacy achievement. In the National Report Council called Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) recognized the development of literacy motivation as one of the most important opportunities that children should have. Despite that fact, Snow (2017) argued that literature around the essential aim of motivating literacy is very limited.

Research showed that print motivation linked to emergent literacy skills, as well as to later literacy development (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Whitehurst & Angell, 1994). A study of five- and six-year-olds showed a significant relationship between children's literacy interest and other emergent literacy skills including letter knowledge and phonological awareness (Frijters, Barron, & Brunello, 2000).

Furthermore, in their 2016 study, Hume, Allan, and Lonigan investigated the relation between literacy interest and early literacy development for 169 children in preschool. The authors used parents' reports to measure children's literacy interest, which represents print motivation. Also, to measure early literacy skills, they used a test called the Test of Preschool Early Literacy. The results of the regression analyses evidenced that literacy interest is strongly related to early literacy skills.

Children's literacy environment influences their motivation toward literacy. For instance, children who have access to a variety of books tend to spend time by themselves looking at books (Baker et al, 1997). Besides, there is evidence that early exposure to literacy is essential in children's development of literacy interests (Hume, Allan, & Lonigan, 2016), as well as later academic skills development (LeFevre et al, 2010).

One method that has been used to promote print knowledge and motivation is through environmental print. Environmental print benefits children's emergent literacy skills because it allows children to discover print in everyday natural environments. Neumann, Hood, and Ford's (2013) study aimed to investigate the influence of using environmental print on children's print motivation and emergent literacy skills. The study involved eight weeks of intervention for 73 three to four-year-old children who participated in this study. The results showed that the experimental group who received the environmental print intervention outperformed the control group in their print motivation as well as other literacy skills such as letter-sound knowledge, letter writing, and print concepts.

Alphabet Knowledge

Alphabet knowledge refers to children's knowledge of letterforms, names, and corresponding sounds (Piasta & Wagner, 2010). It incorporates numerous aspects, including letter-name knowledge and letter-sound knowledge (Piasta et al, 2016). Letter knowledge has been defined as children's capability to recognize letters and know that "letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named" (Head Start, 2003, p. 23).

Letter knowledge allows children to connect the letter in spelling with the sound in pronunciation (Gunn, Simmons, & Kameenui, 1995) and it has been identified by many studies as a strong predictor of the acquisition of reading and spilling later in school (Ehri & Sweet, 1991; Hammill, 2004; Leader, 2015; Muter, Hulme, Snowling, &

Taylor, 1998; Pullen & Justice, 2003; Schatschneider, Fletcher, Francis, Carlson, & Foorman, 2004).

Leader's (2015) study aimed to investigate whether there is a relationship between early letter naming fluency and later reading fluency. Forty-six students were randomly selected to look at their kindergarten letter containing fluency scores and compare it with their fourth-grade reading fluency score. The finding showed a relationship between that letter naming fluency and reading fluency; letter naming fluency has been proved to be a good predictor of later reading fluency.

Levin and Ehri (2009) investigate the role of letter knowledge on children's ability to read and spell their names and their classmates' names. Sixty children participated in the study and were tested for name identification, name spelling, knowledge of letter names, and other emergent literacy skills. The results indicated that reading and spelling names were linked to letter knowledge and not to phonemic awareness.

Also, a meta-analysis of 137 studies aimed to investigate the relationship between rapid naming—which includes letter naming—and reading performance. The result revealed a strong positive relationship between rapid naming and word reading and reading comprehension (Araújo, Reis, Petersson & Faísca, 2015)

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness refers to children's ability to manipulate and distinguish the sounds in the words (Snow et al, 1999; Anthony & Francis, 2005). In particular, it has been defined as "the ability to perceive the sounds of speech that are derived from

syllables, including the syllable as a whole, the rhyme unit of the syllable, and the individual phonemes" (Arrow & McLachlan, 2014).

Phonological awareness appears in many ways at different times in children's literacy development. To illustrate, the beginning of the development of phonological awareness is represented by children's capabilities to perform and understand rhymes and to classify words based on their beginning and ending sounds. In the more advanced levels of phonological awareness children can comprehend that sentences include words (word awareness) and that words contain syllables (syllable awareness) (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

Phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge combined are two essential skills for the acquisition of literacy; they form the foundation of the development of the alphabetic principles. Developing the alphabetic principles means understanding that the sounds in the verbal words are represented by graphemes in the written words. Children who acquired a combined knowledge of phonological awareness and alphabetic principles can use the knowledge of letters and their sounds when they read and spell to produce phonematically correct words (Arrow & McLachlan, 2014; Nicholson, 2005).

Phonological awareness's influence on literacy acquisition has been recognized as one of the most important scientific findings in education since the twentieth century (Stanovich, 2000). A meta-analysis of 52 studies in phonological awareness intervention evidenced that phonological awareness has a statistically significant influence on improving children's spelling, word recognition, and comprehension (Ehri et al, 2001).

In a more recent meta-analytic review, Melby-Lervåg, Lyster, and Hulme (2012) conduct a systematic meta-analytic review of 235 studies that look at the relationship

between children's phonological awareness and word reading skills. The review contains extreme group studies as well as correlation studies. The review of the extreme group studies shows that children with dyslexia have a real problem with phonemic awareness compared to typically developing children. Concerning the correlation studies, the results showed a strong correlation between phonemic awareness and word reading skill, which suggests that phonemic awareness is a predictor of individual variations in reading development.

Furthermore, Burns (2016) studied the influence of using phonological awareness centers in the classroom on children's phonological awareness development and reading skills. The research used the Phonological Awareness Skill Screener (PASS) test to determine the phonological awareness growth of children who used these centers for seven weeks. The results of the study showed a significant improvement in children's phonological awareness as well as other reading skills. These findings suggest that teachers should use a variety of practices to promote children's phonological awareness.

Early Writing

According to the emergent literacy perspective, children's attempts to write at an early age play an essential role in their literacy development as Morrow and Dougherty (2011) stated "emergent literacy acknowledges a child's scribble marks on a page as rudimentary writing, even if not one letter is discernible." (p. 7). In the initial phase of early writing, children know that print conveys meaning, and their writing is represented in their attempt to mimic conventional writing without knowing that there is a connection between symbols and sounds (Gentry & Gillet, 1993). In fact, many preschool children

are interested in written language and they try in a creative way to represent oral language in a written format. This phenomenon has been called *invented writing* or *emergent writing* (Puranik & Lonigan, 2011).

In a more advanced phase, children used their knowledge of letters' sounds and letters' names to spell what they hear, such as writing RUDF for *Are you deaf?* (Bissex, 1980). This kind of writing has been called *invented spelling* which refers to "the written products of young children who are exploring and discovering the sound-text relationships during their writing" (Hofslundsengen, Hagtvet & Gustafsson, 2016, p. 1447).

Studies showed that allowing children to practice writing through invented writing and invented spelling reinforce other emergent literacy skills, such as alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness, as well as later reading and writing (Aram & Biron, 2004; Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1979; Martins & Silva, 2006; Ouellette, Sénéchal, & Haley, 2013; Rowe, 2017).

Recently, Hofslundsengen, Hagtvet, and Gustafsson's (2016) study investigated the immediate and later influence of invented writing on literacy skills. One hundred and five five-year-old preschoolers participated in this study. The experimental group received an invented writing intervention program implemented by their teachers. Children's literacy skills were assessed through pre-test and post-test. Also, a follow-up test was conducted six months after the intervention. The test results showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group on the post-test and follow-up test for the measures of phoneme awareness, spelling, and word reading. These

results suggest that invented writing promotes the development of emergent literacy skills in preschool as well as later reading and writing development in school.

Furthermore, in a more recent study, Ouellette and Sénéchal (2017) investigated whether children's invented spelling in kindergarten could be a reliable predictor of children's subsequent reading and spelling in first grade. One hundred and seventy-one kindergarten children were evaluated on invented spelling as well as other emergent literacy skills such as alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness. One year later, these children were evaluated on reading and spelling. The results showed a significant influence of invented spelling on later reading.

Teachers' Beliefs and Emergent Literacy in Different Contexts

Social contexts impact children's literacy development; the purposes of literacy differ among different countries and cultures; social expectations and the value of literacy in a particular culture impact literacy acquisition (Mason & Allen, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1990; Clay, 1971). That being said, research on teachers' beliefs and practices toward emergent literacy among different countries will be reviewed in the following section. Norling's (2014) study aimed to investigate preschool staff's view of emergent literacy approaches in Swedish preschools. Participants included 188 preschool teachers from 52 preschools across three different cities in Sweden. The researcher conducted 52 focus group interviews with teachers to collect the data. All the interviews were transcribed and analyzed based on Whitehurst and Lonigan's (1998) model, which consisted of outside-in and inside-out processes. The outside-in processes included four dimensions: language (developing syntactic and conceptual knowledge), narrative (understanding and

constructing narratives), conventions of print (knowledge about conventional print formats), and emergent reading (children's processes of pretending to read). On the other hand, the inside-out processes comprised eight dimensions: knowledge of graphemes (letter-naming knowledge), phonological awareness (manipulating syllables), and syntactic awareness (phoneme-grapheme correspondence, emergent writing, phonological memory (capability to correct grammatical mistakes), rapid naming (ability to rapidly name letters, numbers, or colors), and print motivation (interest in print and shared reading).

The results of the study showed a partial idea of the emergent literacy environment in Swedish preschool. The analysis of the interviews indicated that teachers applied all the dimensions of the outside approaches and that the two dimensions to emerge were within the outside-in domain—play and supportive communication—which have been identified from earlier research as developmental strategies for children's emergent literacy. Preschool teachers saw themselves as role models and they also believed that they should respect children's perspectives; they tried to engage and listen to children to guide them in the right direction. Concerning the inside-out approach, only three dimensions were mentioned by preschool teachers: emergent writing, rapid naming, and print motivation (Norling, 2014).

Furthermore, McLachlan, Carvalho, de Lautour, and Kumar's (2006) study aimed to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices in New Zealand. There were 107 teachers surveyed from different settings, including kindergarten, full-day childcare, Montessori, and other programs. The results evidenced that New Zealand's teachers were enthusiastic about literacy and believed that their role was to guide and facilitate children's learning;

they believed that children develop literacy through exposure to oral and written texts and develop literacy through the experience of oral and written stimuli and interaction with others. Overall, teachers held a consistent view of what could be defined as "good practice" in terms of endorsing early literacy. However, the researchers indicated, "We are not convinced that we can say teachers have current knowledge of the most effective methods of promoting literacy" (McLachlan et al, 2006).

Also, Sandvik, van Daal, and Adèr (2014) conducted a study in Norway aimed at investigating preschool teachers' beliefs and practices regarding emergent literacy. A group of 90 preschool teachers completed a 130-item survey called the Preschool Literacy Survey (PLS). Of these, 36 of them participated in a literacy-awareness training program while the rest of the participants served as a control group in the study. The results illustrated that all teachers held positive beliefs toward emergent literacy, they agreed that preschools and preschools teachers have a significant role in promoting children's literacy development, and their answers revealed an agreement with current early literacy research. Teachers' positive beliefs about early literacy could be due to the revised preschool curriculum, which encourages language and literacy. However, teachers' beliefs were not consistent with their practices; teachers spent a very limited amount of time with individual literacy-related activities; shared reading was the most frequent activity that teachers spent significant time with, regarding literacy activities. On the other hand, when comparing the two groups, the results reported less variation in teachers' beliefs for the subsample who were in the literacy-awareness training; also, relationships between their beliefs and practices increased (Sandvik et al, 2014).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the current sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to examine the beliefs of Saudi Arabian preschool teachers toward the importance of emergent literacy practices in children's literacy development. The study involved two phases; in the first phase, the quantitative phase, Q methodology was used as a method for collecting and analyzing the data. In the second phase, the qualitative phase, a focus group interview was used as a method for collecting the data, then a constructive grounded theory approach was used as a method to analyze that data. In the following discussion, process and method justification is addressed.

Restatement of Research Questions

1. What are Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices?
2. What are the emergent literacy skills and practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider as most important for children's literacy development?
3. What are teachers' perceived factors contributing to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and teaching practices?
4. Do perceived contributing factors differ among teachers with differing beliefs and practices and, if so, how?

Mixed Methods Design

A mixed methods research design was used to conduct the current study. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) defined mixed methods study as, "a type of research design in which qualitative and quantitative approaches are used in types of questions, research methods, data collection and analysis procedures, and/or inferences" (p. 711). The fundamental premise of mixed methods research is that using both qualitative and quantitative instruments improve the understanding of the research problem, compared to using only one of these approaches (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Qualitative data provides a comprehensive understanding of the problem, while quantitative data provides a more general view of the problem. Thus, by using mixed methods, the weaknesses of one approach were resolved by the other approach.

There are several types of mixed methods designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A key design component in the differentiation of mixed methods is the timing of each quantitative and qualitative strand of research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Among these several designs, Creswell (2014) identified the three basic mixed methods designs as convergent parallel, exploratory sequential, and explanatory sequential. In the parallel design, quantitative and qualitative data are gathered concurrently and analyzed separately, and then the researcher compares the results of both methods to see the degree of correspondence between them (Creswell, 2014; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The other two types of mixed methods design are sequential. Sequential mixed methods refer to the method where qualitative and quantitative data are collected in chronological order, with one strand following the other or being developed based on the other (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The first type of sequential mixed methods design is the exploratory method. In this design, the research starts with the qualitative phase and follows that with the quantitative phase. The research starts by exploring with qualitative data and analysis and then uses the results to build the second phase, the quantitative phase (Creswell, 2014). The other type of sequential design is the explanatory sequential mixed methods design. In this design, the research begins with the quantitative phase and is followed by the qualitative phase; the researcher collects the qualitative data to explain the quantitative results (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Clark Plano, 2011). In this study, the explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used.

In the explanatory sequential design, two phases were applied. The first phase was conducted through Q methodology, while the second phase, the qualitative phase, was applied by conducting interviews based on the results of the first phase (see Appendix A for a visual representation of the research design).

The first phase involved collecting and analyzing the data using Q methodology techniques. The Q methodology itself is a mixed methods approach that "applies statistical analysis to the qualitative study of human subjectivity such as attitudes, beliefs, feelings and opinions" (Ellingsen, Størksen, & Stephens, 2009, p. 397). It combines the advantages of factor analysis with the subjective beliefs of the participants (Roberts, 2007). Since a primary goal of Q methodology is to look at the whole viewpoint, a qualitative narrative interpretation method is usually used for factoring interpretation. Concerning the qualitative aspect of Q methodology, the researcher applies the inductive method through procedures that include coding and categorizing.

The second phase, the qualitative one, was "implemented for the purpose of

explaining the initial results in more depth" (Creswell & Clark Plano, 2011, p. 82). The results of the first phase were used as a base for conducting focus group interviews. In the following section, each phase is discussed in more detail.

Phase-one Methodology

Q Methodology

As indicated previously, the current study aimed to investigate teachers' beliefs, and therefore the Q methodology technique was chosen for the first phase of the study. In the 1930s, psychologist-physicist William Stephenson developed Q methodology; he aimed to establish a scientific approach to studying human subjectivity (Davis & Michelle, 2011). Stephenson used Spearman's method of factor analysis and converted the traditional R approach of factor analysis by testing the "person" instead of the "variable" (Militello & Benham, 2010). Q methodology provides a scientific approach for studying subjectivity, while at the same time maintains the intensity and individuality of the humanistic approach (Brown, 1980).

Q methodology is the first and foremost methodology interested in human subjectivity (Ellingsen et al, 2010). Using Q methodology provides a more holistic understanding of participants' subjectivity than using conventional surveys; it also provides better analytical frameworks than only applying qualitative approaches such as interviews (Davis & Michelle, 2011). Q methodology has been identified as a "qualiquantological" method because it applies statistics to acquire qualitative findings (Parker & Alford, 2010).

Based on the Q methodology research, the participants in this study were

presented with a set of statements, which were called Q-set and were developed around the topic. The participants, who were called the P-set, were asked to rank-order the statements mostly in a forced quasi-normal distribution chart (Q sort) according to their preferences. Through the act of Q sorting, participants presented their subjective interpretations to the statement, which in turn revealed their subjective beliefs (Smith, 2001).

In Q studies, this act has been identified under the term *operant subjectivity*. The relation of the activity of Q sorting to operant subjectivity has been explained by Brown (1993): "The statements are matters of opinion only (not fact), and the fact that the Q sorter is ranking the statements from his or her point of view is what brings subjectivity to the picture" (Brown, 1993, p. 92). Operant behavior is associated with traditional behaviorism because participants display their subjectivity through their behaviors (Watts, 2011). Stephenson coupled the term operant with subjectivity to show that subjectivity or point of view can be measured and studied scientifically through Q methodology (Smith, 2001; Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this study, after the participants performed Q sorting, their sorts were subjected to factor analysis for intercorrelations. This step was followed by factor interpretation using examining and comparing.

Ellington stated that five steps of Q methodology were identified by Brown (1980) and are consistent with Brown's approach. The five steps of Q methodology are:

1. Identifying a concourse on the topic of interest
2. Developing a representative set of statements (Q sample)
3. Specifying the respondents for the study (P-set) and conditions of instruction
4. Administering the Q sort (rank ordering of statements)
5. Factor analyzing and interpretation. (Ellingsen, Størksen, & Stephens, 2010, p. 397).

Each of these steps is included in the following discussion.

Sampling

Sampling has special importance in Q methodology. Two sampling procedures were included in Q methodology: Q samples and person samples or P samples (McKeown & Thomas).

Concourse Development and Q Sample

The concourse is the topic in general, the "running together of ideas as indicated by Brown (1993) that a 'concourse' (from Latin *concursus*, 'a running together,' as when ideas run together in thought), and it is from this concourse that a sample of statements is subsequently drawn for administration in a Q sort" (p. 94). Brown (1993) further explained:

> Concourse is the very stuff of life, from the playful banter of lovers or chums to the heady discussion of philosophers and scientists to the private thought found in dreams and diaries. From concourse, new meaning rise, bright ideas are hatched, and discoveries are made, it is the wellspring of creativity and identity formation in individuals, groups, organizations, and nations, and it is Q methodology's task to reveal the inherent structure of concourse—the vectors of thought that sustain it and which, in turn, are sustained by it (Brown, p. 95).

There are different ways that the Q sample can be drawn and developed. To illustrate, one method is the naturalistic Q sample, which refers to when the statements are drawn from individuals' oral or written statements, such as through interviews or case studies. In contrast, the other method of Q sampling is a "ready-made Q sample" and occurs when the statements are drawn from other resources rather than communication with people. An additional type is called "quasi-naturalistic Q sample," which is like the naturalistic

method, but the statements are drawn from sources external to the study (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). The statements in the current study were generated from survey items and, therefore, the "ready-made" Q sample technique was used.

A Q sample is a collection of statements about the topic, which is drawn from the topic concourse, and which represents the concourse. There are two methods used in item sampling and Q sets; these two methods produce two types of Q set, namely structured and unstructured. In the structured Q set, the general topic breaks down into themes and each theme has a similar number of statements. Fisher's (1960) balanced block approach is one of the best ways to generate a structured Q set (Watts & Stenner, 2012; McKeown & Thomas, 2013). In this study, Fisher's design was used, which guaranteed a balanced and representative Q set. The balanced Q set allowed the researcher to capture a complete and comprehensive picture of different potential opinions or beliefs toward the investigated topic (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Developing the Q set in the current study followed the procedure of structure sampling or Fisherian balanced block design. The Fisherian design permitted a systematic classification of the concourse, which allowed developing a Q set that was representative of various aspects of the concourse (Brown, 1991; Ellingsen et al, 2010). Also, the balanced design was more consistent and facilitated the process of applying constructivism grounding theory in analyzing the data as Strauss and Corbin (1994) stated: "Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during actual research and it does this through a continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (p. 273).

Emergent literacy practices were divided into five themes. As indicated previously, the statement was taken mainly from a ready-made survey. The survey was developed by a National Head Start study to gather information about preschool teachers' views and practices regarding emergent literacy. The development of the survey was based on reviewing emergent literacy research, practice, and policy. It also included the emergent literacy skills which were outlined in the *Head Start Child Outcomes Framework.* A validation process was performed to develop and refine the survey. The process included reviewing a draft survey by preservice teachers and field testing. Following the validation process, many changes were made according to the feedback provided during the validation process.

The survey underlined five areas of emergent literacy: print awareness, relation to the book or print motivation, phonological awareness, letter awareness, and early writing. Thus, the Q sample statements were categorized under these five areas, which were also identified by major emergent literacy literature (e.g. Sulzby & Teale, 1991; van Kleeck, 1990; Smith, 1989; Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1992). Under each area, eight statements were generated, and therefore the total number of statements was 40. A pool of 40 to 80 items in a Q set is a standard rule for Q research (Rogers, 1995).

The survey contains only 34; therefore, additional statements were generated from emergent literacy literature. In the survey that was used, not all areas of emergent literacy have the same number of items, and, as indicated previously, it is the structured Q set, meaning each theme (which is here an area or skill in emergent literacy) had a similar number of statements. Therefore, these items were added to the areas which do not have eight items. For example, under "print awareness", there were only six items, so two

items were added from emergent literacy literature. These items were “Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator” and “I use my finger to follow words as I read aloud” (Evans et al, 2009; Otto, 2010; Piasta, Justice, McGinty, and Kaderavek, 2012; Pullen & Justice, 2003).

Three additional statements were added under the print motivation area; these statements were “Provide children with a variety of books for induvial preferences”, “Give children chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them” and “Provide literacy-enriched play environment” (Baker et al, 1997; Hume, Allan & Lonigan, 2016; LeFevre et al, 2010; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Whitehurst & Angell, 1994). Concerning phonological awareness, three additional statements were added, and these statements were “Children match rhyming words”, “Children memorize and sing rhyming songs” and “Children learn the sounds of the letters”. It is also worth mentioning that some of the statements under phonological awareness were modified to fit the nature of the Arabic language such as the statement “Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from left to right”, which was changed to “Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left”.

Also, after adding the statements, the statements were sent to some of the committee members to review and they gave their approval. The statements were originally written in English, but the participants were Arabic speakers; therefore, the statements were translated into Arabic. The researcher translated the statements from English to Arabic since her first language is Arabic and she has sufficient knowledge of the topic. Then the researcher sent the translated statements to two people who speak

both languages and have a respectful amount of knowledge about the topic. To check the accuracy of the translation, the researcher applied a procedure called back translation: “Back translation involves the translation of a text which itself is a translation back into the original language” (Harkness & Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). Back translation is one of the most effective ways to ensure a good quality translation (Brislin, 1970; Werner & Campbell, 1970).

P Sample or Person Sample

The other kind of sampling in the Q study is the P sample or person sample, which represents the participant in the study. In Q methodology, "the focus [is] on quality rather than quantity" (Brown, 1993, p.94). Q studies aim to discover, understand, and compare the existence of particular viewpoints, which could be achieved by many participants or even a single individual (Brown, 1980). Stephenson (1953) stated, “each factor [participant] in Q represents a class of variates” (p. 162).

Q methodology uses factoring people instead of factoring items, and therefore the same logic of selecting items could be applied to the selection of people or participants. In the traditional technique, or what is called the R technique, a minimum ratio of two participants for every variable is recommended. Therefore, in Q methodology, since participants are the variable, it is recommended to have one-half the number of statements in the Q sample (Watts & Stenner, 2012; McKeown & Thomas, 2013). In the current study, the number of statements was 40 and therefore the targeted number of participants was 20-25 participants.

Besides, this study aimed to explore the existence of viewpoints toward emergent

literacy skills and practices, and therefore purposeful sampling techniques were applied. Watts and Stenner (2012) argued that participants in Q studies should be selected purposefully because each participant becomes a variable in the Q study. They further suggested that, through Q methodology, the research aims to identify different viewpoints, which means finding participants who have sufficient knowledge of the topic or "participants whose viewpoint *matters* in relation to the subject in hand" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 71). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) stated, "research using purposeful sampling want[s] to generate a wealth of detail from a few cases; therefore, sampling decisions are crucial" (p. 173).

A purposeful sampling includes different techniques, which largely depend on the goals of sampling. In the current study, "sampling to achieve representativeness or comparability" was used (Clark & Creswell, 2008, p. 203). The purpose of the sampling was to select the typical or normal cases as well as consider comparability (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) since the current study aimed to determine the different beliefs of teachers toward emergent literacy skills and practices. According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), this kind of purposeful sampling includes two goals: a) sampling to find instances that are representative or typical of a particular type of case on a dimension of interest, and b) sampling to achieve comparability across different types of cases on a dimension of interest (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

To put it briefly, purposeful sampling was chosen in the current study to make sure that the P sample contains teachers who have variant backgrounds, including age, years of experience, public or private school teaching backgrounds, and level of education. To do so, the researcher selected three public preschools and three private

preschools. From each school, the researcher met the principal and asked her to recommend teachers who represented different backgrounds, to guarantee representativeness and comparability. The participants were all female since all preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia are female. Also, all participants were from one city, which is Medina. There were two reasons for choosing this city. First, it is the hometown of the researcher and thus it was easier to collect the data. Second, the city of Medina is considered one of the most diverse cities in Saudi Arabia, especially because it is a holy city in the Islamic religion, and many people from around the world migrate to live there.

Q Sorting Data Collection

At this phase, collecting data was completed through Q sorting. Ernest (2011) indicated that in Q methodology, "the tool of experimentation is the Q sort." Then the researcher provided the participants with instructions about Q sorting. Participants were asked to subjectively rank the statements into a quasi-normal distribution. The distribution ranked from +5 (most important) to -5 (most unimportant). In the middle there was 0, which represents the neutral categories, where the participants placed the statements that were considered as relatively "without meaning". It provided the theoretical justification for the normal distribution of statements so that they could be analyzed using statistics: keeping the middle as zero, with statements moving away from zero to degrees of standard deviations. Each sort was zero centered each sort so that they could be standardized, keeping each sort and component on a common metric (Brown, 1980; Smith, 2001).

The forced normal distribution required two cards to be placed at the right and left

edges of the distribution; followed by three cards, then another three cards, then four cards, then five cards, and finally six cards in the middle continuum (see figure 1). The statements were printed on 3x5 inch cards.

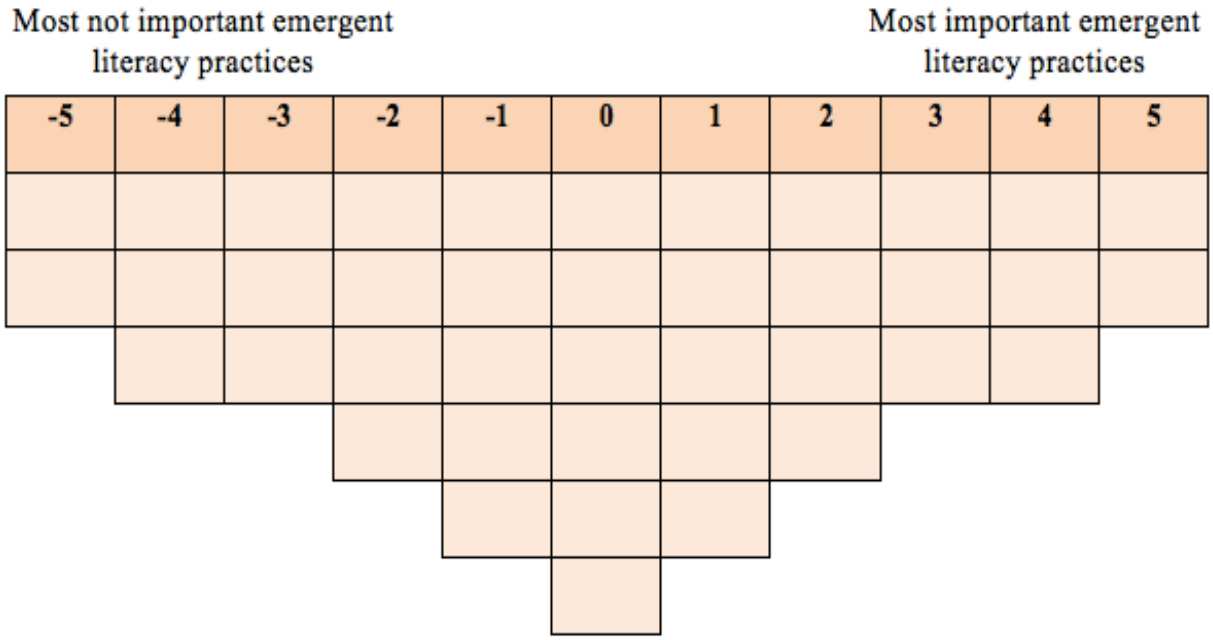

Figure 1. Q sort

The participants were given the instructions of Q sorting first. Then, they were asked to read through all the statements. Then the participants were asked to group the statements into three piles: most important, most unimportant, and uncertain. After that, the participants were asked to arrange the statement into a force distribution. To the right of the diagram, the participant would place the most important statements. To the left, they would place the most unimportant statements. Finally, they placed in the middle the statements they were uncertain about. They were asked to check their sorting and make some changes.

The result of the Q sort was recorded on a score sheet. Each statement had a number from 1 to 40, which facilitated recording the score on the sheet. The statement which was sorted as most important had a score of 5+ whereas the score which was sorted as most unimportant had a score of 5- and so on (see Figure 1). The participants were asked to complete the demographic form after they finished the Q sort. Watts and Stenner (2012) recommended that the researcher collect the additional information about participants after they complete the Q sort to avoid any situation which could influence their viewpoints. Each participant in the Q sort was transcripted into a score sheet to prepare it for the analysis (see Figure 2).

Date _____

Participant's Name_____

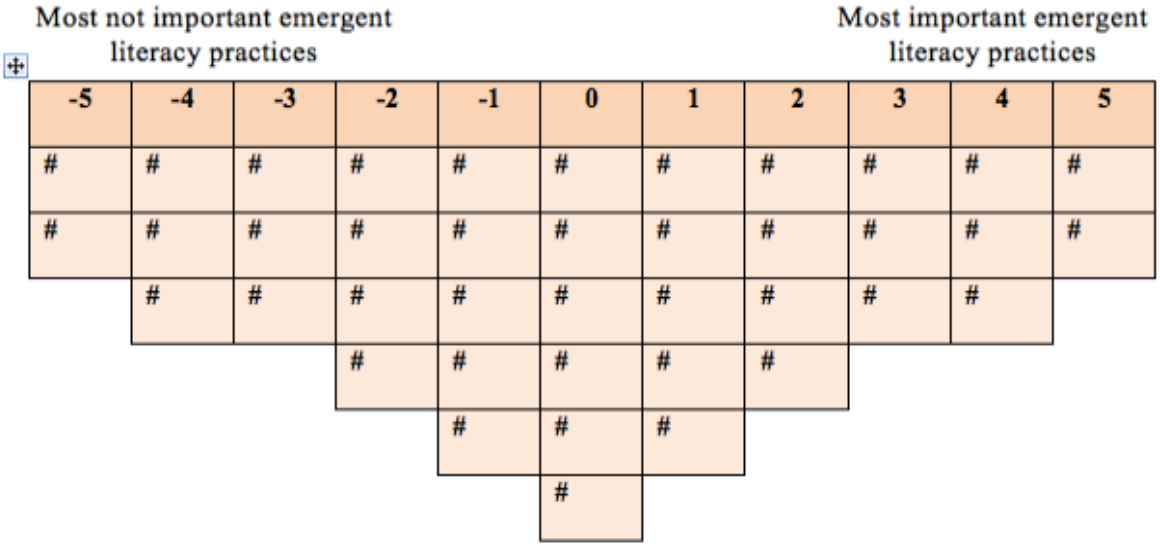

Figure 2. Score Sheet for Q sort

Data Analysis

To answer the first question “What are Saudi preschool teachers’ beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices?” the PQMethod software and the Ken-Q analysis program were used. These are statistical programs designed to analyze the data of Q studies. In particular, "it allows the researcher to easily enter data (Q-sort) in the way the data is collected (i.e. as a quasi-normal distribution of statement numbers)" (Ernest, 1999). The software processed the correlation between Q sorts, which were then subjected to a PCA (principal component analysis). McKeown and Thomas (2013) indicated that "factor analysis is fundamental to Q methodology since it comprises the statistical means by which subjects are grouped or, more accurately, group themselves through the process of Q sorting" (p. 49).

To answer the second question: “What are the emergent literacy practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider as most important for children’s literacy development?", mathematical procedures were applied to calculate the weight of each statement in each factor. The statement that has the highest score represented the most important practice. To do so, first, the component (factor) weight was calculated: "the weights [were] gotten by dividing each factor loading (f) by the expression 1 minus the square of the factor loading" (Brown, 1993, p. 118). The component weight was calculated for each participant whose association with the components was significant.

Second, the component weights were used to calculate component scores. "These component scores provide important information that helps to identify and differentiate the clusters of people associated with a component" (Ernest, 1999, p. 106). To calculate the component score for a particular statement, the component weight for that statement

associated with the component was multiplied by the rank score given to the statement by the participant in her Q sort. Third, after computing the component scores for all the statements, the scores were transcribed into a quasi-normal distribution similar to the continuum which participants used to Q sort. The research then allowed the researcher to conclude the most important practices, as well as the most unimportant practices for each component.

Phase Two Methodology

The second phase of the current explanatory sequential mixed methods study was the qualitative phase, which aimed to answer the third question of the study: "What are teachers' perceived factors contributing to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and teaching practices?"

The second phase was conducted through a qualitative method called a constructivist grounded theory. The following part starts with an overview of grounded theory in general and constructive grounded theory as the primary methodology for the second phase of the study. Then, the procedures of this phase, which included sampling and data collection and analysis, are explained.

An Overview of Grounded Theory

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) argued that grounded theory is "a methodology for theory development that is grounded in narrative data that are systematically gathered and inductively analyzed" (p. 25). Inductive data analysis encompasses the use of specific facts or data to generate a theme or conclusion (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) and

grounded theory is the most recognized theory for inductive analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Patton (2002) noted: "inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data in contrast to deductive analysis where the data are analyzed according to an existing framework" (p. 453).

Grounded theory allows the researcher to study the issue from the participant's perspective without fitting it to an existing framework (Wuest, 2007). It is particularly useful when the goal of the research is to generate a framework or theory to understand human behavior in a particular context (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978).

Grounded theory was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967); they argued that this theory would result in "closing the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research" (p. vii). Grounded theory merges two divergent traditions in sociology: positivism and pragmatism. The systematic and logical part of grounded theory reflects the positivism side, which was the influence of Glaser's intensive training in quantitative research. On the other hand, Strauss brought the idea of the human as an active agent and the idea that subjective and social meanings rely on language and communication, which represent the pragmatic side (Charmaz, 2014).

Types of Grounded Theory

There are three main types of grounded theory. The first type is the classical grounded theory which was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1998). The second type is Strauss and Corbin (1998), and finally the constructivist grounded theory by Charmaz (2014). These three types are more alike than different; they

share almost all the same processes of data collection and analysis, such as coding, categorizing, and generating themes to develop an emergent theory. However, some factors differentiate these types of grounded theory. One main factor is the type of paradigm that underlines each one, which includes the view of research subjectivity and the flexibility or rigidity during data analysis (Farrell, 2018).

Glaser's classical grounded theory is related to the postpositivist paradigm, which privileges researcher objectivity (Levers, 2013). Although Glaser (1978) agreed that the researcher is not a blank slate, he claimed that the researcher is capable of preserving objectively during constructing the emergent theory. Post-positivists also argue for the likelihood of finding partial truths, in which researchers can find generalizable knowledge through empirical validation.

On the other hand, Corbin and Strauss's (1998) systematic grounded theory falls into the interpretive paradigm, which claims subjectivity and acknowledges the influence of researchers' beliefs, values, and culture. Interpretivist believes that all knowledge is subjective, and it is not possible to achieve objectivity (Levers, 2013). Charmaz (2014) suggested that Strauss and Corbin "further moved the method toward seeing grounded theory as a method of verification" (p.11).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Finally, Charmaz's (2014) constructivist grounded theory falls into the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is a research paradigm that considers realities as "social constructions of the mind, and that there exist as many such constructions as there

is an individual[s] (although many constructions will be shared)" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 43).

Charmaz argued that, according to the constructivist approach, research is recognized as a construction rather than a discovery; this view promotes the researchers' reflexivity toward their actions and choices. The emergent theory is co-constructed amongst the participants and the researchers' experiences and their comprehension toward that experience. Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory moved away from the objective role of the researcher toward the recognition of the role of the researcher. In her words, Charmaz (2014) stated:

> In the original grounded theory text, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging form data separated from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered either as given in the data or the analysis. Rather, we are part of the world we study, the data we collect, and the analysis we produce. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvement (p. 17)

The previous discussion of grounded theory and constructivism revealed that constructivist grounded theory was particularly relevant and logically consistent with the purpose of the study. Constructive grounded theory helps the researcher to understand multiple perspectives and construct knowledge from these multiple perspectives. Furthermore, constructive grounded theory recognizes the active role of the researcher and provides flexibility as well as rigidity during the engagement of data analysis. The following diagram is a visual representation of the process of a constructive grounded theory, which was suggested by Charmaz (2104).

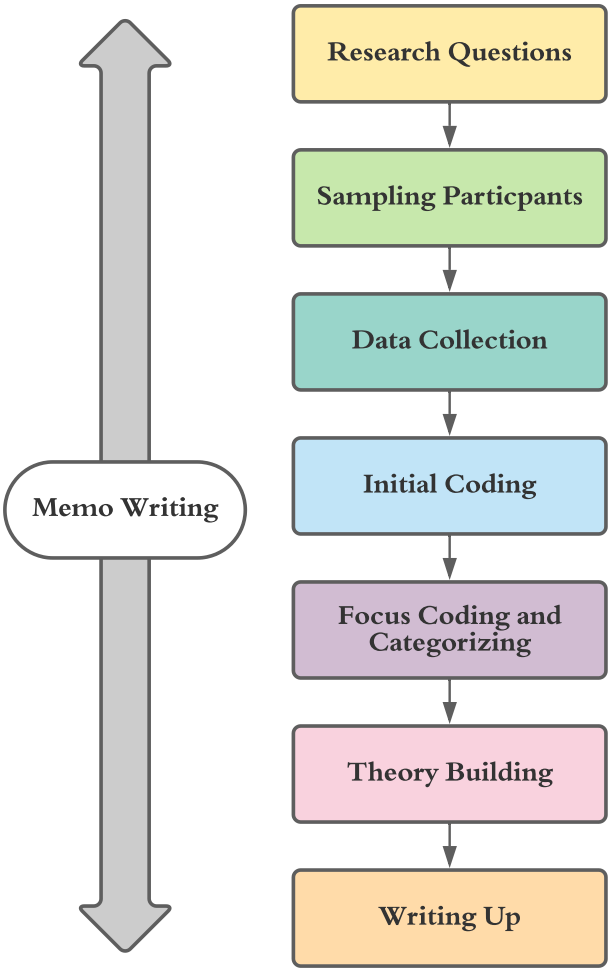

Figure 3. Visual representation of the process of constructivist grounded theory. Inspired by Charmaz (2104).

Sampling

In the first phase of the study, Q methodology resulted in factoring or grouping participants who shared similar viewpoints toward emergent literacy skills and practices. From each group of participants who share a similar view, the research has selected two or three participants to be in the same focus group interview. The number of the focus

group interviews was based on the number of significant views (components) that emerge from phase-one data analysis, which was four factors. To do so, the sampling technique was proposal sampling. Charmaz (2014) indicated that sampling in constructive grounded theory is intended to aid in constructing the theory, not to represent the population, which further clarifies the benefit of using purposeful sampling.

Concerning the sample size, there was no specific number in grounded theory, as different authors suggested different sampling sizes. For example, 20-30 participants for grounded theory was suggested by Creswell (2014), while others suggested that reaching theoretical saturation is possible with as few as six participants who represent high levels of homogeneity (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). According to Charmaz (2014), attending saturation relies more on the quality of the data rather than on sampling size. With that being said, in the current study, the aim was for 12 participants, but it ended up with 10 participants. A further explanation is provided in the findings chapter.

Data Collection

Focus group interviews were conducted, since the results of phase one will group the participants who have similar beliefs. "Focus group" has been defined as, "a technique involving the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because they are [a] purposive, although not necessarily [a] representative, sampling of a specific population. The name, focus group interview, drives from the selection of groups which are this group 'focused' on a given topic" (Lederman, 1990, p. 117). Focus group interviews were chosen because one of the benefits of focus group interviews was that they provided richer information compared to separate interviews

because participants activate and support each other's thinking through questioning and discussion (Kreuger, 1994). In addition, since the findings of the first phase of the study resulted in grouping participants who share similar beliefs, doing a focus group interview was more beneficial.

The Interview

The focus group interviews were in the form of semi-structured interviews, and "the questions became more focused throughout the sessions based on participants' previous response" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 228). Charmaz (2014) suggested doing an intensive interview when using the interview as a primary source of the data. An intensive interview has been defined as a "gently guided, one-sided conversation that explores a person's substantial experience with the research topic" (p. 56). The intensive interview is usually used to investigate a topic in which the participants have had significant experience. The interview involved open-ended questions which allow the participants to provide more in-depth responses about the topic being investigated. (see Appendix G)

The amount of interaction that intensive interviews provide allows participants to link their own experiences. Intensive interviewing is one kind of research interviewing. The degree to which the interviewer directs the interview is influenced by the kind of interview. For example, unlike intensive interviewing, the interviewer in standardized interviewing takes full control in directing the interview (Charmaz, 2014)

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed after collecting all interviews. Data was transcribed using the original language of the interview, which was Arabic, and then it was translated into English. Charmaz (2014) provided a visual representation of the process of a constructive grounded theory, which includes the process of data analysis (see Figure 4). These processes were adopted in the study. In the following part, the process will be explained in detail.

Initial Coding

Coding refers to the process of sorting and organizing the data (Gibbs, 2018). Coding means, "applying a short-hand label to sort, synthesize, and conceptualize data" (Charmaz & Bryant, 2010, p. 409). In constructive grounded theory, coding involves two stages. The first stage is called initial coding. In this study, the researcher looked at the data line by line and chose words as codes that represented participants' understanding and meanings. Each interview was coded line-by-line separately. To make more sense of the codes and better visualize them, the codes from each interview were printed on small cards, and then the cards were displayed on a big board. The next step was to group the codes which related to each other and could form a category. That step involved axial coding, which was defined as "the process of relating pieces, or codes, of data to each other" (*The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, 201, p. 80). Charmaz (2014) indicated that during initial coding, the researcher breaks the data into unconnected pieces, and axial coding is a way to bring the data together.

Focus Coding and Categorizing

This is the second stage of coding and it is called focused, or selective, coding. It aims to use the most frequent and significant codes to synthesize and sort data. The researcher identified the codes that are related conceptually and the codes which are most frequently used, as Charmaz (2014) indicated "in focused coding, you use these codes to fit, sort, synthesize, and analyze a large amount of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (p.137).

In the focused coding stage, the principal investigator used Charmaz's (2014) suggested list, which helped to define what codes work better for focus coding:

- What do you find when you compare the initial codes with data?
- In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?
- Which of these codes best account for the data?
- Have you raised these codes to focused codes?
- What do your comparisons between codes indicate?
- Do your focused codes reveal gaps in the data? (p. 140-141)

Memo Writing

The researcher used memo writing during the coding steps and used these memos when forming the categories and the theoretical themes. Memo writing, in its basic definition, refers to the researcher writing about the emergent categories from the focused coding. According to Charmaz (2014), "memo writing is the pivotal intermediate step

between data collection and writing draft of papers. Memo writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts your data and codes early in the research process (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162). Memos are the foundation of the developing theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this study, memo writing was the place where the researcher started to compare the data (Charmaz, 2014). Memo writing is sorting, diagraming, integrating. Memo writing took place during and after coding. Memo writing was in a form of a research journal.

Diagramming, which was a form of memo writing, was used to connect the codes and to develop the major categories, as well as constructing major themes. Charmaz (2014) indicated that "diagrams can enable you to see the relative power, scope, and direction of the categories in your analysis as well as the connection among them.

Constant Comparative Method

The constant comparative method was used during all three stages of coding: codes were compared to codes, categories to categories within the same interview, as well as with other interviews. Hallberg (2006) defined the constant comparative method as:

> That every part of data, i.e. emerging codes, categories, properties, and dimensions as well as different parts of the data, were constantly compared with all other parts of the data to explore variation, similarities, and differences in data. The constant comparative method of grounded theory is strict enough to be helpful to the researcher in exploring the content and meaning in the data, but not saddle with so many strict rules to be too rigid for a grounded researcher. (p. 143)

During data analysis, the interviews were compared with each other. Each interview was examined to see what similarities and differences it contained in relationship to the other

interviews, in order to generate the general themes. Sorting was also used during and after focus coding: all codes were printed on a small piece of notepaper and were placed on a big board, which provided a visual representation of the codes and categories. Also, coding and categorizing were performed sequentially for the interviews, starting with the first interview and ending with the last, and then all interviews were compared to conclude the developing theory. Categories were compared for all interviews until there was no new emerging category, which resulted in theoretical saturation.

Theoretical Saturation

As indicated previously, the interview was sequentially analyzed. The researcher started coding the first interview, then the second, and so on. When the researcher reached the last interview, no new category had emerged from the data and there were no new properties of these categories, which was an indicator of reaching theoretical saturation.

The researcher conducted the interviews and data analysis personally.

Validity

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it involves checking for the accuracy of the findings through some procedures (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Creswell (2014) identified eight primary validity strategies. In the current study, three strategies were used. The first strategy was triangulation, which refers to triangulating different sources of data to reach a coherent justification of the finding themes. Through this procedure, the researcher obtained evidence of the themes from

different sources and individuals.

The other validation strategy was member-checking. The researcher summarized the major findings and asked each of the participants to check if the findings reflected their experiences accurately. Finally, additional strategies were applied as a result of the nature of this study, which was dissertation research. This strategy was peer debriefing. The dissertation chair reviewed the study and asked questions about the study, and the researcher justified the findings (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Member Checking, Peer Review, Triangulation and Reflexivity

To establish credibility in this study, member checking, triangulation, peer review, and reflexivity techniques were used. After analyzing the data, general themes and categories were sent to one person from each group to ensure that the findings represented their responses. Also, the researcher asked a person who holds a Ph.D. degree in the same field to check the process of coding.

The other strategy that was used to check the credibility of factor interpretation was triangulation. Triangulation refers to triangulating different sources of data to reach a justification of the finding (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation was used in analyzing the focus group interview, as many of the emergent codes supported factor interpretation. For example, it was concluded that teachers seemed not to have a strong opinion when it came to classroom resources, and this was one of the codes that emerged in analyzing the interview.

Furthermore, reflexivity was used to ensure the credibility of data interpretation by the researcher. That is, the researcher tried to avoid subjectivity and bias by using the

constructive grounded theory coding guidelines. For example, Charmaz indicated that "Careful coding also helps you to refrain from imputing your motives, fears, or unresolved personal issues to your respondents and your collected data" (2014, p. 133).

To increase the accuracy of findings during data analysis, the researcher kept reflecting on her personal beliefs and recorded these beliefs in her memo writings as suggested by Creswell and Miller (2000).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to collecting the data, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Also, participation in the study was voluntary. Each participant received a consent form. A consent form was included in the research goals, coverage of the process, statement of voluntary participation, and personal contact information. Also, the data, interview transcriptions, audio files, and any other identifying participant information were kept in a locked file cabinet/password-protected data file in the personal possession of the researcher. When no longer necessary for research, all materials will be destroyed. All names were removed from audio transcriptions and replaced with pseudonyms. Information from this research was used solely for this study and any publications that may result from this study. Participants involved in this study were not identified by name at any point.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of the current study was to examine preschool teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices. A mixed methods research design was used to examine teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices. The study aimed to answer four questions:

1. What are Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices?
2. What are the emergent literacy skills and practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider most important for children's literacy development?
3. What are teachers' perceived factors contributing to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and teaching practices?
4. Do perceived contributing factors differ among teachers with differing beliefs and practices, and if so, how?

The following chapter details the results of this mixed methods research, which involved two phases. The first phase of data collocation and analysis was completed through the Q methodology design, and it aimed to answer the first two questions. The second phase of the study (the qualitative phase) was completed through a focus group interview, and it aimed to achieve a more in-depth understanding of teachers' perspectives and to answer the third question of the study.

Phase One Results

Q methodology was used to answer the first two questions: 1) What are Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices? and 2) What are the emergent literacy skills and practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider as most important for children's literacy development?

In the first phase of the study, Q methodology was used to collect and analyze the data. Thirty participants ranked 40 statements in a quasi-normal distribution. The Q sorts were then entered in an Excel file and uploaded to an online Q methodology program called Ken-Q Analysis. The program provided a 30 x 30 inter-correlation matrix (see Appendix). After that, principal component analysis (PCA) was chosen, followed by Varimax rotation. The PCA grouped the sorts into eight un-rotated factors; participants who share similar views grouped and, thus, shared the same factor.

The final decision for how many factors to retain was based on the following steps:

1. The eigenvalue or what is called the Kaiser-Guttman criterion:

   If the eigenvalue is greater than 1, this is usually used as a cut-off point for data retention (Kaiser, 1960). All eight factors had an eigenvalue greater than 1. The eigenvalue for the eight factors was 8.03, 2.95, 2.05, 1.79, 1.64, 1.48, 1.43, 1.27. With that being said, other criteria were also used to determine the number of factors to be retained.

2. Significant loading of two or more:

   Another parameter to determine the right number of factor retention was to accept that the factors which have two or more participants loaded significantly. The

following equation was used to calculate a significant factor loading at the .01 level (Brown, 1980):

Significant factor loading = $2.58 \times \left(1 \div \sqrt{no.of\ items\ in\ Q\ set}\right)$

$= 2.58 \times (1 \div 40)$

$= .41$

Based on this criterion, only four factors have two or more significant factor loading of .41 or higher.

3. The explained variance:

The explained variance for the eight unrotated factors was 27%, 10%, 7%, 6%, 5%, 5%, 5%, 4%, with a total of 69%. In factor rotation, the higher the variance explained, the better. When rotating three factors, the explained variance was 16%, 15%, 12%, with a total of 43%. However, when rotating 4 factors, the explained variance was 16%, 14%, 8%, 11%, with a total of 49%.

4. Correlation between factors:

When rotating three factors the correlation between factors was higher than when rotating four factors. The highest correlation between factors is .4 whereas the highest correlation between factors when rotating 3 factors was .5.

Table 1

Correlation between factors after rotation

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Factor 1	1	0.309	0.3857	0.3044
Factor 2	.309	1	0.2298	0.4406
Factor 3	.3857	0.2298	1	0.2541
Factor 4	.3044	0.4406	0.2541	1

Based on the previous discussion, the decision was made to keep four factors for rotation.

Factor Rotation

Factor rotation increased the factor loading of a Q sort in one factor while decreasing it in the others. The rotated factor loading is an indication of how close a Q sort or participant's perspective is to the factor or perspective (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Watts and Stenner (2012) indicated that Varimax rotation is a good choice when "using an inductive analytic strategy of the majority viewpoint of the group is your main concern. In this latter case, Varimax will probably guide automatically to a very workable factor solution" (p. 125). Ten participants loaded significantly on Factor 1, 7 participants on Factor 2, 3 participants on Factor 3, and 5 participants on Factor 4. Each factor represents a unique perspective shared by participants who loaded significantly on that factor.

The following table describes each participant's loading in each factor. An X indicates a significant loading of participants, which has generated automatically by Ken-Q Analysis (the Q methodology program).

Table 2

Factor Matrix with an X Indicating a Defining Sort Loading

Participant	Factor 1		Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	
PF1	0.4096		0.4843	0.3798	0.2096	
PF2	0.3709		0.0857	0.3477	0.4938	
PF3	0.1793		0.0909	-0.0392	0.6154	x
PF4	0.6045	x	-0.1863	0.162	0.1014	

PF5	0.2481		0.5957	x	0.1511		0.06	
PF6	0.6899	x	0.1451		0.1691		0.0845	
PTW1	0.4858	x	0.3162		-0.1344		0.0119	
PTW2	0.3971		0.6095		0.0617		0.4657	
PTW3	0.1225		0.2442		-0.3825		0.5574	x
PTW4	0.2843		0.0583		0.7578	x	0.0649	
PTH1	0.3735	x	-0.0229		0.1903		0.1205	
PTH2	0.5677	x	-0.014		-0.1262		0.0215	
PTH3	-0.0437		0.2641		0.2008		0.7065	x
PTH4	0.5277		0.2777		0.4514		0.169	
PTH5	0.7381	x	0.2432		0.1486		-0.0539	
RNF1	-0.0542		0.466		0.1905		0.6179	x
RNF2	0.4679	x	-0.0907		0.0791		0.3966	
RNF3	0.1211		-0.0011		0.6086	x	0.1535	
RNF4	0.4368	x	0.1833		-0.1513		0.2233	
RA1	-0.2183		0.5628	x	0.4147		0.1367	
RA2	-0.2089		0.7218	x	-0.1357		0.2083	
RA3	-0.0946		0.6073	x	-0.033		0.2331	
RA4	0.538	x	0.5259		0.0114		0.0217	
RA5	0.2502		0.5602	x	0.1851		0.114	
RME1	0.3943		0.1037		0.3381		0.3841	
RME2	0.2053		0.6413	x	0.2661		-0.0042	
RME3	-0.1338		0.154		0.3383	x	0.0197	
RHM1	0.4129		0.5243	x	-0.2112		0.0484	
RHM2	0.1368		0.0312		0.2138		0.7609	x
RHM3	0.7826	x	0.1155		0.0985		0.2	
Explained variance	16		14		8		11	

Factor Estimation and Factor Arrays

To generate a factor estimate, Q sorts that loaded significantly on that factor will be used in a weighted averaging procedure based on the Z scores. These procedures occur automatically in Q method programs such as PQMethod and Ken-Q. To illustrate, all Q sorts that loaded significantly were merged to produce a single Q sort called a factor array. A factor array provides the best estimate of the characteristics of that factor. Watts

and Stenner (2012) indicated that a factor array is “no more or less than a single Q sort configured to represent the viewpoint of a particular factor” (p. 140). Factor arrays or best-estimate Q sorts are then subjected to factor interpretations.

Factor Interpretations

To define each factor (or perspective), factor arrays and the crib sheet system were used. The crib sheet was invented by Watts in his attempts to create a methodological approach for factor interpretation. He aimed to generate a methodology which could: “(a) be applied consistently in the context of each and every factor, and (b) help the researcher to deliver genuinely holistic factor interpretations” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 150). The crib sheet promotes holism by allowing the researcher to engage with every statement in a factor array; it includes: (a) highest ranked statements, (b) statements that ranked higher in this factor than other factors, (c) statements that ranked lower in this factor than other factors, and (d) lowest-ranked statements. Also, consensus statements and distinguishing statements for each factor were used to define that factor. Consensus statements, as the name suggests, are the statements whose ranking does not distinguish between any pair of factors. To say it another way, all factors ranked these statements alike. On the other hand, distinguishing statements were the statements that had been ranked with a significant difference in one particular factor rather than the other factors. These statements helped to define the factor (Herrington & Coogan, 2011). Factor 1 had 7 distinguishing statements, Factor 2 had 11, Factor 3 had 8, and Factor 4 had 8 (see Appendix F).

Participant Demographic Information

Thirty preschool teachers participated in this study. Fifteen (50%) were public preschool teachers and 15 (50%) were private preschool teachers in the city of Madinah. Table 3 summarizes teachers' demographic and background information. Each participant was given a code. The P indicates that the participant was a public preschool teacher, while the R indicates that the participant was a private preschool teacher. The P and the R are followed by an abbreviation of the preschool name.

Table 3

Participants demographic information

Participant	Age	Public/ private	Level of education	Specialization	Years of experience	Number of professional development courses
PF1	20-29	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	7	6
PF2	30-39	Public	Associate	ECE	22	8
PF3	30-39	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	5	5
PF4	40 and above	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	8	3
PF5	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	9	20
PF6	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	15	30
PTW1	40 and above	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	6	20
PTW2	40 and above	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	10	25
PTW3	40 and above	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	12	25
PTW4	40 and above	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	9	
PTH1	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor's	Early Childhood Education	7	25

PTH2	40 and above	Public	Associate	ECE	26	2
PTH3	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	7	7
PTH4	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	7	5
PTH5	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor's	ECE	5	23
RNF1	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Family Nutrition	1	
RNF2	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Family Nutrition	3	25
RNF3	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	ECE	1	
RNF4	40 and above	Private	Bachelor's	Family Education	10	24
RA1	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Family Education	1	3
RA2	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Social Studies	1	
RA3	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Sociology	1	2
RA4	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Social Studies	1	
RA5	30 – 39	Private	Bachelor's	ECE	5	8
RME1	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Family Education	1	8
RME2	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Family Education	1	7
RME3	30 – 39	Private	Bachelor's	Social Studies	5	22
RHM1	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	ECE	1	6
RHM2	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	Islamic Studies	1	6
RHM3	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor's	ECE	2	9

The previous table summarized teachers' demographic and background information. All 15 public preschool teachers held a degree in early childhood education; thirteen of them (86%) possessed a bachelor's degree while only two held an associate degree. Six preschool teachers (40%) were above 40 years old, nine preschool teachers were aged 30-39. Teachers' teaching experiences ranged from 5 to 26 years. The professional development courses for these public preschool teachers ranged from 2 to 30 courses.

On the other hand, all private preschool teachers held a bachelor's degree. However, only four of them were specialized in early childhood education. The other preschool teachers possessed degrees that varied between social studies, family education, sociology, and Islamic studies. Private preschool teachers' teaching experiences ranged from 1 to 10 years. Their professional development ranged from 2 courses to 25 courses.

Ten participants loaded significantly on Factor 1. They shared a perspective (Perspective A). Of the ten participants (PF4, PF6, PTW1, PTH1, PTH2, PTH5, RNF2, RNF4, RA4, RHM3), six were from public preschools, and four from private institutions. Their teaching experiences ranged from 1 to 26 years, and they represented an age range of 20 to 40 years old. Five of them held a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, one held an associate degree in early childhood education, and the rest held a bachelor's degree in different fields, including family nutrition, family education, and social studies.

Seven participants were associated with Perspective B (PF5, RA1, RA2, RA3, RA5, RME2, RHM1). Only one of them was a public preschool teacher, while the other six were private preschool teachers. Three out of the six taught at the same private preschool. Preschool teachers associated with this perspective represented a range of 1 to 9 years of teaching experiences. Their age ranged between 20 and 39 years. Two out of the seven teachers held a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. The rest of them (five teachers) held a bachelor's degree in different fields, which included family education, social studies, and sociology.

Three participants (PTW4, RNF3, RME3) associated with Perspective C. One was a public preschool teacher, the other two were private preschool teachers and they

taught at the same preschool. They represented a range of ages between 20 and 40 years old. Two teachers possessed a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and one teacher possessed a bachelor's degree in social studies. They represented a range of 1 to 9 years of teaching experience.

Five participants associated with Perspective D (PF3, PTW3, PTH3, RNF1, RHM2), three were public preschool teachers and two were private preschool teachers. Three teachers held a bachelor's degree in early childhood education while the other two held a bachelor's degree in family nutrition and Islamic studies respectively. They represented a range of 1 to 12 years of teaching experiences and were aged between 20 and 40 years.

Factor Interpretation

As indicated previously, four factors have been retained for factor rotation, each factor representing a different perspective of a group of teachers who shared the same beliefs towards emergent literacy skills and teaching practices. Before going further with explaining each factor, consensus statements are presented and then each factor is discussed, including the distinguishing statements for that factor: the highest- and lowest-ranked statements.

Consensus statements

Table 4

Consensus statements

14	Provide children with a variety of books for individual preferences	0	1	-2	0

24	Children match rhyming words	-2	-1	-3	0
25	Encourage play with alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	1	2	2	0
35	Children write and/or receive letters/postcards in class	-2	-2	-3	-3
37	Children write in journals	-5	-4	-5	-5

Consensus statements were statements that did not distinguish between any pairs of factors. Five statements were identified as consensus statements. These statements were 14, 24, 25, 35, and 37. All of them were nonsignificant at P>.01, and Statement 35 was nonsignificant at P>.05.

Participants universally agreed that writing in journals was not a very important activity for preschool children (Statement 37), with a sort value of -5, -4, -5, and -5). Many participants indicated during their sorts that this activity was not appropriate for preschool children; it was more appropriate for older children who already knew how to write. Furthermore, Statement 35 (Children write or receive a letter postcard in class) has also been identified as an inappropriate activity for preschool children, with sort values of -2, -2, -3, and -3.

Statements placed between the -2 to +2 columns showed that participants neither agree nor disagree (neutral) with the statements. Statement 25 (Encourage play with alphabet puzzle/magnetic letters) had Q sort values of 1, 2, 2, and 0, and Statement 14 (Provide a variety of books for individual differences) had a Q sort value of 0, 1, 2, and 0. Both of these two statements were related to classroom resources and they were placed under the Neutral to Slightly Agree columns, which rose a point for further investigation.

Finally, Statement 24 (Match rhyming words) had a Q sort value of -2, -1, -3, and 0. This statement contained two parts, the act of matching and the rhyming aspect, which was related to more advanced phonological awareness.

In conclusion, two patterns could be classified in the consensus statements. The first one is that all teachers agreed writing in journals and writing postcards was not important; both activities were related to advanced writing and they could be classified as "hard" or "developmentally inappropriate practices" for preschoolers. The second theme is that teachers did not have a strong opinion when it came to the classroom resources. School owners or administrators were usually responsible for the classroom resources and, therefore, this could explain why teachers had no opinion about these activities.

Factor Scores

Table 5

Statement and Factor Placements

	Statement	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
1	I use my finger to follow words as I read aloud	1	3	-1	0
2	Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator	-4	-3	0	-5
3	Encourage children to use dramatic play areas with literacy-related props that include print (e.g. letters for the post office)	-3	0	-2	-2
4	Use a written schedule	-2	-4	-1	-5
5	Display children's writing around the room	0	-1	3	1
6	Point to print while reading aloud to teach children that print, not pictures, tells the story	-2	-4	-4	-1
7	Post a written task list (e.g. line leader)	1	1	-4	-4
8	Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left	-4	-2	-2	4
9	Read to children every day	1	1	5	1
10	Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages	-3	0	0	4
11	Children predict stories	2	-3	2	-4
12	Children practice retelling stories	4	0	3	1
13	Reread stories to children	2	-5	2	-3

14	Provide children with a variety of books for individual preferences	0	1	-2	0
15	Give children the chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them	0	0	4	-4
16	Provide a literacy-enriched play environment	2	1	-1	4
17	Children practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g. “f” in fish)	0	4	1	2
18	Play rhythm games practicing sounds in words	-3	-2	1	-1
19	Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters	5	5	4	5
20	Children memorize and sing rhyming songs	3	-1	2	-1
21	Children identify syllable units (e.g. “Fri-day”)	0	2	-1	-2
22	Children practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g. “c-a-t” = cat)	0	4	-3	-1
23	Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter’s sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it	-1	3	4	3
24	Children match rhyming words	-2	-1	-3	0
25	Encourage play with alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	1	2	2	0
26	Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter? What sound does it make?)	4	3	-2	1
27	Children use letter stamps or letter sponges	5	-1	0	0
28	Play games that teach letter/word recognition	1	2	-4	3
29	Use flannel boards with letters/words	3	-3	3	2
30	Introduce new letters	-1	0	5	1
31	Read alphabet books	2	-1	1	-3
32	Children make letter collages (e.g. cut and paste pictures that start with the letter “B”)	-1	1	1	2
33	Children practice writing their name	-4	5	0	-1
34	Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools	-1	2	0	5
35	Children write and/or receive letters/postcards in class	-2	-2	-3	-3
36	Children make their own books	-3	-4	-5	-2
37	Children write in journals	-5	-4	-5	-5
38	Use templates to help children form letters	3	4	1	3

39	Children practice invented spelling	-5	-2	0	-2
40	Children practice tracing letters/words	4	0	-1	2

To answer the first question, "What are Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices?" and the second question, "What are the emergent literacy skills and practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider as most important for children's literacy development?", each factor is first described and then analyzed. Answering the second question is part of the process of answering the first question. To illustrate, recognizing the most important practices identified by each perspective was the method used to identify the unique perspective of each factor.

Factor 1 (perspective A)

-5	**-4**	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
39	33	10	35	32	17	1	31	38	12	19
37	2	3	24	23	5	9	11	20	40	27
	8	36	4	18	15	28	16	29	26	
			6	34	14	7	13			
				30	21	25				
					22					

Figure 4. Factor array for Factor 1

Table 6

The eight most important emergent literacy practices by perspective 1

Statement #	Statement	SV

19	Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters	Phonological awareness	5
27	Children use letter stamps or letter sponges	Alphabet knowledge	5
12	Children practice retelling stories	Print motivation	4
40	Children practice tracing letters/words	Early writing	4
26	Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter? What sound does it make?)	Alphabet knowledge	4
38	Use templates to help children form letters	Alphabet knowledge	3
20	Children memorize and sing rhyming songs	Phonological awareness	3
29	Use flannel boards with letters/words	Alphabet knowledge	3

Table 4 represents the most important literacy skills and practices for the group of teachers who associated with Perspective A. The two highest-ranked statements (which ranked +5) are #19 (Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters) and #27 (Children use letter stamps or letter sponges). Both were related to alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness. Statement 19 represented the simplest and most basic form of phonological awareness. The next three statements were the statements that scored +4 in the array. These statements were related to print motivation (Statement 12: Children practice retelling stories), early writing (Statement 4: Tracing letters/words), and alphabet knowledge (Statement 26: Ask children what is the name of the letter and what sound does it make?). The last three statements in the tables ranked +3 in the array. Statements 38 (Use templates to help children form letters) and 29 (Use flannel boards with letters/words) were both related to alphabet knowledge, and

Statement 20 (Children memorize and sing rhyming songs) was related to phonological awareness.

Six out of the eight practices were related to letter knowledge. Four statements were categorized under alphabet knowledge; one was related to early writing, but it also conveyed letter knowledge (practice tracing letter).

Table 7

The eight most unimportant emergent literacy practices by perspective 1

statement #	Statement	Skill	SV
10	Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages	Print awareness	-3
3	Encourage children to use dramatic play areas with literacy-related props that include print (e.g. letters for the post office)	Print motivation	-3
36	Children make their own books	Early writing	-3
33	Children practice writing their name	Early writing	-4
2	Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator	Print awareness	-4
8	Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left	Print awareness	-4
39	Children practice invented spelling	Early writing	-5
37	Children write in journals	Early writing	-5

On the other hand, the most unimportant statements for this perspective, which ranked -5, were related to early writing: children practice invented spelling and children write in journals. This group of teachers considered print awareness an unimportant skill; two of the next three statements in the table which rated -4 were related to print awareness: (Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator), and (Show

children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left). The third was related to early writing (Children practice writing their names). Finally, the last three statements that ranked -3 were related to print awareness and early writing: (Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages); (Encourage children to use dramatic play areas with literacy-related props that include print (e.g. letters for the post office); and (Children make their own books).

In addition to the highest-ranked statements in this factor and their relation to alphabet knowledge, the crib sheet indicated that many statements which were rated higher than in other factors were related to alphabetic knowledge. Those were #27 (Children use letter stamps or letter sponges), #26 (Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time ((I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter? What sound does it make?)), # 31 (Read alphabet books), and #29 (Use flannel boards with letters/words). On the other hand, three of the lowest-ranked statements were related to early writing. For example, #33 (Children practice writing their name) ranked -5 here and ranked much higher in other factors.

That being said, this group of teachers prioritized letter knowledge in early literacy, and they considered it one of the most important skills, while they considered early writing and print awareness as unimportant skills in early literacy.

Table 8

Distinguishing statements for factor 1

#	Statement	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
27	Children use letter stamps or letter sponges	5*	-1	0	0

23	Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it	-1*	3	4	3
30	Introduce new letters	-1	0	5	1
10	Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages	-3	0	0	4
33	Children practice writing their name	-4*	5	0	-1
8	Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left	-4	-2	-2	4
39	Children practice invented spelling	-5*	-2	0	-2

As indicated previously, distinguishing statements were used to define each factor. Statements 27, 23, 33, and 39 were significant at $P < .01$, and the other statements were significant at $P < .05$. Statement 27 (Children use letter stamps or letter sponges), which related to alphabet knowledge, was ranked significantly higher than other factors. This statement represented a simple activity and related to very basic literacy skills such as alphabet knowledge. On the other hand, Statement 23 (Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it) was ranked significantly lower than other factors. This statement represented a more complex and advanced phonological skill. In other words, Statement 27 was a simple activity to help children learn the alphabet letters and it had a significantly higher score value, while Statement 23 was about learning the short vowels, which was a more advanced and complex phonetic skill and valued significantly lower than other factors.

Also, practice writing names was ranked significantly lower than other factors, even though it was a simple practice. However, an explanation for this contradiction was related to early writing, which had been undervalued by this group of teachers. Finally,

Statement 10 (Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left) and Statement 8 (Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages), which related to print awareness, were ranked lower than other factors.

Defining Factor 1 or Perspective A: Teaching surface literacy out of context whole group instructions

The ten participants associated with this perspective were PF4, PF6, PTW1, PTH1, PTH2, PTH5, RNF2, RNF4, RA4, RHM3. Six of them were from a public preschool and four of them were from a private preschool.

Based on the previous discussion of the sort values of each statement and comparing them to other factors using the crib sheet system, this group of teachers has been categorized as practicing "surface and out-of-context literacy teaching". It appeared that these groups of teachers believed in simple literacy practices: activities such as using a sponge, identifying letters and their sounds, and tracing letters. Most of these practices were out-of-context literacy practices.

Comparing the most important practices with the most unimportant practices identified by this perspective helped in identifying this perspective as oriented toward simple activities. Simple activities were very straightforward and had only one way to do them. "Children use letter stamps or letter sponges", "Children practice tracing letters", and "Children sing songs" were examples of these simple activities. On the other hand, these teachers undervalued the more complex activities such as making a book, invented spelling, using dramatic play to support literacy, and writing in journals. Referring to

many activities related to writing as not important supports the claim that the orientation of this group was toward using simple and out-of-context activities.

Furthermore, looking at the highest-ranked statements, the lowest-ranked statements, the crib sheet, and the distinguishing statements showed that those who supported this perspective believed in whole-class instruction. Whole-class instruction here means that all children are involved in the same activity at the same time and that activity is directed by the teachers. Examples of whole-class instruction activities include asking children about the sound and the name of the letter during the read-aloud time, retelling stories, singing songs, and using templets to form letters. These activities have been either ranked highly or had a positive ranking higher than other factors. On the other hand, an activity that required individualization such as practicing writing names, making their books, and writing in a journal was identified as unimportant and was ranked lower than other factors.

Although some of the practices were contextual, such as retelling stories and singing and memorizing songs, an explanation for that would be that these practices were very common in preschools. It was appropriate to classify this group as “surface literacy and out-of-context-literacy oriented”. Furthermore, this perspective supported the two identified patterns that emerged from the consensus statements. Those teachers had neutral opinions toward the practices that related to classroom resources such as “provide writing tools”, “provide books for individual preferences” and “play with puzzles”

Finally, concerning emergent literacy skills, this group of teachers prioritized letter knowledge and undervalued the other literacy skills, including writing, advanced

phonics skills, and print awareness and motivations. That being said, it supported categorizing these groups of teachers as surface and out-of-context literacy oriented.

Factor 2 (Perspective B)

-5	**-4**	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
13	6	29	18	27	40	7	25	1	17	33
4	36	2	8	24	30	14	21	23	**22**	19
	36	11	39	5	15	9	34	26	38	
			35	31	10	16	28			
				20	3	32				
					12					

Figure 5. Factor array for Factor 2

Table 9

The eight most important emergent literacy practices by Perspective 2

	Statement	Skill	SV
33	Children practice writing their name	Early writing	5
19	Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters	Phonological awareness	5
17	Children practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g. “f” in fish)	Phonological knowledge	4
22	Children practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g. “c-a-t” = cat)	Phonological awareness	4
38	Use templates to help children form letters	Early writing	4
1	I use my finger to follow words as I read aloud	Print awareness	3
23	Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter’s sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it	Phonological awareness	3
26	Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter? What sound does it make?)	Phonological awareness	3

Table 9 presents the eight most important literacy practices and skills for this perspective. The first two practices were given a +5 score in the array: Statement 33 (Children practice their name) and Statement 19 (Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters). These two statements were related to phonological awareness and early writing.

The next three statements have an array score of +4. The first two were related to phonological awareness: Statement 17 (Children practice identifying initial sounds in words {e.g. "f" as in fish}), and Statement 22 (Children practice blending sounds to form words {e.g. "c-a-t" = cat}). These two practices represented a different level of phonological awareness. The third statement was #38 (Use templates to help children form letters) and related to early writing.

The last three statements were given an array score of +3. Two of them were related to phonological awareness: Statement 23 (Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it), and Statement 26 (Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter? What sound does it make?)). The other statement related to print awareness: Statement 1 (I use my finger to follow words as I read aloud).

Table 10

The eight most unimportant emergent literacy practices by Perspective 2

Statement number	Statement	Skill	SV
29	Use flannel boards with letters/words	Alphabet knowledge	-3

2	Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator	Print awareness	-3
11	Children predict stories	Print motivation	-3
6	Point to print while reading aloud to teach children that print, not pictures, tells the story	Print awareness	-4
36	Children make their own books	Early writing	-4
37	Children write in journals	Early writing	-4
13	Reread stories to children	Print motivation	-5
4	Use a written schedule	Print awareness	-5

On the other hand, the lowest-ranked statements, which have an array score of -5, were Statement 13 (Reread stories to children) and Statement 4 (Use a written schedule), which related to print awareness and print motivation. The next three statements in Table 10 show the statements which have a -4 score array. Two of these statements related to early writing: Statement 36 (Children make their own books) and Statement 37 (Children write in journals). The other statement related to print awareness.

Finally, the last three statements in the table have an array score of -3. Statement 11 (Children predict stories) related to print motivation. Statement 2 (Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator) related to print awareness. Statement 29 (Use flannel boards with letters/words) related to alphabet knowledge, which had a Z score of -0.82.

Table 11

Distinguishing statements for Factor 2

	Statement	Factor 2	1	3	4
33	Children practice writing their name	5*	-4	0	-1
17	Children practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g. "f" in fish)	4*	0	1	2
22	Children practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g. "c-a-t" = cat)	4*	0	-3	-1
21	Children identify syllable units (e.g. "Fri-day")	2	0	-1	-2
9	Read to children every day	1	1	5	1
3	Encourage children to use dramatic play areas with literacy-related props that include print (e.g. letters for the post office)	0	-3	-2	-2
31	Read alphabet books	-1	2	1	-3
29	Use flannel boards with letters/words	-3*	3	3	2
2	Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator	-3	-4	0	-5
13	Reread stories to children	-5	2	2	-3
4	Use a written schedule	-5*	-2	-1	0

Statements 33, 17, 22, 29, and 4 were significant at P.01, while other statements were significant at P< .05. Three of the distinguishing statements which had a significantly higher Q sort value than other factors were about advanced and complex phonics skills. They were: Children practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g. "f" in fish), Children practice blending sounds to form words (e.g. "c-a-t" = cat), and Children identify syllable units (e.g. "Fri-day"). Also, practice writing names was significantly higher than other factors.

On the other hand, for Statement 29 (Use flannel boards with letters/words) and Statement 4 (Use a written schedule), both scores were significantly lower than other

factors. Neither activity included teaching a specific skill. They belonged to the classroom resources and management, as one teacher indicated: “using a written schedule is for me to manage the classroom, not to teach children literacy”. Other factors were placed under the neutral to slightly unimportant columns.

Defining Factor 2 or Perspective B: Skill-based isolated literacy teaching

Teachers associated with this perspective could be categorized as being skills oriented. According to the above-mentioned analysis, it appeared that these teachers believe in the importance of teaching literacy skills in isolation. The high-ranked statements, which were considered important, were related to a specific skill. To illustrate, statements such as “Children practice writing”, “Children learn the sounds of the letters”, “Children practice blending sound”, and so on were related to a very specific skill. However, statements that did not provide specific skills such as “Use flannel boards”, “Use a written schedule”, “Introduce books by talking about the author”, and “Reread stories to children” had a low ranking. Also, these practices related to teaching literacy in context.

Furthermore, the three distinguishing statements that ranked higher than other factors supported the idea of teaching specific skills and teaching them in isolation. These statements were #33 (Children practice writing their name), #17 (Children practice identifying initial sounds in words {e.g. “f” in fish}), and #22 (Children practice blending sounds together to form words {e.g. “c-a-t” = cat}). On the other hand, Statement 29 (Use flannel boards with letters/words), and Statement 4 (Use a written schedule), which

ranked significantly lower than other factors, also supported the idea that this perspective cared about teaching explicitly specific literacy skills.

Seven participants associated with Perspective B (PF5, RA1, RA2, RA3, RA5, RME2, RHM1). Only one of them was a public preschool teacher, while the other six were private preschool teachers. Three out of the six teachers taught in the same private preschool. Preschool teachers associated with this perspective represented a range of 1 to 9 years of teaching experiences. Their ages ranged between 20 to 39 years. Two out of the seven teachers held a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. The rest of them (five teachers) held a bachelor's degree in different fields that included family education, social studies, and sociology.

It is worth adding here that the principal of the school, as well as four teachers, shared an interesting perspective. They mentioned that "parents are paying us to teach their children, they want to see that their children are learning hard stuff and they are not just playing, and therefore we need to give parents what they want even if that means less playing for children".

Also, this perspective supported the pattern which emerged from the consensus statements. To illustrate, it was concluded that teachers did not have a specific opinion when it came to classroom resources. In this perspective (Perspective B), many of the statements in the middle ("which has no meaning") related to classroom resources and environment. Examples of those statements were #14 (Provide children with a variety of books for individual preferences), #3 (Encourage children to use dramatic play areas with literacy-related props that include print (e.g. letters for the post office)), #16 (Provide a

literacy-enriched play environment), and #15 (Give children the chance to choose what book they read).

Finally, concerning literacy skills, five of the highest-ranked statements were related to phonological awareness and some of them were distinguishing statements. Teachers in this group support teaching all levels of phonological skills. Although the highest-ranked statement was related to early writing, it was about writing their names, which is a very common practice, given that children write their names on the worksheet for identification and support teaching letters and their sounds through writing their name. On the other hand, teachers who associated with this perspective undervalued print awareness, print motivation, and early writing as all the lowest-ranked items were related to them.

Factor 3 (Perspective C)

-5	**-4**	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
36	6	22	14	16	33	18	13	12	23	30
37	7	24	3	40	34	31	25	5	**15**	9
	28	35	26	1	39	17	11	29	19	
			8	21	2	32	20			
				4	27	38				
					10					

Figure 6. Factor array for Factor 3

Table 12

The eight most important emergent literacy practices by Perspective 3

Statement #	Statement	Skill	SV
30	Introduce new letters	Alphabet knowledge	5
9	Read to children every day	Print motivation	5
23	Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it.	Phonological awareness	4
15	Give children the chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them	Print motivation	4
19	Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters	Phonological awareness	4
12	Children practice retelling stories	Print motivation	3
5	Display children's writing around the room	Print awareness	3
29	Use flannel boards with letters/words	Alphabet knowledge	3

The first two statements in Table 12 represent the most important literacy practices for teachers who were associated with this perspective. These two statements had an array score of +5. Statement 30 (Introduce new letters) related to alphabet knowledge, and Statement 9 (Read to children every day) related to print motivation. The next three statements in the table had an array score of +4. Statement 23 related to phonological awareness (Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it). Statement 15 (Give children a chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them) related to print motivation. Finally, Statement 19 represented the basic form of phonological awareness (Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters).

The last three statements in the table were the practices scored +3 in the array. These statements were related to print motivation (Children practice retelling stories), print awareness (Display children's writing around the room), and alphabet knowledge (Use flannel boards with letters/words), which had a Z score lower than 1.

This was the only group that had three of the highest-ranked statements related to print motivation. These statements were #9 (Read to children every day), #15 (Give children a chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them), and #12 (Children practice retelling stories). Also, although statement #5 was related to print awareness, it showed their beliefs on children's motivation.

Table 13

The eight most unimportant emergent literacy practices by Perspective 3

Statement #	Statement	Skill	SV
22	Children practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g. "c-a-t" = cat)	Phonological awareness	-3
24	Children match rhyming words	Phonological awareness	-3
35	Children write and/or receive letters/postcards in class	Early writing	-3
6	Point to print while reading aloud to teach children that print, not pictures, tells the story	Print awareness	-4
7	Post a written task list (e.g. line leader)	Print awareness	-4
28	Play games that teach letter/word recognition	Phonological awareness	-4
36	Children make their own books	Early writing	-5
37	Children write in journals	Early writing	-5

On the other hand, Table 13 shows the eight most unimportant practices recognized by Perspective C. The first two statements had an array score of -5, and they represented the most unimportant practices for this perspective. Both statements were related to early writing: Statement 36 (Children make their own books) and Statement 37 (Children write in journals).

The following three statements had an array score of -4. Two of them were related to print awareness (Point to print while reading aloud to teach children that print, not pictures, tells the story; Post a written task list (e.g. line leader)), and the other was related to alphabet knowledge (Play games that teach letter/word recognition). Finally, two of the last three statements, which had an array score of -3, were related to phonological awareness, while the other one was related to early writing. None of the eight statements were related to print motivation.

Table 14

Distinguishing statements for Factor 3

#	Statement	Q-SV	1	2	4
30	Introduce new letters	5*	-1	0	1
9	Read to children every day	5*	1	1	1
15	Give children the chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them	4*	0	0	-4
18	Play rhythm games practicing sounds in words	1*	-1	-2	-1
38	Use templates to help children form letters	1	3	4	3
2	Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator	0*	-4	-3	-5
26	Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud	-2*	4	3	1

	time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter? What sound does it make?)				
28	Play games that teach letter/word recognition	-4*	1	2	3

Statements 30, 9, 15, 18, 2, 26, and 28 were significant at $P < .01$ and Statement 38 was significant at $P < .05$. The first four statements had a sort value significantly higher than other factors. Two of them related to letter knowledge and phonological awareness, and the other two related to print motivation.

The first three high-ranked distinguishing statements were related to alphabet knowledge (Introduce new letters) and print motivation (Read to children every day); (Give children the chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them). Statement 2 (Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator) related to print awareness and had a sort value of 0, which was significantly higher than other factors. Statement 26 (Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter? What sound does it make?)) was placed on the neutral to a slightly unimportant column. Finally, Statement 28 (Play games that teach letter/word recognition), which was related to alphabet knowledge, was ranked significantly lower than other factors.

Defining Factor 3: Both direct and contextual literacy (reading) through the lens of a child-centered approach

Only 3 participants (PTW4, RNF3, RNF4) loaded significantly in this factor and associated with this perspective, which was the least significant loading of participants on

a factor. One is a public preschool teacher, the other two were private preschool teachers and they taught in the same preschool.

Based on the previous analysis and description of the Q sort of this factor, this perspective was classified as a mixed perspective that focused on teaching skills, as well as a child-centered one.

Teachers who embraced this perspective believed in the importance of children's motivations toward print and reading. They placed a value on reading. To illustrate, Statement 9 (Read to children every day) and Statement 15 (Give children a chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them) were two of the highest-ranked statements. Statement 13 and Statement 11(Reread stories to children) were ranked higher than other factors. Statement 2 (Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator) was a distinguishing statement, which indicated that teachers with this perspective valued books and reading.

Allowing children to retell the story, displaying their writing around the classroom, and allowing them to choose what book they want to read—all these activities revealed that these teachers cared about children and their confidence and feelings; that children’s voices mattered. On the other hand, games, activities, and strategies focus on teaching literacy skills, such as blending sounds to form words, matching rhyming words, word recognition, and writing in a postcard, were located on the left side of the sort, which represents the unimportant statements. Thus, it appears that these teachers focused on students’ interests and some of the literacy skills, but not on the strategies to teach these skills.

Also, this perspective supported the previously mentioned pattern that emerged from analyzing the consensus statements. That is, the teachers did not have an explicit opinion when it came to the classroom resources. For example, the statements “provide a variety of books for individual preferences”, “present children with an opportunity to use writing tools”, and “dramatic play areas” were all located in the middle of the factor sort, and they related to the classroom resources.

Examining the distinguishing statement for this factor aided in defining it as a “mixed perspective that focuses on teaching basic literacy skills as well as being child-centered”. For the purposes of illustration, three distinguished statements which scored higher than other factors were related to teaching letters (Statement 30), the need for reading (Statement 9), and treating children as active learners who had a voice in their learning (Statement 15). On the other hand, Statement 28 was a low-ranking distinguishing statement for Factor 3. This low ranking of statement 28, which is related to teaching through play, supports identifying this perspective as being of “ mixed-perspective” as a low ranking of this statement (Play games that teach letter/word recognition) could be an indication of supporting the traditional direct teaching. Thus, teachers holding this perspective support both contextual teaching “through reading” as well as direct teaching.

Factor 4 (Perspective D)

-5	**-4**	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
37	15	35	3	18	27	9	17	23	8	19
2	11	31	36	20	25	5	40	28	**10**	34
	7	13	21	33	4	26	32	38	16	
			39	6	1	30	29			
				22	24	12				
					14					

Figure 7. Factor array for Factor 4

Table 15

The eight most important emergent literacy practices by Perspective 4

Statement Number	Statement	Skill	SV
9	Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters	Phonological knowledge	5
34	Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools	Early writing	5
8	Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left	Print awareness	4
0	Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages	Print awareness	4
6	Provide a literacy-enriched play environment	Print motivation	4
3	Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it	Phonological awareness	3
8	Play games that teach letter/word recognition	Alphabet knowledge	3
8	Use templates to help children form letters	Early writing	3

Table 15 shows the eight practices that teachers who associated with this perspective believed were most important on emergent literacy development. The first two statements gave an array score of +5. The first statement was #19 (Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters), which related to phonological awareness. The second statement was #34 (Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools), which related to early writing.

The following three statements in the table had an array score of +4. The first two of them related to print awareness, which corresponded to #8 (Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left) and #10 (Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages).

The last three statements in the table gave an array score of +3. Each one related to a different skill. Statement 23 (Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changes according to the short vowel attached to it) related to phonological awareness, Statement 28 (Play games that teach letter/word recognition) related to alphabet knowledge, and Statement 38 (Use templates to help children form letters) related to early writing.

Table 16

The eight most unimportant emergent literacy practices by Perspective 4

Statement Number	Statement	Skill	SV
5	Children write and/or receive letters/postcards in class	Early writing	-3
1	Read alphabet books	Alphabet knowledge	-3
3	Reread stories to children	Print motivation	-3

5	Give children the chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them	Print motivation	-4
1	Children predict stories	Print motivation	-4
7	Post a written task list (e.g. line leader)	Print awareness	-4
37	Children write in journals	Early writing	-5
2	Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator	Print awareness	-5

On the contrary, Table 11 represents the practices indicated as the most unimportant on emergent literacy development. The first two statements were given an array score of -5. One of them related to early writing and the other one to print awareness. These statements were #2 (Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator) and #37 (Children write in journals).

The next three statements were given a score of -4; two related to print motivation (Give children a chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them) and (Children predict stories). The other statement (Post a written task list (e.g. line leader)) was related to print awareness. The final three statements were given a factor score of -3 related to early writing, alphabetic knowledge, and print motivation respectively.

Table 17

Distinguishing statements for Factor 4

	Statement	Q-SV	1	2	3
34	Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools	5*	-1	2	0
8	Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left	4*	-4	-2	-2
10	Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages	4*	-3	0	0

28	Play games that teach letter/word recognition	3	1	2	-4
26	Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter? What sound does it make?)	1*	4	3	-2
31	Read alphabet books	-3*	2	-1	1
13	Reread stories to children	-3	2	-5	2
15	Give children a chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them	-4*	0	0	4

Factor 4 had eight distinguishing statements. Six of them were significant at P< .01, and only two were significant at P< .05. The first three high-ranked distinguishing statements were Statement 34(Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools), Statement 8 (Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left) and Statement 10 (Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages). The first statement related to writing development, as well as the classroom environment. The second two statements related to print and book awareness, as well as promoting children's experiences with books.

Statement 26 had a rank of 1. It read “Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them, What is the name of this letter is? What sound does it make?)”. This statement conveyed teaching a literacy skill, as well as reading aloud practice.

Also, the statement “Read alphabet books” was a low-ranking distinguishing statement. Reading alphabet books related to letter knowledge, although such a practice did not provide a hands-on experience for children.

It is worth mentioning that, although statements related to print and book awareness were among the highest-ranked statements, three of the distinguishing statements were related to books and stories.

Defining Factor 4: Teaching literacy through simple, hands-on experiences with consideration for the role of the classroom environment

Reviewing statement ranking for this factor, as well as the distinguishing statements, led to a definition of this perspective as believing in learning literacy through simple, hands-on experiences, as well as by providing a rich learning environment in the classroom. To illustrate, the highest-ranked statements—Statement 34 (Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools), which was a distinguishing statement, and Statement 16 (Provide a literacy-enriched play environment)—were both related to preparing the environment for children and convey a belief in the importance of providing a rich learning environment. Also, hands-on activities that required children's involvement and provided them with real and direct experiences, such as practice turning pages (direct experience with books), cutting and pasting to make letter collages, and use writing tools.

Furthermore, comparing the most important with the most unimportant practices identified by this perspective supports the idea that this perspective contains teachers who believe in learning through experience and by providing a rich learning environment. On the other hand, the most unimportant practices identified by this perspective were either those activities not initiated by children or were complex activities. Examples of non-

children-initiated activities were repeated reading, reading alphabet books, and introducing books by talking about the author and posting a written schedule.

In addition, examples of more complex activities included invented spelling, writing in journals, exchanging postcards, and predicting stores.

Even though this perspective placed a value on print awareness, due to the high-ranked distinguishing statements, many of the low-ranking statements were related to reading. However, these practices could be interpreted via aspects other than their relation to reading. For example, “read an alphabet book” and “reread stories” were teacher-initiated activities. On the other hand, activities such as “predicting stories” were considered a more complex activity. Finally, “giving children a chance to choose what book they want to be read to them” could be related to classroom resources as well as classroom management, which was consistent with the pattern that emerged from the consensus statements that indicated most teachers were closer to neutral when it came to the classroom resources.

In conclusion, this was the only factor that had two of the highest-ranked statements related to print awareness and they are distinguishing statements. That being said, this perspective was identified as supporting print awareness, even though one of the two lowest-ranking statements was related to print awareness: Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator. This statement was ranked very low on all other factors, except for one factor which had a score of 0. With that being said, we could relate Statement 2 to a common culture. To illustrate, talking about the author could be considered unimportant in the common culture of the society where the teachers belong.

Also, although some of the negative statements (unimportant) were related to print awareness, the nature of the practice could convey another meaning. For example, one of the teachers who was sorting Statement 7 (Post a written task list (e.g. line leader)), indicated, "this practice is for me to manage the classroom, not to teach a child reading or writing". However, Statement 8 (Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left) and Statement 10 (Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages) were both related directly to print awareness and they were distinguishing statements for this perspective.

Summary of all perspectives

The following table provides a summary of the characteristics of each perspective.

Table 18

Summary of the four perspectives

Perspective	Description of the perspective
Perspective A	• Simple practices and skill • Teaching literacy in isolation • Letter knowledge is the most important skill in emergent literacy • Print awareness and print motivation • Early literacy is undervalued
Perspective B	• More advanced and complex phonological skills • Skills-based • Direct instruction • Out of context • Early writing is undervalued
Perspective C	• Mixed perspective support direct teaching of skills as well as contextual teaching

	• Child-centered • Children's motivation is important • Place a value on reading more than other perspectives • Early writing is undervalued
Perspective D	• Simple and hands-on literacy practices • Recognized the value of print awareness more than other perspectives • Recognize the influence of the classroom environment • Early writing is undervalued

Phase Two Results

The data analysis of the second phase of the study aimed to answer the following question:

What are teachers' perceived factors contributing to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and teaching practices?

Participants

The first phase of the study resulted in having four groups of teachers who shared similar beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices. From each group, teachers were purposefully selected to participate in a focus group interview to answer the question of the second phase of the study. The first criterion was choosing participants who were highly correlated with the factor. The second criterion was choosing a heterogeneous group by choosing teachers from public and private schools based on their years of experience. A total of 10 participants participated in the second phase of the study. The first group had two participants (RA4, PTH5). It was supposed to have three participants, but on the day of the interview the third participant was not able to attend,

and it was hard to schedule another interview. Therefore, the interview was conducted with only two participants in that group.

The second interview had three participants (RA2, PF5, and RA3). The third interview had two participants (RME3 and PTW4). This perspective had only three participants associated with it, and the third participant refused to participate in the second phase of the study.

Finally, three teachers participated in the fourth interview (PF3, PTW3, and RNF1). All teachers held a bachelor's degree, which varied between early childhood education and other majors including social studies, sociology, and family education. The teaching experiences of the teachers varied from one year to 12 years. Further information about the participants is presented in Table 19.

Table 19

Demographic information for the interview's participants

Subject	Age	School	Education	Major	Years of experience	Teaching level
PF3	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor	ECE	5	two
PF5	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor	ECE	9	one, two, and three
PTW3	40 and above	Public	Bachelor	ECE	12	three
PTW4	40 and above	Public	Bachelor	ECE	9	one, two, and three
PTH5	30 – 39	Public	Bachelor	ECE	5	one, two, and three

RNF1	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor	Family Nutrition	1	three
RA2	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor	Social Studies	1	three
RA3	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor	Sociology	1	three
RA4	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor	Social Studies	1	three
RME2	20 – 29	Private	Bachelor	Family Education	1	two and three

As indicated previously, this sample was drawn from the same sample in the first phase of the study. This sample represented the same characteristics as the larger sample from the first phase. To illustrate, in both samples, 50% were public preschool teachers and the other 50% were private preschool teachers. Fifty percent held an early childhood education degree, while the other 50% held other degrees. Fifty percent were expert teachers while the other 50% were relatively inexperienced.

The focus group interviews were completed through an online program, and each lasted for about an hour. Before the interview, participants received recruitment letters and consent letters. Permission was also obtained from participants to record the interview. The interview was conducted in Arabic (which is the first language of the researcher). After the interview, the researcher transcribed the interview and then translated it into English. Later, back translation was applied. The researcher asked a person who was fluent in both languages to translate the content back to Arabic and compared it with the original transcript. Then the original transcripts were compared to the transcript which was translated from English to Arabic.

Restatement of Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis aimed to investigate teachers' perceived factors contributing to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and teaching practices. The process of data analysis was based on constructive grounded theory guidelines, which were explained in more detail in Chapter 3 of the study. Briefly, these processes were:

1. Initial coding: Line-by-line coding, making sense of the data, choosing words or phrases as codes to represent participants' meanings.

2. Focus coding and categorizing: Using the most frequent and significant codes to synthesize and sort the data, identify the codes that are related and most frequently used to develop categories. Use of diagraming and sorting (see appendixes)

3. Constant comparison: Constant comparison was used during all three stages of coding; codes were compared to codes, categories to categories within the same interview, as well as with other interviews.

4. Memo writing: Memo writing was used during the coding steps and these memos were used when forming the categories and theoretical themes. The researcher's writing about the emergent categories came from the focused coding.

5. Theory building: Using a constant comparative method to describe how emergent categories relate to each other to build the theory.

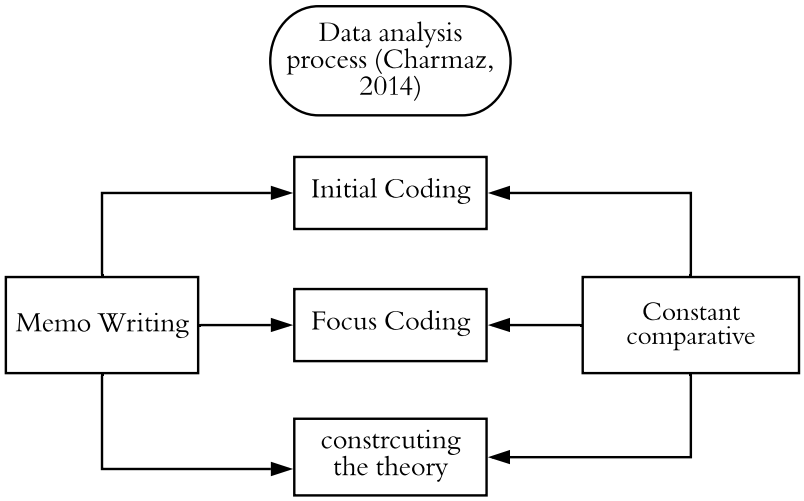

Figure 8. Visual representation of data analysis procedures adopted from constructivist grounded theory guidelines by Charmaz (2014).

Emerging categories, Themes Development, and Constructing the Theory

Data analysis in this phase aimed at a further understanding of the results of the first phase by investigating what factors would contribute to the development of teachers' beliefs on emergent literacy skills and teaching practices. Coding and categorizing using a comparative method, as well as memo writing, resulted in three major themes that explain the factors contributing to the development of teachers' beliefs and practices regarding emergent literacy.

Three main themes have emerged to explain the factors that influence teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and teaching practices, which represent the role of the influence of culture and society. The second theme was the influence of a teacher's background and her understanding of emergent literacy and teaching practices. The last theme represented the influence of education policy and school administration. The first theme explains the factors that influence the similarities in teachers' beliefs across all

perspectives. The second theme explains the factors that influence the variation arising between perspectives. The last theme explains the factors that influence the similarities as well as differences amongst the four perspectives. The following graph illustrates the development of the categories and themes.

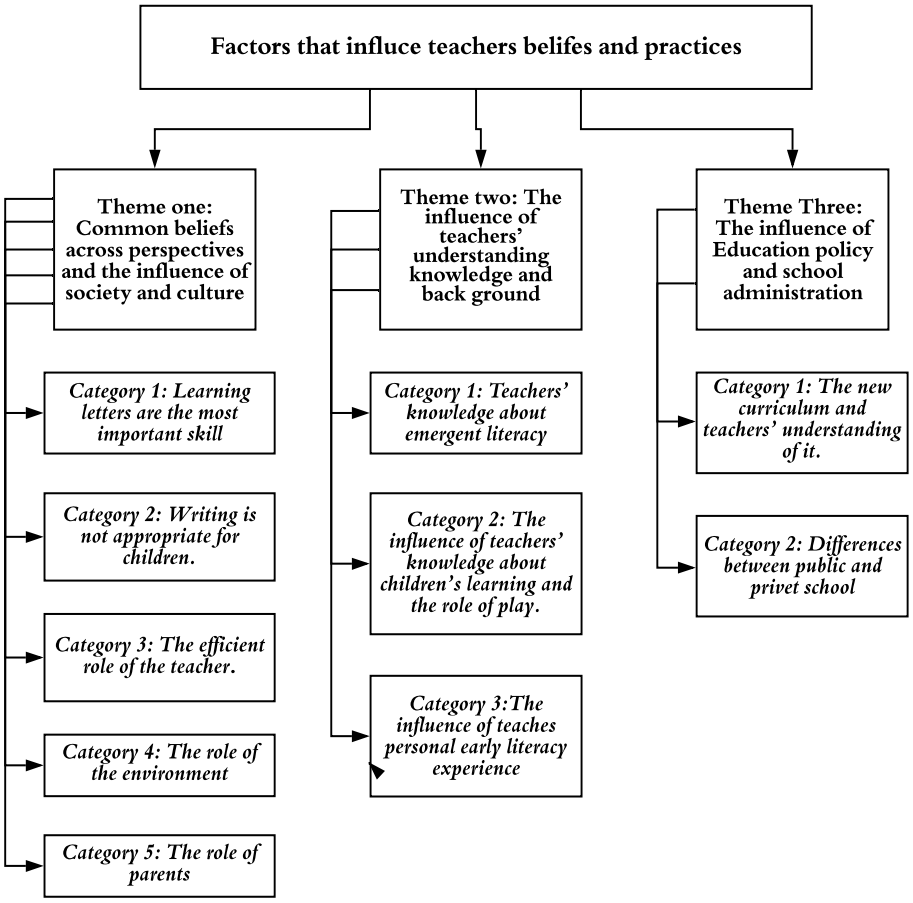

Figure 9. Themes and categories that explain the factors that influence teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and teaching practices.

Each theme consists of categories that emerged from coding the data. In the following discussion, each category will be discussed concerning each of the four perspectives.

Theme One: Common Beliefs Across Perspectives and the Influence of Society and Culture

As a result of coding, constant comparisons, and memo writing, the researcher was able to compare the codes and categories of one interview with the codes and categories in other interviews. It was concluded that all teachers across all perspectives had similar beliefs. This conclusion resulted in the development of the first theme, which represented the influence of society and its culture, as the participants of this study were all from the same city. Five main categories explained this theme. Categories one and two were related to a common belief toward emergent literacy skills, which include letter knowledge and early writing. Category three represents the belief in the effective role of the teacher. Category four explains the influence of the environment. Finally, category five explains the role of parents which are respected members of society.

Table 20

Theme one development from codes and categories

Codes	Category	Theme
When teachers were asked about literacy practices, most of the time they talked about teaching letters		
Examples of early literacy are always about letter knowledge	Letter knowledge is the most important skill in emergent literacy	
The answer about teaching literacy is usually related to alphabet knowledge		
The definition of early literacy is learning letters		

Recognizing letters is the most important thing to know for preschoolers		
Emergent literacy is important at home before joining preschool.		Teachers common beliefs that represent the influence of culture and society
The role of parents in educating their children before preschool and even during the school break	The role of parents	
Recognizing the role of parents at home: "They need to provide writing materials at home"		
Teacher can make some changes to the schedule		
The role of the teacher in encouraging children in reading and writing	Common beliefs about the efficient role of the teacher	
Teachers have the most important role: "Everything comes back to the teacher" A teacher's effort in teaching is influenced by her belief about how important it is		
The role of the teacher: "Resources are necessary, but should not be a barrier for teachers"		
A large number of students is a barrier for reading to children	The role of the environment	
Resources are important: the influence of classroom resources		

Category 1: Learning Letters Is the Most Important Skill. Even though teachers' beliefs towards other emergent literacy skills varied, it was concluded that teachers across all perspectives recognized the importance of letter knowledge more than other emergent literacy skills. For instance, across all perspectives, when teachers were

asked about emergent literacy or early literacy, most of their responses were related to letter knowledge. Furthermore, in all factor arrays (each factor represents a perspective) in the first phase of the study, there were at least two statements amongst the most important practices related to letter knowledge, which identified it as the most important practices.

Perspective A was defined in the first phase of the study as a perspective that prioritized letter knowledge. Six out of the eight most important practices recognized by this perspective were related to letter knowledge. For example, Statement 19 (Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters) and Statement 27 (Children use letter stamps or letter sponges) had a score of 5. This finding was confirmed during the second phase of the study. To illustrate, on many occasions during the interview, letter knowledge appeared in teachers' responses to many general questions related to emergent literacy and teaching practices. For example, a teacher who associated with Perspective A was asked her opinion about using group activity. Her answer was related to letter knowledge; she indicated,

> We used these activities. It is very important in learning letters. For example, we have a mirror that we use at the time of learning when the child says the letter with the short vowels. The mirror moves around the children so they can look at their mouth when they say the letter with each short vowel (PTH5).

When the teacher was asked her opinion about the curriculum, her response was about letters as well. The teacher explained, "I tell the Ministry of Education that the biggest mistake they made is the new language curriculum. The letters are not presented in order". Another teacher (RA4) associated with the same perspective indicated that they spend a whole week teaching a single letter.

Similar to Perspective A, Perspective B was also defined as prioritizing letter knowledge in addition to placing a special value on skills related to phonological awareness. This claim is supported by reviewing the eight most important practices identified by Perspective B and the distinguishing statements. For example, Statement 19 (Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters) and Statement 17 (Children practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g. “f” in fish)), had an array score of 5 and 4. And two of the distinguishing statements were also related to letter knowledge and phonological awareness.

Throughout the interview, when teachers were asked the general question of whether it related to emergent literacy or teaching practices, many of their responses were related to letter knowledge. For example, a teacher associated with this perspective when she was asked about her experience in emergent literacy and she indicated, “when I was in preschool, I don’t remember the teacher teaching us letters” (PF5). Her answer supported prioritizing letter knowledge in emergent literacy. Another teacher associated with Perspective B, when she was asked about her practices, gave the answer, “It is easy to present the letter to them, but the hard job is to help them memorize the shape of the letter. How to help them memorize it forever” (RA5).

Concerning Perspective C, teachers’ special attention to letter knowledge was also evidenced in their responses, although this perspective paid more attention to print motivation than other perspectives. One of the positive distinguished statements in Perspective C was Statement 30 (Introduce new letters). Four of the eight most important practices were either related to letter knowledge, such as #23 (Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter’s sound changes according to the short

vowel attached to it.) or #19 (Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters).

For instance, when a teacher was asked about her emergent literacy experience, her answer was, “I did not go to preschool, but I see a huge difference between the children who attended preschool and those who did not. The child who went to preschool could recognize the letter and write his name” (RME3). Besides, later in the interview, she indicated “the most important thing [for preschooler] is knowing how to write his name and learn the letters”. Furthermore, in a conversation held during the interview about emergent literacy and its definition, a teacher associated with Perspective C explained:

> When he [the child] joins preschool, he begins to learn letters and begins to make connections. Now I am teaching kindergarten but last year I used to teach preschool, so when I wrote some words on the board, children connect them with the letter we studied in preschool (PTW4).

Another teacher’s response to her beliefs about the importance of emergent literacy was:

> Emergent literacy is very important; children are usually good at memorizing. I believe that children who learn the letter before entering preschool outperform the children who do not. I have a child who can recognize the letters and he is very advanced in everything else such as reading, coloring, writing (RME3).

Finally, although Perspective D was recognized as a perspective that placed a value on print awareness and was closer to the emergent literacy perspective, teachers’ responses during the interview showed that they also prioritized letter knowledge. For instance, a teacher (PF3), when asked about classroom practices, said, “every week we have 3 skills: a letter’s shape, a letter’s position in the word, and a letter’s sound.” When the teacher

was asked about the importance of classroom resources, she also gave an example about teaching the letters. She explained:

> I had to teach the children three letters. I was not prepared because it should be the other teacher who teaches them. So, I divided the children into three groups, giving each group a letter and asking the children to bring me a thing that starts with that letter (PF3).

And again she was the teacher who explained emergent literacy through learning the letters: "emergent literacy is very important, children are usually good at memorizing. I believe that children who learn the letters before entering preschool outperform the children who did not".

The above-mentioned examples illustrate teachers' common beliefs about prioritizing letter knowledge, even though they hold different perspectives toward the other emergent literacy skills.

Category 2: Writing Is Not Appropriate for Children. Contrary to the common belief about the importance of letter knowledge, teachers universally underestimated early writing and consider it an unimportant activity, even though some perspectives recognized its value more than others. This conclusion appeared also in the first phase of the study, the Q method. To illustrate, two of the five consensus statements, which were the statements that did not distinguish between any pairs of factors, were related to early writing. Participants universally agreed that writing in journals was a not very important activity for preschool children. Statement 37 (Children write in journals) had a sort value of -5, -4, -5, and -5, and many participants indicated during their sorts that this activity was not appropriate for preschool children, but more appropriate for

older children who already knew how to write. Furthermore, Statement 35 (Children write or receive a letter postcard in class), which had sort values of -2,-2, -3, and -3 has also been identified as an important activity.

Category 3: The Effective Role of the Teacher. Across the interviews, many codes revealed that teachers in all perspectives recognized their effective role in the classroom. To illustrate, a teacher associated with Perspective A indicated that "Resources are necessary, but lack of resources should not be a barrier for teachers; the teacher could use the simplest materials" (PTH5). Teachers associated with Perspective A also indicated that they could make some changes to the curriculum and add new concepts. Teachers also agreed that they had some freedom to change the curriculum and improve it. One teacher said, "We use worksheets, but we do not use contextual education. However, a diligent teacher may apply contextual teaching, such as teaching letters through reading stories" (PTH5). Another teacher associated with the same perspective said, "You could add a new concept that you like" (RA4).

This category also emerged in Perspective B when the teacher was asked about the role of the classroom library. She referred to the teachers' role in encouraging children to use the library, explaining, "It depends on the teacher if she activates it and uses it in a good way. Otherwise, the children will not look at it" (RA3). During a conversation about literacy practices, a teacher (PF3) associated with Perspective B explained, "Everything comes back to the teacher, if you see that it is important, you will make an effort toward it". Also, teachers indicated that with teachers' encouragement, children became more motivated to go to the library and read or pretend to read.

Concerning Perspective C, which was identified as a child-centered perspective, teachers also showed that they had an essential role in motivating children to learn letters. As one teacher said:

> Teachers can encourage children by using very simple techniques. For example, when I teach them a letter and ask them to write it, they became more interested and excited if I rewarded them by drawing a star or a happy face on their writing. They write it just so they can have my reward. Motivating children has an essential role in their learning (PTW4).

Teachers here also indicated that even though the curriculum was provided for them, every teacher could use her own way to teach that curriculum. Also, even though the curriculum was provided by the general education, a teacher indicated that they asked the administration to make changes to the curriculum and the administration agreed.

Similar to other perspectives, teachers associated with Perspective D also showed their belief in their essential role. To illustrate, a teacher associated with Perspective D suggested that the teacher's effort in teaching was influenced by her belief about how important it was. She said, "Everything comes back to the teacher. If you see that it is important, you will make an effort toward it" (PF3). This also illustrates how teachers' beliefs were important and how this belief influenced their practices.

Furthermore, even though this perspective emphasized the role of the classroom environment, it included the resources available in the classroom. During the conversation about classroom resources, teachers agreed that resources were important, but then one indicated that improving teachers was more important, and so too the strategies she used: "the new strategies help to improve children a lot, and the first thing that has been developed is the teacher and her way of teaching" (PTW3). Also, the

teacher here suggested that the most important thing in developing education was developing the teacher.

Teachers also agreed that they have an essential role in encouraging and motivating children, as a teacher (PTW3) said, “The teacher has a big role in encouraging and introducing the child to the center [library center].” Besides, teachers recognized their effective role, they also recognized the importance of improving and educating themselves. For example, a teacher (PF3) associated with Perspective D explained, “we improve ourselves and sometimes the school leader or our supervisor provides some guidance for us in these matters, but most of the teachers improve themselves.”

Category 4: The Role of the Environment. Although some perspectives emphasize the role of the environment more than other perspectives, across all interviews, teachers agreed on the importance of classroom environment. In addition, many teachers referred to a large number of students in the classroom and how that influenced their teaching practices.

Perspective A was identified in the first phase of the study as a perspective that held a neutral opinion toward classroom resources, given that teachers’ opinions were neutral toward activities related to classroom resources and environment such as Statement 5 (Display children’s writing around the room) and Statement 14 (Provide children with a variety of books for individual preferences), which both had a score of 0.

Another example is Statement 34 (Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools) and Statement 14 (Provide books for individual preferences) which has a score of -1. This finding emerged as well during the interview. To illustrate,

a teacher (PTH5) associated with Perspective A said “Resources are necessary, but lack of resources should not be a barrier for teachers. The teacher could use the simplest materials. However, I do not deny that resources are important and necessary.” Even though the teacher here agreed that the teachers’ role was more important, she did not deny the importance of classroom resources. Another teacher (RA4) in the same perspective said “Classroom resources are very important. I teach in a private school and there are a lot of resources that we need.”

Another code that emerged, relating to the classroom environment, was the number of children in the classroom. Here is a part of teachers’ conversation regarding this issue:

> PTH5: I used to like to watch movies in which the teacher is sitting on a small chair, wearing a cowl, and telling the children a story. But there were six or seven children around her. She reads and all the children can hear her, but when I read for 30 or 32 [children], they will not hear me well, and they will not be able to circle around me. They will fight, each one of them wants to be closer. If there is a huge number of children, my voice will not reach them.
> RA4: I am facing the same problem. I have 24 students. When I open the story, all the children want to see the story and look at the pictures, which makes me present it on the projector.
> PTH5: But the story loses its beauty when is presented on the projector.

Those examples illustrate how having too many children in the classroom could influence teachers’ ability to read to children.

Concerning Perspective B, the influence of the classroom environment appears when a teacher indicated that they need to change the books in the library to attract children. She explained,

> We change the books at the beginning of each unit, [and] I give the children a quick explanation of all the books. Children get excited about them for one or two

> weeks at most, then they become less interested. We have to change the library every two weeks (PF5).

In addition, the teachers recognized the role of the environment on children's emergent literacy development. One explained:

> It is mandatory that we write the child's name on the classroom posters and spell the name so that after a while you see children recognizing their friends' names even though that they cannot read (PF5).

The teacher here indicated that the role of the classroom environment on recognizing their friends' names was important. Statement 33 (Children practice writing their name) was a distinguishing statement in Perspective B that had a score of 5, which was at the top of the most important practices recognized by this perspective. The teacher also talked about writing the name on everything in the classroom. Another teacher (RA3) in the same perspective replied "yes, we follow this strategy and it is called 'improving the environment.'"

Concerning Perspective C, the influence of the classroom environment was evidenced by one teacher who agreed that classroom resources had a huge influence on teaching practices. She further explained:

> Me, for example, it differs when I teach the letter by writing it on the board or teach it through the projector. It is different when the child writes the letter on the sand or writes it on paper (RME3).

Furthermore, the perspective was identified as a child-centered perspective that recognized the importance of print motivation. Teachers agreed on the importance of providing a suitable environment for children to play and actively engage themselves in their learning, as this teacher explained:

> Children enjoy coloring their letters and playing. Teaching through playing allows the child to comprehend more than teaching in a serious way… The most loved time for children is [in the] center's time [when] they build, break, and organize (PTW4).

Also, Statement 5 (Display children's writing around the room) was among the most important practices identified by Perspective C, which was related to the classroom environment. Here is another example to illustrate teachers' beliefs on the influence of providing resources:

> I have some parents who tell me at the beginning of the school year that their children do not know how to write and use the pen correctly, so I tell them not to worry about it, they only need to provide writing materials at home (PTW4).

Finally, regarding Perspective D, it was identified as a perspective that supported hands-on activities, as two of the highest-ranked statements were #34 (Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools), which was a distinguishing statement, and #16 (Provide a literacy-enriched play environment), both of which related to preparing the environment for children. Statement 5 (Display children's writing around the room) was also a distinguishing statement that could be linked to the classroom environment.

Another example supports the role of the classroom environment, Statement 34 (Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools) from Perspective D, which was a distinguishing statement that had a score of 5. That statement supported the belief in the importance of proving a rich classroom environment and literacy resources.

This conclusion was confirmed again during the interviews as one teacher associated with Perspective C explained how the resources which were part of the classroom environment influenced them:

> For example, several years ago, they used to take fees from children and a lot of resources were available such as boards and papers, which made the educational process easier for the teacher. But now when the resources are few and the teacher is trying to provide them, it becomes a burden for the teacher. In addition to the standards and doing papers, we now do almost all the work at home. At home, we spend a lot of time preparing for the day after school. We can no longer prepare everything in school. Not like before, we used to prepare everything at school for the next day after the kids left, but now we can't. We must prepare at home because there are not enough resources in the school. For example, even printing became much less [easy] than before. Printing is no longer permitted for all activities, for example, and the teacher has to print the paper for circle time on her own, as we are only allowed to print center papers at school. This greatly affects the teacher's contribution (PF3).

Another teacher associated with Perspective D explained the influence of the classroom environment on her teaching practices. She explained,

> When we took the standards course, the trainer provided examples. These examples were from a foreign country, on how they applied the standards. The number of students in the video was eight or ten maximum. How do they ask us to apply it when we have a large number of students? Our environment is very different from that environment (PTW3).

The teacher here also pointed out that what works in another culture would not work in Saudi Arabia because of the differences in the classroom environment. Teachers believed that doing observation exercises was not very effective because of the environment. The effectiveness of the practices depends on the classroom environment. Thus, the classroom environment influenced her beliefs towards the practices.

Category 5: The Role of Parents. In addition to the common agreement on the essential role of parents across all perspectives, parents are important members of society

and are part of their culture, and therefore it was appropriate for this category to be placed under this theme.

It was concluded that teachers believe in the influence of parents on children's learning. Two kinds of beliefs regarding the influence of parents have emerged. The first kind was the direct influence of parents on children's learning, such as providing rich literacy opportunities in the home environment. Direct influence refers to the parent teaching the child, or the child learning directly from the parent. The second kind was the influence of parents on teachers and their teaching practices, which would in turn influence children's learning.

Although in Perspective A teachers did not talk a lot about the influence of parents on their teaching practices, they referred to parents' role on children's emergent literacy at home. For example, a teacher associated with Perspective A explained the role of parents through her own experiences, when her parents provided a rich literacy environment. She explained,

> I consider that I studied preschool and kindergarten at home. The activities that children do in kindergarten, I used to do at home … I was trying to emulate and imitate my older brother when he wrote. I was trying to learn the letters out of jealousy. My father was trying to satisfy me, so he would give me some letters to challenge me (PTH5).

The role and influence of parents were also evidenced in Perspective B. A teacher (PF5) associated with perspective B indicated that "in this stage [preschool], sensory skills that children learn from observing their parents are important". Furthermore, teachers associated with this perspective indicated that children's skills now are more advanced, and the reason was that parents are now more educated and aware than before. Two teachers also agreed that parents' expectations would influence their practices.

It is interesting to mention here that the principal of a private school, along with four teachers associated with this perspective, mentioned that,

> Parents are paying us to teach their children. They want to see that their children are learning hard stuff and they are not just playing, and therefore we need to give parents what they want even if that means less playing for children.

A teacher associated with Perspective C referred to the influence of parents through her own emergent literacy experience, when she explained,

> My mother noticed I like reading and writing so she provided stories, children's magazines, and notebooks for me. I used to look at the books and write without knowing exactly how to read letters, and then later I started to spell the letters and I learned that the letters together form the word. Now my reading is excellent, and my spelling was excellent during all my later school years (PTW4).

On the other hand, the indirect influence of the parents' role was their influence on teachers. As one teacher indicated:

> I had a parent who used to say to me 'I don't want my child to learn reading or writing, he is so young, I only want him to adapt to school and make friends. So, we are not tough with preschoolers [of these parents], we just want them to learn how to use the pen. On the other hand, when a parent is very careful about teaching her child, and she tells you that she is helping him at home, the teacher makes more effort with that child (PTW4).

Another teacher:

> Some parents are very careful and mindful about teaching their child even in school breaks. They read with them and teach them the letters, so when the children come back to school you find the child very focused (RME3).

Finally, as with other perspectives, the role of parents appears in Perspective D, as a teacher associated with this perspective explained,

> At the beginning of the school year, some parents expect that the child will finish preschool and know how to write and read, but when we meet with them and

> explain to them what our role is and what the child will learn in the preschool, most of them understand that. This is for public preschool, but private schools may differ (PF3).

Another teacher (PTW3) recognized the influence and the role of parents by talking about educating parents at the beginning of the year. She said, “When I became a teacher, the first thing I did at the beginning of the year was a parents’ meeting.” In the meeting, the teacher explained what children were going to learn and she provided them with tips about how to support their literacy development.

Furthermore, a teacher associated with Perspective D said “For us, the most important thing is parents’ opinion. What is their opinion about the teacher?” (RNF1). The teacher here clearly indicated the influence of parents. She meant by “us” the private preschool teachers, which lead to the following finding that illustrated the influence of parents.

Parents' influence on teachers appeared within the differences between public and private schools. To illustrate, public preschool teachers, which focused more on the importance of play and learning through play, indicated that they were more interested in making the child happy than the parents. On the other hand, the private preschool teachers appeared to care more about parents' opinions, and because most parents wanted to see evidence that their child was learning, therefore they used more worksheets and explicit teaching. For example, the researcher had a conversation with a private preschool principal. The principal indicated that she believed teaching in preschool should be through play. She further explained, “but we have to use worksheets because parents want to see their children’s outcomes, and they say that we are paying money because we want him to learn not to play.” On the other hand, the public preschool teachers were

more interested in making the child happy, as one teacher noted, “I don't care about the expectations of the parents, I care about the child himself. The most important thing for me is that he is happy. I usually do not consult the parents” (PF5).

Theme Two: The Influence of Teachers’ Knowledge and Background

The second theme explains the influence of teachers’ knowledge and background on their emergent literacy beliefs and teaching practices. This theme serves to explain the variance arising between the four perspectives that were identified in the current study.

The findings indicated that teachers' beliefs and understanding of emergent literacy skills and practices was influenced by teachers’ knowledge and background, which was represented in three main categories. These categories were teacher’s knowledge about emergent literacy, teachers’ knowledge about teaching strategies and the role of play, and teachers’ own literacy experiences. Further explanation of each kind will be presented in the following section.

Table 21

Example of theme, two categories and theme development

Codes	Category	Theme
Lack of understanding of print awareness		
Print awareness not important		
Lack of knowledge about early writing and invented spelling	Teacher’s knowledge and background about emergent literacy	
Unclear definition of emergent literacy		

Limit print awareness to writing sentences and letters		
Drawing is more appropriate than writing		
Confusion and inconsistent opinions about phonological awareness		The influence of teachers' conceptions and understanding
The teacher's understanding of simple and complex activities		
Unclear understanding of explicit teaching and implicit teaching	Teachers' knowledge about teaching strategies and the role of play	
Separation between play and learning		
The need for motivation and encouragement		
Unclear understanding of print awareness		
Supporting the old curriculum that they experienced	Teachers' own literacy experience	
The teacher's experience led them to think that challenging children is good for them		
Painful preschool experiences influence a teacher's way of treating the children		
Using experience to form knowledge about teaching strategies		

Category 1: Teachers' Knowledge About Emergent Literacy. It was concluded that the teachers' conceptions and knowledge about emergent literacy influenced their beliefs and teaching practices. To illustrate, although there was a general agreement on prioritizing letter knowledge across all perspectives, teachers' beliefs

towards emergent literacy skills varied. One factor that was found to influence these variations was their knowledge and background about emergent literacy.

In identifying Perspective A, it was indicated that this perspective underestimated the influence of print awareness which was an essential aspect of emergent literacy. None of the most important practices identified by this perspective were related to print awareness. More than one practice relating to print awareness was identified as unimportant. During the interview, a teacher indicated that print awareness was not very important, and she further explained,

> The most important thing for a child to know is how to hold the pen …. The teacher does not have to be tough with children about knowing the characteristics of the letters. At a later stage, the child will learn the characteristics of the letters" (PTH5).

Another teacher defined print awareness as taking care of the book and limited print awareness to teaching a unit. She (RA4) explained, "We have a unit called 'My Book'. In this unit, the child learns how to take care of books. We can promote all these things [print awareness] during this unit."

Teachers' definitions of print awareness did not reflect a good background knowledge about emergent literacy. For instance, the ability to hold a pen was related more to physical development than print awareness. The characteristics of the letter were related to letter knowledge.

Furthermore, the influence of teachers' knowledge about emergent literacy appears in teacher's beliefs about invented spelling and early writing, as Perspective A was identified as a perspective that neglected the benefit of early writing. The statement (children practice invented spelling) was identified as the most unimportant practice.

During the interview, when the teachers were asked about early writing and invented spelling, they did not show a clear understanding of its benefits. One teacher related it to the child's ability to hold the pen, saying, “There are individual differences. Some children can hold the pen correctly at an early age while some children cannot”. However, when the researcher explained the idea of invented spelling to them the teacher indicated that invented spelling was good and “it motivates them [the children] and promotes their passion to write” (RA4).

Perspective A was classified as a perspective that supported traditional and out-of-context teaching. However, one teacher’s definition reflected some of the concepts of the emergent literacy perspective, which recognizes the importance of print motivation, when she said, “it is the first spark that makes the child love reading and writing. It is what makes the child attracted to reading and writing” (PTH5). However, the same teacher further supported teaching sight words explicitly, when she talked about a program that was introduced in a private school for preschoolers, she explained,

> I would like to add one point. Five or six years ago I was in a private school and they were implementing a program called the New Approach. There are words and phrases written in a large font, and from time to time, they present some of them to the children. This is before they learn the letters, so the child learns the name by the shape of the drawing of the word before he learns the letters. The children were three years old. It was a beautiful idea…

Furthermore, a teacher associated with this perspective, which supported traditional teaching, confessed that she did not have enough knowledge and she needed to learn more as she explained:

> They give us some courses, but not with regard to teaching literacy. For example, the supervisor came to observe my teaching, and she told me that I treat children very well. Because I focus a lot on dealing with children, the way I deal with

> children is very important to me, but her criticism for me was that I should use a certain strategy when teaching them how to draw a letter. But they never told us about these strategies. There are no courses on how to teach a child to read and write (PTH5).

Another teacher also agreed that they had not taken any course related to teaching literacy.

Perspective B was identified as skilled-based oriented and supported isolated teaching. Similar to Perspective A, Perspective B did not recognize the benefit of print awareness, print motivation, and early writing as the seven most unimportant practices identified by this perspective were related to these three emergent literacy skills. During the interview, teachers showed that they did not recognize the importance of print awareness. They indicated that print awareness was not important. Here was a teacher talking about print awareness:

> There is a new program called Emerging Reading, which provides a specific method. Not all teachers apply this program, because, for me, it is not very important in preschool. It seemed unimportant but it is acquiring a reputation. It started as not important but now it has a reputation and they started to force teachers to apply for it. We have to bring the book and explain that it has a title and an author, and it has pictures. I explain the pictures and talk about the contents of the book. I don't use this program a lot (PF5).

Although this program was introduced to the teacher in her preschool, she did not recognize the benefit of it. However, the same teacher's response about emergent literacy aligns to some degree with the emergent literacy theory when she said,

> There are four literacy skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We are applying it without consciousness. First is listening, then speaking, then after that reading and writing development.

One of the main concepts of emergent literacy theory was that the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing were all interconnected (Morrow, 2012). She also indicated that "Everything the child recognizes is reading. When he reads a picture, 'this is a horse', 'this is a flower', he is reading." Which was also aligned with emergent literacy theory.

Another example that illustrated the role of teachers' knowledge was teachers' understanding of early writing such as invented spelling and its benefits on children's emergent literacy development. For example, a teacher (RA3) associated with this perspective indicated that children should practice writing because it would help them in first grade. She did not recognize or mention its benefit on children's emergent literacy development.

Another teacher also did not recognize the value of early writing when she said, "drawing is better for the child than writing wrong letters. Because I cannot say to the child you are wrong, I can direct him to the correct letter and help him" (PF3). She later added,

> Children differ. Some children if I tell him to write, and he did not know how to write, it would affect him, and he would feel like a failure. I should give him a skill that is on his level.

Here the teacher not only recognized the value of early writing but also believed that the writing would harm the child. The other teacher in the same perspective supports the previous statement, "I do not see the benefit of writing in this age. It is best for them to express their ideas by drawing because they do not know how to write" (RA3). She further added, "children express their thoughts by drawing better than writing".

Identifying Perspective B as skill-based and supporting out-of-context literacy practices went in line with underestimating the benefit of early literacy. To illustrate, early writing such as invented spelling was a contextual literacy practice. Two of the most unimportant practices identified by Perspective B were related to early writing.

Perspective B was identified in the first phase of the study as a skill-based perspective which supported phonological awareness skill. Teachers associated with this perspective indicated that learning vowels and the sound of the letter were important. Most of the important practices recognized by this perspective were related to phoneme awareness which was part of the phonological awareness. Examples of these practices were Statement 19 (Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters), Statement 17 (Children practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g. "f" in fish), and Statement 22 (Children practice blending sounds to form words (e.g. "c-a-t" = cat).

On the other hand, perceptive C was identified as one which supports contextual teaching as being closer to the emergent literacy perspective. Here a teacher showed more understanding about emergent literacy. She suggested that the development of literacy started early in life before joining the school, which would align with the emergent literacy perspective. She indicated:

> Before the child joins preschool, he must be getting ready at home. He can read with the parents and repeat reading with them… Even when the children follow the children's channels on TV, you find that he memorizes the songs and repeats the dialogue. When he joins preschool, he begins to learn letters and begins to make connections. Now I am teaching kindergarten, but last year I used to teach preschool, so when I wrote some words on the board, children connect them with the letter that we studied in preschool (PTW4).

Another teacher associated with this perspective indicated:

> I see a huge difference between the child who attended preschool and who did not. The child who went to preschool could recognize the letter and write its name. For me, preschool is more important than first grade in preparing the child to learn how to read and write (RME3).

Both examples illustrated teachers understating the importance of emergent literacy. Besides, Perspective C was classified as a perspective that supported implicit teaching practices. A teacher associated with this perspective showed an understanding of the influence of contextual teaching, which was the main principle of the emergent literacy perspective. She explained:

> Through reading, children will start to comprehend that letters form words, and they have meanings. When we want to teach a letter's position–at the beginning of the word, at the middle, and at the end–we have to read these words, so they can comprehend what the letters' positions mean.

The above-mentioned example illustrated teachers' understanding of emergent literacy and the role of reading and contextual teaching, which supported the finding from the first phase of the study. Statement 9 (Read to children every day) and Statement 15 (Give children a chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them) were two of the high-ranked statements, which were also distinguishing statements identified by this perspective. These two statements related to print awareness, motivation, and reading.

Concerning early writing, teachers here also did not recognize its benefit. It was not identified as an important practice in the first phase of the study. The top two unimportant practices identified by this perspective were related to early writing, as one teacher associated with this perspective indicated that writing is appropriate for kindergarten, not preschoolers. Another teacher's understanding of early writing was limited to children's ability to use the pen. When she was asked about it, she indicated:

> It has a huge influence on literacy development. For example, my nephew is one and half years old, and he can hold the pen in the right way because he sees his siblings when they write. Learning this skill that early will facilitate his learning in the future when he joins preschool (PTW4).

Perspective D was defined as a perspective that shared similar beliefs to the emergent literacy perspective, which emphasizes the role of the environment. For example, the highest-ranked statements were #34 (Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools), which is a distinguishing statement, and #16 (Provide a literacy-enriched play environment). Both were related to preparing the environment for children and convey a belief toward the importance of providing a rich learning environment. A teacher associated with Perspective D recognized the role of providing a suitable environment, which includes centers and activities that influence children's literacy development. She defined emergent literacy as:

> It is the preparation stage in which there are centers, playdough, and activities that prepare them for reading and writing, such as drawing on lines, drawing on winding, how to hold the pen, strengthening the muscles of the hands; these are all pre-reading and writing, and this is our role as preschool teachers.

Also, this was the perspective that most recognized the importance of print awareness. Statement 8 (Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left) and Statement 10 (Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages) were both related directly to print awareness and they were distinguishing statements for this perspective. A teacher associated with the same perspective recognized the importance of the library and print motivation. She also recognized the benefit of using books to help children understand the meaning of reading and writing, as she noted:

> In the classroom, I encourage them to go to the library and read the stories by themselves. Behind the library, I have a board, where they draw the characters in the story and write their names. They do that with my help, not alone, but they have an effective role in this activity. The children in the other groups learn from them and try to copy them until they can, so they love this activity (PTW3).

Category 2: The Influence of Teachers' Knowledge About Children's Learning and the Role of Play. Throughout the interviews, teachers have shown similarities and differences regarding their knowledge about children's learning. The variation in teachers' understanding and knowledge and how that influenced their beliefs and practices are explained concerning each perspective.

Perspective A was recognized as a perspective that supported out-of-context practices or explicit practices. During the interview, the code "separation between play and education" emerged. In implicit teaching or contextual teaching, the teacher would use play as a method of teaching. However, here the teacher indicated that "Education through play is required. I do not deny that learning letters are important, but play is also important" (PTH5). Although the teacher here supports the importance of play, she separated play from learning. The same teacher supported passive or directed teaching when she said, "Our days were very beautiful, we receive information, and we can memorize it." Education in the past used to be very directed and based more on memorization. Here the teacher supported that kind of teaching.

Another teacher made a distinction between education and teaching practices. She indicated,

> I have noticed that most of the supervisors do not care about education. They are interested in the activities that you offer; they do not care that the child graduated

> from kindergarten knowing the letters and how to read and write. The teacher is the one who could be interested in that (RA4).

The teacher (RA4) did not recognize the importance of providing a rich literacy environment, which was an important principle in emergent literacy perspective. To illustrate, when she was asked about the importance of having a library in the classroom, her answer was, “it depends on the child. Some children love the library very much and love to read and search for books. Some children do not have an interest in books at all.”

Perspective B was categorized as a skill-based perspective that supported out-of-context practices. Most of the important practices identified by this perspective supported this kind of teaching, while all of the most unimportant practices identified by this perspective related to contextual teaching.

Teachers’ knowledge about teaching strategies aligned with the conclusion drawn about this perspective. Here was a teacher associated with the perspective who strongly supported the isolated teaching of skills, as she noted:

> Children need to learn step by step, teaching should be gradual when we teach each skill separately, [because] they are more likely to stay in this mind[set]. When I taught them the letter “ba”, I taught them how to write it, and I showed them pictures of the letter, and then they use their body to write the letter. So the focus here was only on one letter, and they memorized it very well (PF5).

Besides explicit teaching, the teacher's aim was memorization. Teaching for memorization was a contradiction of teaching for meaning. Another teacher also supported this idea when she said, “It is easy to present the letter to them, but the hard job is to help them memorize the shape of the letter. How to help them memorize it forever” (RA3).

Another example supported teachers' thinking about teaching literacy explicitly as a teacher noted: "teaching reading and writing is not mandatory, but if it happened, then it is related to the teacher and her effort" (PF5). She meant direct explicit teaching because the policy of the school where she worked supported a child-centered approach. Another teacher (RA5) from another school indicated, "in our school it is mandatory. We have to teach them the letters".

Finally, supporting explicit teaching was the opposite of contextual teaching, which supported teaching through play. During the interview, when teachers were asked about their teaching practices, none of them talked about play and its role in children's learning.

Perspective C teachers identified as a child-centered approach that supported contextual teaching practices as many of the practices that identified as most important were related to books. A teacher associated with this perspective recognized the benefit of contextual teaching through reading, as she explained:

> I am against letting the child write words [when] he does not know what they mean. Through reading, children will start to comprehend that letters form words, and they have meanings (RME3).

In addition, teachers associated with this perspective showed a great background knowledge about play and its role only on children's learning development. A teacher (ME3) associated with Perspective C showed a good understanding of the benefit of play on children's learning in preschool. She emphasized the benefits of learning through play:

> It differs when I teach the letter by writing it on the board or teaching it through the projector. It is different when the child writes the letter on the sand or writes it on paper. Children enjoy coloring their letters and playing. Teaching through

> playing allows the child to comprehend more than teaching in a serious way. When we laugh and play with them they become very happy. The most loved time for children is centers time. Because they feel responsible for themselves, they play by themselves, they build, break, and organize. This is true for preschool and kindergarten.

Another teacher, associated with the same perspective, added:

> Education in preschool should be through entertainment; when you are serious with them, they don't like it…. Playing helps children to comprehend more than teaching the letters and vowels directly. I teach this vowel by acting it with my body, then the children could comprehend it and they copy me. Playing is very useful in teaching letters. In the beginning, I used to be serious, but I realized that affected them negatively, and I reached the conclusion that education should be through playing (TW4).

In addition, a teacher associated with Perspective C indicated that she used observation to assess children and planned their lessons based on students' needs. She (PTW3) explained "Last year, a new program was introduced in our school, and this program depends on observing the child. We have records we use to observe children during different activities, then we plan our next unit based on these observations".

Perspective D was distinguished by its emphasis on individualized activities as the most important practices, which could be classified as a hands-on practice that supported children's differences.

Many codes here appeared to support teachers' understanding of the importance of individual differences. A teacher who associated with Perspective D showed a greater understanding of individual differences, as she indicated:

> The most important thing for me at this stage is for the teacher to know the individual differences between the children. For example, some children, from my experience, can read words in the middle of the term. I did not ask them to read, but they learned the shape of the letters from writing them on the board. When we introduce the letter, we tell them a story in which most of the words contain this

> letter. Some children like to read words, which are without pictures. Children who like to read, I help them to improve this talent, and some children have not yet reached this stage in their development; these are just individual differences. If you observe children's development, you will find a huge development within a month (PTW3).

Another teacher who associated with Perspective C recognized the importance of individualization when she said,

> There are individual differences. I am now teaching the second level for the first time, and I have about a quarter of the class who can do the visual reading in a great way, and we have been in school for only two months from the beginning of the school year. They read their names and the names of their friends. When we introduced the vowels, we noticed a difference in their level of reading (PF3).

In addition, teachers in this perspective acknowledged the role of play and learning through play. Here a teacher explained,

> The child learns, and at the same time, he is enjoying himself and having fun. For example, the simplest method I used last week was to bring a pot and fill it with water and I put several things in it. Then, I asked the children to take out the things that start with a certain letter. One of the children told me that this game is very beautiful (PTW3).

The other teachers in this perspective also recognized the importance of play, as one (RNF1) indicated, “Now we apply education with entertainment, learning by playing”, and another (PF3) said, “So, it differs when I write on the blackboard or just present the letter. Through games, even their language skills develop. They learn many words and will never forget them because they learned them through playing.”

Furthermore, a teacher who was associated with Perspective D said that she did not know about this at the beginning of her teaching career, but then in her statement, she indicated that she had the knowledge. She added that did not know about it until after

practicing it. She also recognized the importance of a learning environment. Here she explained:

> The first year of teaching was very different from now after several years of experience. In the first year, we did not know anything. We were waiting for someone to train us. We were introduced to the children's environment, development and behavior. When I compare my knowledge in my first year of teaching with my knowledge now, I did not know anything. Even though I studied all these things that we are teaching, it differs from practice. Practice helps us a lot (PF3).

Last but not least, although teachers in each perspective had similar beliefs, some beliefs within the same perspective varied, which could be related to the influence of other factors. To illustrate, it was concluded across all perspectives that there were some differences between private and public preschool teachers. None of the private school teachers held an early childhood education degree, while all the public preschool teachers held an early childhood education degree and most of them had more professional development courses, which were clear evidence of the influence of teachers' knowledge on their beliefs and practices. Further discussion regarding the differences between public and private teachers is presented later, under the last theme, which discusses the influence of education policy and school administration.

Category 3: The Influence of Teachers' Own Early Literacy Experiences.

Experience is another way to form knowledge about a topic. It was evidenced that teachers' own literacy experience influenced their knowledge and beliefs towards emergent literacy skills and teaching practices. The impact of teachers' personal experiences is discussed with each perspective.

Perspective A was identified as a perspective that supports traditional teaching and the explicit teaching of literacy skills. Teachers associated with this perspective indicated that they liked the old curriculum, which they have experienced themselves and which reflected traditional teaching. Their experience of the old curriculum influenced their beliefs that it was the best way to teach. The following is a conversation between two teachers who associated with this perspective:

> PTH5: But our focus on reading and writing was right.
> RA4: Yes, we had a generation who were excellent in reading and writing.
> PTH5: Very cool. And I tell the Ministry of Education that the biggest mistake they made is the new language curriculum. The letters are not presented in order. I didn't understand it and I am old. Honestly, I am not satisfied with this education.
> RA4: Yes, the new curricula have many mistakes. They are full of mistakes.
> PTH5: Our days were very beautiful, we received information and we memorized it.
> RA4: Our days were beautiful, and because of that, the old generation's writing was perfect.

The previous conversation with these two teachers illustrated how their own early literacy experiences influenced their beliefs toward teaching literacy. However, a teacher associated with this perspective had a pleasant emergent literacy experience at home. The teacher showed that she recognized the important role of books on literacy development. Here she is talking about her literacy experience,

> My experience in learning to read and write was preceded by my experience in drawing and art. I was an artist from the age of five. I had an older brother in school. Although I was not in preschool, I did not enroll in kindergarten either. I consider that I studied preschool and kindergarten at home. The activities that children do in kindergarten I used to do at home, as in our house there was a small garden and a small hall. After drawing, reading, and writing, I would try to emulate and imitate my older brother when he wrote. I was trying to learn the letters out of jealousy. My father was trying to satisfy me, so he would give me some letters to challenge me (PTH5).

Later in the interview, she supported reading stories with children and using puppet theater, which revealed her beliefs in the importance of reading and play on children's literacy development. This belief was influenced by the teachers' own experience, as she indicated:

> When I was a child, I loved stories a lot, and my mother used to tell me a lot of stories. I think we are not focusing a lot on the library center; we don't give the library center much attention. There must be a greater effort from preschool supervisors to assign more time for reading. They should give more attention to puppet theater and stories. Children in the classroom visit the library center and they browse books and hope to understand the content of the stories, but they couldn't. They wish for someone to read the stories to them. I can see that in their eyes (PTH5).

Perspective B was identified as a perspective that supported the isolated directed teaching, and also underestimated the benefit of print awareness. During the first phase of the study, a teacher who associated with this perspective when she was sorting the cards, told the researcher,

> It is not important that the child turns the pages correctly. I remember when I was in preschool, I used to turn the pages the wrong way and the teacher used to get mad at me, and I hated that. It is not important that the child knows how to hold the book correctly (PF5).

The previous example indicated the influence of a teacher's personal literacy experiences on her beliefs. The teacher used her experience to aid her beliefs when she was arranging the practices from most important to most unimportant.

Also, the teacher indicated that having a bad experience in preschool influenced her way of dealing with children. When she was asked about her own experience she replied:

> If there was anything influential, I would remember it and use it. There was nothing influential, but I do remember things that caused me pain in preschool, and it is impossible for me to put my children in such pain (PF5).

The other two teachers who associated with this perspective indicated that they did not recall their emergent literacy experience. Having no emergent literacy experience that was worth remembering also influenced their beliefs, because they did not recognize the importance of emergent literacy skills such as print awareness and print motivation.

Perspective C was identified as a perspective that values contextual literacy teaching and emphases through books. A teacher who associated with this perspective explained that her mother provided her with a rich emergent literacy experience. She said,

> My mother noticed I like reading and writing so she provided stories, children's magazines, and notebooks for me. I used to look at the books and write without knowing exactly how to read letters, and then later I started to spell the letters and I learned that the letters together form the word. Now my reading is excellent, and my spelling was excellent during all my later school years (PTW4).

Here the teacher who had a rich literacy experience, which included a lot of books and reading, associated with Perspective C, which believed in the importance of using books for children's literacy development. Her literacy experience with her mother, having a lot of books and learning from stories, influenced her belief in the importance of using books.

Besides, the teacher recognized the essential role of parents in children's literacy development, as she noted,

> Before the child joins preschool, he must be getting ready at home. He can read with his parents and repeat the reading with them. But the idea that this letter with this letter forms a word and that words form a sentence is not important.

The previous example illustrated how the teacher's own experience with her parents influenced her belief in the essential role that parents play in their children's literacy development. She also added later in the interview that parents have an essential role in children's literacy development. She noted:

> Some parents are very careful and mindful about teaching their child. Even in school breaks they read with them and teach them the letters, so when the children come back to school, you find the child very focused.

Perspective D was identified as a perspective that supported hands-on and developmentally appropriate practices. A teacher associated with Perspective D showed that her own experience with developmentally inappropriate practices, which forced her to do a lot of writing, influenced her teaching beliefs and practices, because this perspective did not support writing but supported hands-on and developmentally appropriate practices. The teacher explained:

> I remember my mom if I did not write the same page in the book, she would erase it and ask me to write the whole page, so the teacher would be happy. It was beyond my developmental level to write a whole page or several pages, so I used to cry, and I hated writing which caused me a problem with writing (PTW3).

The teacher explained how her own experience influenced her beliefs and teaching practices. She said:

> When we were children, they asked us to write a lot, but they did not know that this is harmful to our muscle growth. Also, they did not take into account individual differences. The teacher used to enter the class and make all the students write the same thing. When I became a teacher, the first thing I did at the beginning of the year was at a parents' meeting. One of the things that I focused on was telling them that I would ask their children to write. For example, if I asked him to write four lines and he could only write one line, this will satisfy me.

> If he can write all the lines, this is also working for me. I told them the most important thing is that you don't delete what they write (PTW3).

In addition, this teacher referred to the importance of individual differences on many occasions during the interview. She indicated that, in her own experience, teachers did not care about individual differences. Therefore, having that negative experience with individual differences encouraged her to take into consideration individual differences.

Another teacher associated with Perspective D, which emphasized the importance of print awareness, print motivation and contextual literacy teaching, explained her own experience with reading in preschool:

> They used to begin with visual reading, just like now, we went back to visual reading. For a long time, we used to teach the alphabet in order, we did not teach visual reading, but with the standards now we are back again to what we studied when we were in preschool, which is to start with reading directly, and at the same time we teach the letters. Not teaching the letters first and then introducing visual reading later.

Theme Three: The Influence of Education Policy and School Administration

This theme serves to explain the variations as well the similarities arising between the four perspectives. Education policy is generally the principles and the policies initiated by the government for the educational domain, and also the rules and laws that manage the operation of the education system. During data analysis, which aimed to investigate what factors influence teachers' beliefs and practices, many codes and categories emerged that were related to curriculum, such as teaching assigned for reading, teacher-to-child ratio, and so on. All these codes and categories were related to principles

or rules provided by the school administration or people of a higher power who provide the general rules for education policy.

With that being said, two main categories emerged. The first category was the curriculum and teachers' understanding of that curriculum. The second category was the differences between public and private preschools. Each category is discussed in further detail in the following section.

Table 22

Examples of Codes: Theme three development from codes and categories

Codes	Category	Theme
Teachers answers about their beliefs and their practices	The new curriculum and teachers' understanding of it	The influence of education policy and school administration
The concept of play in the curriculum		
Preference for the old curriculum		
Unclear understanding of the curriculum		
Private preschool teachers care about parents' expectation more than public	Differences between public and private school	
Teaching letters is mandatory in private preschool		

Category 1: The New Curriculum and Teachers' Understanding of It. On many occasions, throughout all four interviews for the four different perspectives, when teachers were asked about their beliefs or opinions, their answers were about their

practices, which explained the influence of the curriculum on teachers' beliefs. To illustrate, teachers' practices were mostly based on the curriculum that they were following, which was provided by the administration. Teachers indicated that they follow a fixed curriculum, which is provided by the General Direction of Education in Madinah. The following discussion will provide evidence on how the curriculum and teachers' understanding of that curriculum influences their teaching beliefs and practices.

Before going further in the discussion, it is necessary to provide an idea as to the early childhood curriculum in Saudi Arabia. A detailed explanation of the early childhood curriculum in Saudi Arabia was provided in Chapter 2. In brief, the adapted curriculum was called a child-centered curriculum, which promoted self-learning. However, the curriculum does not have special instructions regarding early or emergent literacy.

Perspective A was identified as a perspective that supported traditional, directed teaching and which also prioritized alphabetic knowledge. As indicated previously, the early childhood curriculum in Saudi Arabia supports a child-centered approach. A conversation between two teachers illustrated their beliefs about the new curriculum. They said:

> PTH5: But our focus on reading and writing was right.
> RA4: Yes, we had a generation who are excellent in reading and writing.
> PTH5: Very cool. And I tell the Ministry of Education that the biggest mistake they made is the new language curriculum. The letters are not presented not in order. I didn't understand it and I am old. Honestly, I am not satisfied with this education.
> RA4: Yes, the new curricula have many mistakes. They are full of mistakes.
> PTH5: Our days were very beautiful. We received information and we memorized it.

> RA4: Our days were beautiful, and because of that, the old generation's writing was perfect.

Although the curriculum supported active and self-learning, the teachers here did not recognize the value of the curriculum, which could be an indication of their limited understanding of the curriculum and suggest that it might need more explanation.

Another example that illustrated teachers' unclear understanding about the curriculum was their inconsistent opinion about it. For example, a teacher (RA4) who, at the beginning of the interview, indicated that the old curriculum was better, later indicated: "But I think it is a beautiful curriculum. The child does not need to be given an enormous amount of information. But this information is beautiful". Also, the teacher used the word "I think" as if she was not very sure of her opinion about the curriculum.

Another factor that might influence teachers' practices related to the curriculum was the time assigned by reading, as one teacher (PTH5) indicated, "I think we are not focusing on the library center a lot; we don't give the library center much attention. There must be a greater effort from preschool supervisors to assign more time for reading. They should give more attention to puppet theater and stories".

Finally, it was concluded that teachers' understanding of education through play, which was one of the curriculum's main principles, was not clear enough, as a teacher who was associated with Perspective A indicated:

> I have noticed that most of the supervisors do not care about education. They are interested in the activities that you offer; they do not care that the child graduated from kindergarten knowing the letters and how to read and write. The teacher is the one who could be interested in that (RA4).

Saying that “they don’t care about education” indicates confusion and a misunderstanding of the new curriculum and the concept of learning through play. The teacher’s statement suggested that she separated play (the activities) and education.

The influence of teachers’ understanding of the new curriculum and education policy appears when a teacher who was associated with Perspective B, which was more supportive of traditional teaching, seemed to be confused about the curriculum. Even though the curriculum was provided by the general education in the region, a teacher associated with Perspective B indicated: “[The] curriculum is always changing, there is no fixed thing, every time the school administration introduces a new curriculum”.

Another example of how teachers’ unclear understanding of the new curriculum influenced them was illustrated by a teacher who was associated with Perspective B, which underestimated the value of print awareness. She talked about a new program that was recently introduced to most preschools. The program focused on teaching print awareness, but the teacher did not see the value in that program. She explained:

> There is a new program called Emerging Reading, which provides a specific method, but not all teachers apply this program, because, for me, it is not very important in kindergarten, it seemed unimportant, but it is acquiring a reputation. It started as not important, but now this program had a reputation and they have started to force the teachers to apply it. We have to bring the book and explain that it has a title and an author, and it has pictures. I explain the pictures and talk about the content of the book. I don't use this program a lot, only a few times when I am reading a story to them (PF5).

Even though this program was introduced to the school, the teacher did not understand it very well or understand the benefit of it. The teacher's language revealed confusion about it.

Another teacher talked about her daily schedule, which was decided by the school administration. She (TW4) explained:

> At the begging of the year, my schedule was to start with the meal, then center, and teaching was at the end. But I found it is better to start with teaching before mealtime and center time because I found that they are more focused. When teaching was after the center, the children used to complain a lot, and they feel tired and bored and they wanted to go home.

A teacher associated with Perspective C, which strongly supports children's differences, reported that observation was introduced in their school. Even the other teachers in the same perspective reported that this program was introduced in their school. The teacher (TW4) explained:

> Last year, a new program was introduced in our school, and this program depends on observing the child. We have records we use to observe children during different activities, and then we plan our next unit based on these observations: "what skills should we introduce for this child and that child?" It requires an effort from the teacher, but it is useful. For example, if I observed that this child cannot recognize the letter shape, then in the next unit I will focus with him on writing and recognizing the letter, so our planning for the next unit is based on our observation for the current unit.

Perspective D was identified as a perspective that supported hands-on activities. A teacher who was associated with Perspective D showed a good understanding of the development of education policy. She talked about the standards and indicated that she liked the new curriculum. She applied the concept of using play as a way of teaching.

Furthermore, a teacher who was associated with Perspective D, which placed a value on print awareness and showed an understanding of it, indicated that a program was introduced and applied in their school. The program was called *tajweed albeaa*, which means, improvement of the environment. Here are her exact words:

> Now, with the *tajweed albeaa* (improvement of the environment) they are writing everything's name on it, even when playing outside. And some children try to read, of course; it depends on the individual differences of children. But they know this is a word and they can read it (PTW3).

Category 2: Differences Between Public and Private School. It was concluded that there were some differences between teachers' beliefs about private school teachers and public preschool teachers. These differences between public and private teachers illustrated the influence of educational policy. Although both public and private preschools were under the supervision of the General Directorate of Education in Madinah, private preschool administrators had some freedom to modify and add to the curriculum.

A public preschool teacher indicated "teaching reading and writing is not mandatory, but if it happened, then it is related to the teacher and her effort", while the private school teacher said, "no, in our school it is mandatory, we have to teach them the letters." Then the public preschool teacher replied "it is forbidden in our school to force the child to write the letter. We provide them with appropriate books and tools, and it is his choice to write or not, but it is not allowed to force him."

Both teachers, in the previous example associated with Perspective B, supported the traditional and serious teaching method, but one of them was a public preschool teacher while the other was a private school teacher. However, the public preschool teacher indicated that she used to teach at a private preschool. She explained:

> I used to teach in private school, and I believe this is right, we teach children spelling and, when they finish kindergarten, they know how to spell and their literacy skills are very high. But what should we do? Because this is a preparation

> stage before going to school. I expect in the following year teaching reading and writing will be mandatory (PF3).

Here, the teacher's opinion was unclear about what would be better. At first, she indicated that it was better to teach the child how to spell. Then she appeared to support the mandatory teaching of reading and writing. Later again she supported the public preschool policy, which focused on not forcing the child to learn. For example, she mentioned later in the interview,

> One of the teachers in our school forced a child to write. Then, the next day his mother came, and she complained that the teacher does not have the right to do that with her son. And the mother was right to be upset.

The teacher here supported not forcing the child to write. This example clearly illustrated the influence of education policy. The teacher encountered two different policies and it was clear that both policies influenced her.

Another example illustrated the differences in the conversation between teacher PF3, who was a public preschool teacher, and teacher RA5, who was a private preschool teacher:

> PF3: Teaching reading and writing is not mandatory, but if it happened, then it is related to the teacher and her effort.
> RA5: No, in our school it is mandatory, we have to teach them the letters.

When the researcher was in the field to collect data, she had a conversation with the principal of a private school who said that she knows children in preschool should be learning through play, but parents want to see worksheets and want to see evidence of their children's learning, and because they pay money for that, we have to do what the parents want.

A private school teacher (RNF1) seemed to care about her benefit over the benefit of the child. For example, when there was having a conversation about dividing the students into two groups so that each child would have a chance to talk and participate, the private school teacher asked what if the children in her group were not good enough, because she worried about her rating from the supervisor. She later indicated that now the focus is more on the paper, not on what you are actually doing in the classroom. She explained:

> Now the focus has become more on paper, so the focus is not on the performance of the teacher, the focus is on the teacher's paper, and this is causing pressure for the teacher. The more requests for more papers, the more pressure on the teacher.

It is interesting to mention here that the principal of the school, along with four teachers who associated with this perspective, mentioned that

> Parents are paying us to teach their children, they want to see that their children are learning hard stuff and they are not just playing, and therefore we need to give parents what they want even if that means less playing for children.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will summarize the study's significant findings, followed by a discussion, conclusion, implication, and recommendation for future research, evidenced by the literature review and the study's findings.

The purpose of the current mixed methods study was to examine Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices, and to investigate what factors would have influenced the emergence of such beliefs. In particular, the study aimed to answer four questions:

1. What are Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices?
2. What are the emergent literacy skills and practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider most important for children's literacy development?
3. What are teachers' perceived factors contributing to their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and teaching practices?
4. Do perceived contributing factors differ among teachers with differing beliefs and practices, and if so, how?

The first phase of the study involved investigating the first two questions through Q methodology, followed by the second phase of the study, which aimed to investigate the

first two questions' results and answer the third question. The fourth question is the mixed methods question, which combines the first phase of the study and the second phase.

Summary of the Major Results

Research Questions One and Two

As the first two questions are related, the answers to both of them will be presented simultaneously. To answer the first, “What are Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices?", and the second question, "What are the emergent literacy skills and practices that preschool teachers in Saudi Arabia consider most important for children's literacy development?", Q methodology was used. Thirty participants participated in ranking 40 statements in a quasi-normal distribution that ranged from the most important to the most unimportant regarding their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices. Then their sorts were subjected to analysis using online software called Ken-Q Analysis. A 30 x 30 correlation matrix was generated. The correlation matrix was subjected to principal component analysis and then Varimax rotation.

The principal component analysis resulted in generating eight factors or components. Each factor represents a group of participants who share a similar view according to their Q sort. All of the factors have an eigenvalue greater than eight. However, other criteria such as the number of the significant loading in each factor have been used to determine which factors should be retained, which resulted in retaining four factors for Varimax rotation. The explained variance for the four rotated factors was: 16%, 14%, 8%, 11%, with a total of 49%.

Each factor represents a unique perspective toward emergent literacy skills and practices, which has been shared by the participants who loaded on that factor. Ten participants loaded significantly on Factor 1, 7 participants on Factor 2, 3 participants on Factor 3, and 5 participants on Factor 4. To define each perspective, factor arrays and the scrip sheet have been used. A factor array means merging all Q sorts which loaded significantly to produce a single Q sort that represents the perspective and can be subjected to interpretation (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Then for each factor array, the crib sheet was generated, which contains: (a) highest ranked statements, (b) statements that ranked higher in this factor than for other factors, (c) statements that ranked lower in this factor than other factors, and (d) lowest-ranked statements. In addition, distinguishing statements have been used to define each factor. What follows now is a brief explanation of each factor or perspective and the most important literacy skills identified by each perspective.

Perspective A. According to factor analysis and interpretation, the first perspective has been identified as "surface and out-of-context literacy teaching". Ten teachers associated with this perspective. It appears that this group of teachers believed in a simple literacy practice; activities such as identifying letters and their sounds or tracing letters. Most of these practices were out-of-context literacy practices. On the other hand, these teachers undervalued the more complex activities such as making a book, invented spelling, using dramatic play to support literacy, and writing in journals. Referring to many activities related to writing as unimportant supports the claim that the orientation of the teachers in this group is toward using simple and out-of-context activities. Whole-

class instruction here means that all children are involved in the same activity at the same time, and the teachers direct the activity.

Regarding the most important and the most unimportant emergent literacy practices and skills identified by this perspective, six out of the eight practices are related to letter knowledge. Four statements are categorized under alphabet knowledge, one under early writing but also under conveyed letter knowledge (practice tracing a letter). On the other hand, most of the unimportant practices identified by this perspective are related to print awareness and early writing.

Perspective B. This perspective was identified as oriented toward skill-based literacy teaching. Seven teachers were associated with this perspective. Teachers associated with this perspective were found to believe in teaching literacy skills in isolation. The highest-ranked statements, which are considered the most important, are related to a specific skill. On the other hand, statements that do not provide specific skills, such as rereading stories to children, have a low ranking. Furthermore, the three distinguishing statements that ranked higher than other factors all support the idea of teaching specific skills and isolation.

It was concluded that teachers associated with this perspective do not have specific opinions when it comes to classroom resources, as many of the statements in the middle (or "the neutral point") were related to classroom resources and environment, such as Statement 14, "Provide children with a variety of books for individual preferences", Statement 16 "Provide a literacy-enriched play environment," and Statement 15 "Give children the chance to choose what book they read."

Concerning the most important and most unimportant emergent literacy practices and skills identified by this perspective: five of the most important practices identified by this perspective were related to phonological awareness skills, which also include the more complex and advanced phonological awareness skills such as Statement 22 (Children practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g. "c-a-t "= cat)). On the other hand, none of the unimportant skills identified by this perspective were related to phonological awareness, while there were skills related to print awareness and print motivation.

Perspective C. This perspective was identified as a perspective that supports teaching literacy through direct teaching as well as contextual teaching, such as through reading. Three teachers were associated with this perspective. Perspective C was classified as a mixed perspective that focuses on teaching skills as well as being child-centered. This perspective believes in the importance of children's motivation toward print and reading. Teachers who associated with this perspective place a value on reading. To illustrate, many of the highest-ranked statements by this perspective were related to reading books and stories. A distinguishing statement for this perspective was Statement 2 (Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator), which suggests that this perspective valued books and reading. In addition, this perspective supports the previously mentioned pattern that emerged from analyzing the consensus statements, which is that teachers don't have an explicit opinion when it comes to classroom resources.

With regard to the most important and most unimportant emergent literacy practices and skills identified by this perspective, the eight most important practices

identified by this perspective include the five emergent literacy skills. The most important practices identified by this perspective emphasize the essential need for print awareness, as three of the statements that related to print awareness were distinguishing statements. The first three high-ranked distinguishing statements were Statement 34 (Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools), Statement 8 (Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left), and Statement 10 (Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages). The first statement is related to writing development as well as the classroom environment. The second two statements were related to print and book awareness, as well as promoting children's experiences with books.

Perspective D. The fourth and last perspective was identified as a perspective that supports teaching literacy through hands-on experiences with consideration of the role of the classroom environment. Five teachers associated themselves with this perspective, and they seemed to believe and value learning literacy through simple hands-on experiences, as well as by providing a rich learning classroom environment. Many of the most important practices identified by this perspective related to the classroom environment, such as Statement 34 (Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools). With regard to the most important skills identified by this perspective, this is the only factor that has two of the highest-ranked statements related to print awareness that were distinguishing statements. That being said, this perspective has been identified as supporting the importance of print awareness.

Similar beliefs among the four perspectives. Consensus statements are the statements that did not distinguish between any pairs of factors, and which aided in

defining a shared belief amongst all perspectives. For instance, participants universally agree that writing in journals is not a very important activity for preschool children. Many participants indicated during their sorts that this activity is not appropriate for preschool children but is more appropriate for older children who already know how to write.

An overarching conclusion was drawn from the consensus statements in that all teachers agree that writing in journals and writing postcards is not important in that both activities were related to advanced writing and could be classified as "hard" or "developmentally inappropriate practices for preschoolers".

Research Question Three

The third question aimed for a further understanding of the results of the first phase by investigating what factors would contribute to the development of teachers' beliefs on emergent literacy skills and teaching practices. Three main themes have emerged to explain the factors that influence teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and teaching practices. The following is a brief explanation for each theme.

The first theme is the common beliefs across all perspectives, which represent the influence of culture and society. This theme explains the factors which contributed to the similarities in teachers' beliefs across all four perspectives. It was concluded that all teachers across all perspectives share similar beliefs. This conclusion resulted in the development of the first theme, which represents the influence of society and its culture. Five main categories explain this theme.

The first and second category explains the common belief across all perspectives about emergent literacy skills. An example of this category is that teachers across all perspectives recognized the importance of letter knowledge more than other emergent literacy skills. For instance, across all perspectives, when teachers were asked about emergent literacy or early literacy, most of their responses were related to letter knowledge. On the other hand, many teachers across all four perspectives underestimated or did not recognize the benefits of early writing.

The third category represents the common belief about the teacher's essential role. Across all interviews, many codes revealed that teachers in all perspectives recognized their essential role in the classroom. Teachers recognized that they could make a difference, even though the curriculum is provided by the school administration. They agreed that they have an essential role in motivating children to learn.

The fourth category represents the common belief about the importance and the influence of the classroom environment. Teachers indicated that they need to change the books and add new books frequently. Teachers also indicated that they wrote the names of the students in the classroom and they wrote the names of the centers and toys. Another code related to the classroom environment is the number of children in the classroom. Many teachers referred to the number of children in the classroom and agreed that it causes challenges for them.

The fifth and last category is related to parents**.** In addition to the common agreement on the essential role of parents across all perspectives, parents are important members of society and are part of their culture, therefore it was appropriate for this category to be included under this theme. It was concluded that the teachers believe in the

influence of parents on children's learning. Two kinds of beliefs regarding the influence of parents have emerged. The first kind is the direct influence of parents on children's learning, such as by providing a literacy-rich environment at home; direct influence is when the parent teaches the child, or the child learns directly from the parent. The second kind is the influence of parents on teachers and their teaching practices, which will in turn influence children's learning.

The second theme is the influence of the teacher's background and understanding of emergent literacy and teaching practices. The second theme explains the influence of teachers' knowledge and background on their emergent literacy beliefs and teaching practices. Teachers' knowledge and background were represented in three main categories.

The first category is teachers' knowledge about emergent literacy. It was concluded that the teachers' conception of and knowledge about emergent literacy influenced their beliefs and teaching practices. To illustrate, although there was a general agreement on prioritizing letter knowledge across all perspectives, teachers' beliefs about other emergent literacy skills varied. One factor that was found to influence these variations was their knowledge about and background in emergent literacy.

The second category represented the influence of teachers' knowledge about children's learning and the role of play. Throughout the interviews, teachers have shown similarities and differences regarding their knowledge about children's learning techniques. The variation in teachers' understanding and knowledge, and how that influences their beliefs and practices, will be explained with regard to each perspective.

The third category represents the influence of teachers' personal early literacy experiences**.** Experience is another way to form knowledge about a topic. It was evidenced that teachers' own literacy experiences influenced their knowledge and beliefs towards emergent literacy skills and teaching practices. The impact of teachers' personal experiences will be discussed with each perspective.

The third and last theme represents the influence of education policy and school administration. This theme explains the factors which contributed to the similarities as well as the differences arising in teachers' beliefs across all four perspectives. Theme three represents education policy, as many codes and categories were related to the curriculum and principles or rules, which were provided by the school administration or people in positions of power. Two main categories were related to this theme.

The first category is the curriculum and teachers' understanding of that curriculum. On many occasions, throughout all four interviews for the four different perspectives, when teachers were asked about their beliefs or opinions, their answers were about their practices, which explains the influence of the curriculum on teachers' beliefs. To illustrate, teachers' practices were mostly based on the curriculum that they were following, which is provided by the administration. In fact, teachers indicated that they follow a fixed curriculum, which is provided by the General Directorate of Education in Madinah.

The second category is the difference between public and private preschools, which was evidenced in teachers' responses. This variation between public and private teachers illustrates the influence of educational policy. Although both public and private preschools are under the supervision of the General Directorate of Education in Madinah,

private preschool administrators have some freedom to modify and add to the curriculum. An example that verifies the differences between public and private schools is that of the seven participants associated with Perspective B, only one of them was a public preschool teacher, while the other six were private preschool teachers. Three out of the six teachers taught at the same private preschool.

Discussion

The current mixed methods study involved two phases. The first phase aimed to capture some of the existing Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices. The second phase of the study aimed to investigate what factors would have influenced the development of these beliefs. The following discussion presents the integration of the findings of the qualitative and quantitative data, and answers the mixed methods question: "Do perceived contributing factors differ among teachers with differing beliefs and practices, and if so, how?"

The answer to this question is both 'yes' and 'no' as three main themes have emerged to explain the perceived factors which teachers feel contribute to the development of their beliefs, whether they are similar or divergent. The first theme explains those factors which influence the similarities in teachers' beliefs across all perspectives. The second theme explains those factors which influence the variance arising between perspectives. The third theme explains those factors which influence the similarities as well as the differences amongst the four perspectives. Some evidence for the influence of each factor on the beliefs of each perspective will be provided.

Teachers' Perspectives Toward Emergent Literacy Skills and Practices and the Influence of Culture

Four perspectives of Saudi preschool teachers have been identified in the current study. These perspectives reveal some of their beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices. Teachers' beliefs and practices are an important issue faced by educators. The fact that preschoolers spend a significant amount of time with their teachers suggests that exploring teachers' beliefs and practices regarding emergent literacy is essential. Teachers' beliefs influence the classroom environment they create (Peña-López, 2009).

In fact, mounting evidence suggests that teachers hold theoretical beliefs about language learning and teaching and such beliefs frame their instructional practices (Davis & Wilson, 1999; Gebel & Schrier, 2002; Johnson, 1992; Richardson et al., 1991; Woods, 1996 as cited in Kuzborska, 2011). In the current study, it was shown that teachers' beliefs influence their practices, as a teacher associated with Perspective D suggested, "Everything comes back to the teacher, if you see that it is important, you will make an effort toward it" (PF3). That teacher's effort in teaching was influenced by her belief about how important it is. This also illustrates how teachers' beliefs are important and how these beliefs influence their practices and illustrates how the teacher herself believes in her active role in education. However, Algamdi's (2016) study of preschool teachers' beliefs in Saudi Arabia revealed that there was some inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices. Yet, the researcher explained that, in some cases, the inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices would be because of the administration's insufficient knowledge regarding the features of efficient early childhood programs.

The results of the current study reveal that teachers' beliefs are influenced by the culture of the society. This finding fits well with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which was chosen as a theoretical framework for this study. According to Vygotsky (1978), much essential learning by the child happens through social interaction with an expert tutor. Vygotsky recognized activity as a unique significant character for human development. He suggested that young children learn to talk and use language as a result of their interaction with adults or expert tutors and through engagement in the activity of making meaning (Vygotsky, 1978; Holzman, 1995; Karpov, 1995). The sociocultural theory underlines the essential role of mediation in early literacy development. A large body of research has highlighted the fact that teachers are the first mediator. Although other aspects such as the curriculum guide the teacher in their planning, the valuable role of the teachers cannot be denied (Scull, Nolan & Raban, 2013).

The influence of culture was evidenced in many ways. First, there was a general agreement on prioritizing letter knowledge over other emergent literacy skills. Statement 19 (children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters) was the only statement that was ranked very highly by the four groups—it was ranked 5, 5, 4, and 5, respectively. This was also evidenced in the teachers' responses during the interview. Most of the time, when teachers were asked about literacy, their first responses were about letters and learning letter sounds, which reveals that they prioritized letter knowledge over other skills. To illustrate, in Perspective C, which was identified as a perspective that recognized the importance of print motivation more than other perspectives, teachers' special attention to letter knowledge was evidenced in their responses. One of the positive distinguishing statements in Perspective C was Statement

30 (Introduce new letters), and four of the eight most important practices were related to letter knowledge. A teacher associated with perspective indicated, “the most important thing [for a preschooler] is knowing how to write his name and learn the letters” (RME3). Letter knowledge involves numerous aspects, including letter-name knowledge and letter-sound knowledge (Piasta et al., 2016). This conclusion is consistent with Al-Qaryouti and colleagues’ (2016) study findings, which suggested that preschool teachers in the Arabian Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, give high respect to children’s acquisition of letter knowledge in their literacy teaching practices.

The context of the study, Saudi Arabia, is known as the most culturally and religiously conservative county in the Middle East region (Al-Otaibi & Al-Swailm, 2002). The first establishment of education in Saudi Arabia, which is referred to as the *kuttab*, aimed to teach reading and writing, and the recitation of the Quran. This would explain the common culture amongst teachers to value letter knowledge.

Although letter knowledge has been identified by many studies as a strong predictor of the acquisition of reading and spelling later in school (Ehri & Sweet, 1991; Hammill, 2004; Leader, 2015; Muter, Hulme, Snowling & Taylor, 1998; Pullen & Justice, 2003; Schatschneider, Fletcher, Francis, Carlson & Foorman, 2004), it should not be the only measure of learning to read; other skills such as the function of print, understanding that print reveals meaning, phonological awareness, and invented writing have fundamental roles in early literacy development (Mason & Sinha, 1992).

This conclusion was witnessed in the current study, as there was general agreement in underestimating the benefit of early writing, as indicated by the consensus statements. Participants universally agreed that writing in journals is not a very important

activity for preschool children. For example, Statement 37 (Children write in journals) has a sort value of -5, -4, -5, and -5, and many participants indicated during their sorts that this activity is not appropriate for preschool children; it is more appropriate for older children who already know how to write. Furthermore, Statement 35 (Children write or receive letter postcards in class), had sort values of -2, -2, -3, and -3, and was also identified as an unimportant activity.

Such an underestimation of the value of early writing contradicts emergent literacy studies which show that allowing children to practice writing through inventive writing and inventive spelling reinforces other emergent literacy skills, such as alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness, as well as influencing later reading and writing (Aram & Biron, 2004; Bissex, 1980; Clay, 1979; Martins & Silva, 2006; Ouellette, Sénéchal & Haley, 2013; Rowe, 2017).

The undervaluing of early writing could be related to a common culture, as it was witnessed by all teachers across all perspectives. In fact, the researcher recorded in her diary that many teachers during the Q sorting in the first phase of the study indicated that writing is hard for preschoolers and so is more appropriate for older children. This belief could also be related to the nature of the Arabic language. For the purposes of illustration, orthography in Arabic has two forms, namely vowelized which occurs when the symbols (short vowels) are provided in the text and unvowelized, which arises when the symbols (short vowels) are not provided in the text (Taibah & Haynes, 2011). Another critical characteristic of Arabic orthography is the form of letters (characters) as many letters look alike. For instance, some letters are distinguished by one dot being positioned above

or below the letter (Elbeheri et al., 2011). Furthermore, for many letters, the form of the letter changes according to its position in the word (Taibah & Haynes, 2011).

Another factor that would influence the belief of undervaluing early writing is teacher knowledge which will be discussed later in this section.

Furthermore, regardless of which perspective a teacher belongs to in this study, there was a general agreement on the essential role of teachers. Teachers believed that they have an essential role in the classroom. A teacher (PTH5) said, "We use worksheets, but we do not use contextual education. However, a diligent teacher may apply contextual teaching such as teaching letters through reading stories", and another teacher indicated, "Everything comes back to the teacher. If you see that it is important, you will make an effort toward it". This illustrates how teachers' beliefs are important and how this belief influenced their practices, and how the teacher herself believes in her active role in education.

Norling's (2014) study finds that preschool teachers saw themselves as a role model and also believed that they should respect children's perspectives; they tried to engage and listen to children to guide them in the right direction. Furthermore, the results of McLachlan, Carvalho, de Lautour and Kumar's (2006) study evidenced that New Zealand's teachers were enthusiastic about literacy and believed that their role was to guide and facilitate children's learning; they believed that children develop literacy through exposure to oral and written texts and develop literacy through the experience of oral and written stimuli and interaction with others.

Another general agreement for all perspectives was their beliefs about the importance of the environment and how the environment influenced their teaching. For

instance, although Perspective A was identified as a perspective with a neutral opinion toward classroom resources, during the interview teachers agreed that the classroom environment is important and that providing rich literacy opportunities in the classroom environment is essential. In fact, children's literacy environment influences their motivation toward literacy as Baker, Scher, and Mackler (1997) indicated, showing that children who have access to a variety of books tend to spend time by themselves looking at books. In addition, there is evidence that early exposure to literacy is essential in children's development of literacy interests (Hume, Allan & Lonigan, 2016).

Finally, teachers agreed on the essential role of parents. Teachers' beliefs about parents' roles appeared in two kinds. The first kind was the direct influence of parents on children's learning, such as providing a literacy-rich home environment, as one teacher indicated, "[at] this [preschool] stage, sensory skills that children learn from observing their parents are important".

The role of parents in emergent literacy cannot be denied. Sonnenschein et al (1997) aimed to investigate the influence of parents' literacy beliefs on children's literacy development. Two main beliefs were identified. The first group of parents was identified as "entertainment-oriented", while the other group was identified as "skills-oriented". The entertainment group value reading books with their children as a way of entertaining them. Parents who support this perspective provide their children with storybooks and games that have printed materials. On the other hand, the skills-oriented parents convey a belief that literacy acquisition is a hard task and that children need to be taught directly through worksheets and studying flashcards. The result of the study indicated that children of the entertainment group were more advanced in their early literacy skills. The

study revealed that there is a consistency between parents' beliefs and the literacy experiences they provide for their children (Sonnenschein et al., 1997).

Another study sought to investigate the influence of parents' literacy beliefs on their children's literacy development. The results identified two groups of maternal beliefs. The first group was 'facilitative' mothers who believed in their active role in their children's literacy development. The other group, termed 'conventional' mothers, believed that school should have a more active role and be responsible for their children's literacy development. These findings indicated that the children of 'facilitative' mothers showed improved print knowledge and print motivation (Weigel, Martin & Bennett, 2006).

The second kind of belief regarding the influence of parents is about the influence of parents on the teachers themselves, as one teacher indicated, "when a parent is very careful about teaching her child, and she tells you that she is helping him at home, the teacher makes more effort with that child." Albaiz's (2009) study was conducted in Saudi Arabia and indicated that kindergarten principals noted the parents' beliefs about early childhood education and that these beliefs influenced the organization in reaching their goals concerning children's development.

Teachers' Beliefs and the Influence of Their Background

The findings of this study reveal that teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and practices are influenced by their background, which consists of their own personal experiences and their knowledge regarding emergent literacy. In agreement with this finding, Richardson (1996) suggested that teachers' beliefs regarding grammar instruction are

influenced by three different experiences, namely those of their personal experience, that of their schooling and their own formal knowledge. Several studies supported the notion that teachers' personal language experiences influence their beliefs and classroom practices (Hassan, 2013; Busch, 2010). As indicated previously, the first phase of the study, the Q method phase, resulted in identifying four perspectives of preschool teachers regarding emergent literacy skills and practices.

The identification of Perspective A and Perspective B aligns more with the skill-based direct teaching method, whereas the other two perspectives are closer in their beliefs to the emergent literacy perspective. In Perspective A, none of the most important practices identified by this perspective were related to print awareness, and more than one practice related to print awareness was identified as unimportant, while invented writing was identified amongst the most unimportant practices. Later in the interview, a teacher showed little understanding of early literacy, especially with regard to the emergent literacy perspective. A teacher associated with this perspective, which supports traditional teaching, confessed that they don't have enough knowledge and they needed to learn more. She explained:

> They give us some courses, but not with regard to teaching literacy. For example, the supervisor came to observe my teaching, and she told me that I treat children very well. Because I focus a lot on dealing with children, the way I deal with children is very important to me, but her criticism for me was that I should use a certain strategy when teaching them how to draw a letter. But they never told us about these strategies. There are no courses on how to teach a child to read and write (PTH5).

The same conclusion applies to Perspective B, as it appeared in the first phase of the study that they did not recognize the benefit of print awareness or print motivation. A teacher belonging to Perspective B explained that she did not see any benefit in "the

emergent literacy program", which could be evidence of her lack of knowledge about emergent literacy. Another teacher explained, "I used to teach in private school, and I believe this is correct, we teach children spelling, [so that when] they finish kindergarten, they know how to spell and their literacy skills are very high" (PF3). Another teacher also said: "the idea that the letters together form a word and that words form a sentence is not important" (PTW4).

On the other hand, the identification of the other two perspectives, Perspective C and Perspective D, would fit closely with the emergent literacy perspective, which stressed the essential role of print awareness and print motivation. Unlike Perspective A and Perspective B, many of the most important practices identified by these two perspectives were related to print awareness and print motivation. Statement 9 (Read to children every day) and Statement 15 (Give children the chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them) were two of the high-ranked statements, which are also distinguishing statements identified by Perspective C; these statements support contextual and implicit teaching of literacy. Teachers who associated with this perspective were found to have a good knowledge and understanding of emergent literacy, as a teacher associated with this perspective said:

> Through reading, children will start to comprehend that letters form words, and they have meanings. When we want to teach letter positions at the beginning of the word, at the middle, and at the end, we have to read these words, so they can comprehend what the letters' positions mean (RME3).

The emergent literacy perspective emphasizes the importance of reading for children's literacy development. Van Kleeck and Schuele (2010) describes the emergent literacy perspective as follows:

> One general conclusion of this body of work suggests that, in their everyday informal interactions with print used by adults in their worlds, in the context of sharing books with adults, and in their own explorations with writing, children become aware first and foremost that print is meaningful and useful. These attitudes and beliefs lay important foundations for children's eventual transition to conventional reading and writing (p. 344).

In addition, Perspective C was classified as supporting explicit teaching practices. A teacher who associated with this perspective shows an understanding of the influence of contextual teaching, which is a main principle of the emergent literacy perspective. She explained:

> Through reading, children will start to comprehend that letters form words, and they have meanings. When we want to teach letter positions at the beginning of the word, at the middle, and at the end, we have to read these words, so they can comprehend what the letters' positions mean (RME3).

Reading is a great way to promote print awareness, as in their 2012 study, Piasta et al investigated the influence of increasing four-year-old children's knowledge of print during shared reading. The results showed that children's print knowledge in the experimental group was higher than in the control group. In addition, the results showed a positive relationship between print knowledge and later literacy skills (reading, spelling, comprehension).

Even though reading has many benefits for children's literacy development and is considered one of the most important literacy practices, there is an obvious gap in Saudi literature regarding reading strategies and their influence on children's literacy development (Islam & Eltilib, 2020). An effort to bridge that gap was done by Islam and Eltilib's 2020 study, which aimed to investigate the influence of reading aloud for first graders in Saudi Arabia. The results of their study revealed that the group that received

more interactive reading strategies had “higher vocabulary retention and better lexical analysis and listening skills than the traditional reading group” (Islam & Eltilib, 2020, p. 14).

The conclusion of the current study about teachers’ background knowledge was consistent with Alanazi’s (2018) study, which was conducted in Saudi Arabia. The study aimed to investigate the use of the reading aloud strategy in preschools and kindergarten. One of the findings of the study indicated that the main reason for teachers not using the reading aloud strategy is their lack of knowledge about how to implement the strategy effectively.

The relationship arising between knowledge and beliefs was explained by Erkmen (2010) when the study argued that one of the reasons for the inconsistency arising between beliefs and teaching behavior is that, "The teachers may not have sufficient knowledge and skills to implement the teaching method that they believe would be effective" (Erkmen, 2010, p. 33). The findings of Aljadidi's (2012) study, which was conducted in Saudi Arabia, suggested that students’ teachers' beliefs and their knowledge were closely related.

Furthermore, the current study found that teachers’ understanding of play and its influence on early literacy development impacted their beliefs on emergent literacy. Emergent literacy is defined as a child-centered perspective (Morrow & Dougherty, 2011), embedded in the idea that children learn best through natural exploration, play-based and developmentally appropriate practices (van Kleeck & Schuele, 2010).

Perspective A was identified during the first phase of the study as a perspective that supported out-of-context practices. The findings of the second phase indicated that

teachers associated with this perspective separated between play and education, as one teacher indicated: “Education through play is required. I do not deny that learning letters is important, but play is also important” (PTH5).

Similarly, Perspective B was categorized as a skill-based approach that supported direct isolated teaching, and teachers who associated with this perspective have not recognized the role of play-based and contextual literacy practice. A teacher associated with Perspective B strongly supported the isolated teaching of skills, which is the opposite of contextual and play-based teaching. She indicated:

> Children need to learn step by step, teaching should be gradual, when we teach each skill separately, they are more likely to stay in the child’s mind. When I taught them the letter “ba”, I taught them how to write it, and I showed them pictures of the letter, and then they use their body to write the letter, so the focus here was only on one letter, and they memorized it very well (PF5).

On the other hand, teachers who associated with Perspective C and Perspective D show more understanding and appreciation towards contextual teaching, such as teaching literacy through reading and play. In fact, during the first phase of the study, Perspective C was identified as a perspective that believes in a child-centered approach and supports contextual teaching practices, as many of the practices identified as most important were related to books. Later, in the second phase of the study, a teacher associated with this perspective recognized the benefit of contextual teaching through reading, as she (RME3) explained, "I am against letting the child write words [when] he does not know what they mean. Through reading, children will start to comprehend that letters form words, and they have meanings”. Another teacher associated with Perspective C indicated, “It is different when the child writes the letter on the sand or writes it on paper. Children enjoy

coloring their letters and playing. Teaching through play allows the child to comprehend more than teaching in a serious way".

Furthermore, Perspective D was distinguished in the first phase of the study by its emphasis on the importance of hands-on and individualized activities. Then, later during the interview in the second phase of the study, teachers who associated with Perspective D showed greater knowledge and understanding of hands-on practices that supported children's individual differences, as one teacher explained:

> The most important thing for me at this stage is for the teacher to know the individual differences between children. For example, some children, from my experience, can read words in the middle of the term, and I did not ask them to read, but they learned the shape of the letters from writing it on the board. When we introduce the letter, we tell them a story in which most of its words contain this letter. Some children like to read words, which are without pictures. Children who like to read, I help them to improve this talent, and some children have not reached this stage yet in their development; these are just individual differences.

The above examples illustrate how the teachers' knowledge and understanding of play and hands-on experiences influences their beliefs about emergent literacy. Large numbers of studies into teachers' beliefs consider teachers' knowledge. Wilson and Cooney (2002) highlighted that knowledge and beliefs are strongly connected and that they both impact teaching quality. However, research on the influence of background knowledge and beliefs is inconsistent. For instance, Smith and Shepard (1988) concluded that teachers' literacy beliefs were not predictable based on their education. On the contrary, many studies suggested that there might be some connection between teachers' knowledge and their beliefs (Burgess, Lundgren, Lloyd, & Pianta, 2001; Hindman & Wasik, 2008)

Although in the current study, teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy skills varied and some of these variations could be explained in terms of teachers' knowledge

and their understanding of emergent literacy skills, the teachers' background education did not appear to have a significant influence on their beliefs as around half of them held a degree in early childhood education. Twenty-five teachers were interviewed as regards their views on four specific perspectives. Seventeen of these teachers were associated with perspectives A and B which were subsequently identified as skills-based. This finding suggests that the majority of teachers lack any detailed knowledge of emergent literacy skills and practices.

Many studies of early literacy theories acknowledged the influence of early writing. For instance, Morrow and Dougherty (2011) stated, "emergent literacy acknowledges a child's scribble marks on a page as rudimentary writing, even if not one letter is discernible." (p. 7). However, the findings indicated that most teachers in the current study did not recognize the value of early writing. Indeed, the teachers lacked any depth of knowledge regarding early writing. One of the researcher's notes in memo writing was that many teachers did not have the knowledge about invented writing or invented spelling. Another teacher indicated that writing developed after reading, which contradicts the emergent literacy view, which in turn suggests that reading and writing develop simultaneously as a result of young children's experiences with oral and written language (Sulzby & Teale, 1999; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982)

This finding indicates the teachers' lack of knowledge background about emergent literacy skills in general and early writing as a part of emergent literacy in particular. Similar findings were witnessed in Al-Othman's (2017) study which suggested that teachers' beliefs diverge from that of the applied curriculum due to their lack of understating of the curriculum and its theoretical principles. Also, Alanazi's (2018) study

reported that the main reason for teachers not using the reading aloud strategy is their lack of knowledge about how to implement it effectively.

It also was evidenced in the current study that teachers' backgrounds are influenced by their own literacy experience, which in turn influences their beliefs on teaching literacy. A teacher associated with Perspective A supported traditional teaching and explained the curriculum she studied when she was a student. She used her own literacy experience to form her knowledge. Perspective B was identified as a perspective that supported isolated directed teaching and underestimated the benefit of print awareness. During the first phase of the study, a teacher who associated with this perspective, when she was sorting the cards, told the researcher, "it is not important that the child turns the pages correctly, I remember when I was in preschool, I used to turn the pages wrong and the teacher got mad at me, and I hated that; it is not important that the child knows how to hold the book correctly" (PF5).

On the other hand, Perspective C was identified as a perspective that values contextual literacy teaching and an emphasis on books. A teacher associated with this perspective explained that her mother provided her with a rich emergent literacy experience. She said,

> My mother noticed I like reading and writing so she provided stories, children's magazines and notebooks for me. I used to look at the books and write without knowing exactly how to read letters, and then later I started to spell the letters and I learned that the letters together form the word. Now my reading is excellent, and my spelling was excellent during all my school years later (PTW4).

In addition, Perspective D was identified as a perspective that supports hands-on and individualizing practices. A teacher associated with Perspective D showed that her own negative experience with early witting influenced her teaching beliefs and practices, as

this perspective does not support writing and instead supports hands-on and developmentally appropriate practices.

Both of the above-mentioned examples illustrate how teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy are influenced by their own emergent literacy experience, which also influences their beliefs about emergent literacy practices. Hospers (1967) suggested that humans gain knowledge through multiple resources, which include sense experiences. Brannen, Mooney and Statham's (2009) found that childcare workers' memories, whether positive or negative, influenced their judgment at work, and they are usually derived from their childhood experiences. In addition, Horsley and Penn (2014) aimed to investigate the influence of our memories and experiences on our understanding of early childhood education and the practices of children. They concluded, "Childhood memories appear to have both influenced students' decisions to study in the field of early childhood and their everyday work with children in definable and diverse ways" (p. 178).

Teachers Beliefs and the Influence of Educational Policy and School Administrations

The findings of the current study suggested that education policy and school administration influenced teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy beliefs and practices. Education policy is generally referred to as the principles and policies initiated by the government with regard to the educational domain, and the rules and laws that manage the operation of the education system. In the current study, the influence of education policy is presented through a) the influence of the curriculum and teachers' understanding of that curriculum, and b) the differences between public and private preschools. Kang

and Wallace (2005) indicated that a teacher might negotiate their beliefs as they encounter new policy standards. In a study of a science teacher, the teacher redefined scientific knowledge into "real science and school science"; according to this teacher, real science is changing, experimental science, while school science is unchanging, fact-based science. In this case, the school context directed the teacher to renegotiate her beliefs about knowledge, which justified traditional teaching practices.

The influence of education policy appears in the influence of the curriculum. In fact, when teachers were asked about their beliefs or opinions, their answers were about their practices, which explained the influence of the curriculum on teachers' beliefs. Most teachers' practices were based on the curriculum, which was provided by the General Directorate of Education in Madinah. The curriculum adopted was called a child-centered curriculum, which promotes self-learning. However, the curriculum does not have special instructions regarding early or emergent literacy. In fact, although the Self- Learning curriculum has some characteristics of the child-center approach, Al-Othman, et al. (2015) suggested that literacy and language development presented in the Self-Learning Curriculum from a maturation's view which depends on the reading-readiness approach (Al-Othman, Gregory, Jessel, & Khalil, 2015).

Perspective A was identified in the first phase of the study as a perspective that supported traditional directed teaching. The influence of teachers' understanding of the curriculum appears in this perspective. Teachers in the second phase of the study showed their disregard for the curriculum, as one teacher (PTH5) said, "I tell the Ministry of Education that the biggest mistake they made is the new language curriculum. The letters

are not presented in order. I didn't understand it and I am old. Honestly, I am not satisfied with this education.” Other teachers within the same perspective also agreed with her.

Likewise, Perspective B was identified as a skill-based perspective that supported the traditional direct-instruction method of teaching. Teachers in this perspective showed confusion regarding the curriculum; even though the curriculum was provided by the general education authorities in the region, a teacher associated with Perspective B indicated, "[The] curriculum is always changing, there is no fixed thing, every time the school administration introduces new curriculum”. Another teacher associated with Perspective B, which underestimates the value of print awareness, talked about a new program that was introduced to most preschools recently. The program focused on teaching print awareness, but the teacher did not see the value in that program. She explained:

> There is a new program called Emerging Reading, it provides a specific method, [but] not all teachers apply this program, because for me it is not very important in kindergarten. It seemed unimportant, but it is acquiring a reputation. It started as unimportant but now this program has a reputation, and they are starting to force teachers to apply it. We have to bring the book and explain that it has a title and an author, and it has pictures. I explain the pictures and talk about the content of the book. I don't use this program a lot, only a few times when I am reading a story to them (PF5).

Even though this program was introduced to the school, the teacher did not understand its benefits very well. The teacher's language revealed confusion about it. The influence of teachers' knowledge and understating was evidenced in Alanazi's (2018) study. The study aimed to investigate the factors that influence teachers’ use of reading aloud in kindergarten. The findings revealed that the first reason for not using the strategy was that teachers lack knowledge on how to read aloud effectively.

The findings of Al-Othman's (2017) study suggested that teachers' beliefs diverge from the applied curriculum, which could be due to their lack of understating of the curriculum and its theoretical principles. Gahwaji (2006) indicated a conflict between the Self-Learning Curriculum, which is based on western theories, and the practical implementation in Saudi preschools.

On the other hand, teachers associated with Perspective C, which strongly supports children's differences, indicated that observation was introduced in their school, and they used observation to plan their lessons. Teachers showed an understanding of the new program, which affected her beliefs on the importance of children's differences and individualizing practices.

Likewise, Perspective D was identified as a perspective that supported hands-on activities, and a teacher who was associated with Perspective D showed a good understanding of the development of education policy. She talked about the standards and indicated that she liked the new curriculum. She also applied play-based teaching. In addition, Perspective D was identified as a perspective that recognizes the value of print awareness and recognizes the role of the environment. A teacher associated with this perspective indicated that there was a program introduced in their school which focused on improving the classroom environment. Introducing this program allowed the teacher to develop a belief that aligns with the emergent literacy perspective, as the literacy environment is strongly related to the emergent literacy perspective. To illustrate, children’s literacy environments influence their motivation toward literacy; children who have access to a variety of books tend to spend time by themselves looking at books (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997).

Last but not least, in the current study, the influence of the school on teachers' beliefs appears in the differences between public and private schools, which was one of the major findings in the two phases of the study. Despite the fact that both public and private preschools are under the supervision of the General Directorate of Education in Madinah, preschool administrators have some freedom to modify and add to the curriculum.

A teacher associated with Perspective B, which supports skill-based direct instruction, indicated that she used to teach in a private preschool and that she supported their method of teaching literacy, which is a skill-based method. She (PF3) said, "I used to teach in private school, and I believe this is right, we teach children spelling, and, when they finish kindergarten, they know how to spell, and their literacy skills are very high." However, on another occasion during the interview, she supported the emergent literacy perspective and showed some understanding of it. This example clearly illustrates the influence of education policy, as this teacher has encountered two different policies. Both policies would have influenced her belief, and thus she holds two different beliefs.

Another example that illustrates the differences between public and private preschool teachers is the parents' influence on these teachers. Many private school teachers agreed that parents' expectations would influence them. Teachers in private schools care about parents' satisfaction. For example, four teachers associated with Perspective B were private preschool teachers, and they teach at the same school. The principal of that school mentioned, "parents are paying us to teach their children, and they want to see that their children are learning, not just playing, and therefore we need to give parents what they want even if that means less playing for children". The differences

between public and private preschool teachers and their relation to the role of parents leads us back to the influence of society and culture.

Finally, teachers' similar and different beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices were influenced by multiple factors. Fives and Buehl (2016) indicated that "Teachers' beliefs exist in a complex system and are enacted in the complex settings of ever-changing classrooms" (p. 119). With that being said, this leads us to another factor, which is the influence of society and the culture of that society.

The above discussion provides examples of how each factor influences teachers' beliefs. However, the influence of each factor cannot be separated from other factors. It was evident in the current study that these factors work as a whole to influence teachers' beliefs and practices toward emergent literacy. It was also concluded from data analysis that the degree of influence of each factor would vary from one teacher to another. To clarify, a teacher who has a positive emergent literacy experience supports the idea of providing a rich literacy experience. For some teachers, their own experience would have more influence on their beliefs than other factors such as the policy. In contrast, for other teachers, other factors such as policy and society have more influence on their beliefs. This could also explain why some teachers with different background knowledge, experience, or school policy share the same perspective.

Another example that illustrates the interaction between factors is when a teacher's knowledge and experience work together to influence her belief; as one teacher indicated,

> I remember my mom, if I did not write the same page in the book, she would erase it and ask me to write the whole page, so the teacher would be happy. It was

> beyond my developmental level to write a whole page or several pages, so I used to cry, and I hated writing, which caused me a problem with writing (PTW3).

This teacher experienced developmentally inappropriate literacy practices and she appears to have some knowledge about developmentally appropriate practice, so both factors work together to influence her belief that forcing the child to write is not a good practice. Another teacher who had a positive personal emergent literacy experience, but does not have perfect knowledge about emergent literacy, did not show a perfect understanding of emergent literacy, but she had a good emergent literacy experience, and that experience would have more impact on her beliefs toward emergent literacy. This could explain why some teachers who have different background knowledge, experience, or school policy share the same perspective.

A similar conclusion was drawn in Al-Othman's (2017) study. In the study, a new curriculum was introduced which supports the implicit teaching of literacy such as teaching literacy through play. However, some teachers' beliefs were against the curriculum; they support direct teaching of literacy skills. The researcher suggested that an explanation for this situation is that these teachers form their beliefs from previous experience and knowledge.

In summary, the three main themes explaining which factors influence teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy and practices were culture, teachers' background knowledge, and educational policy. A similar conclusion was revealed by Aljadidi's (2012) study which suggested that, although students' teachers' beliefs were shaped mainly from their knowledge, many factors impacted their training including cultural context, society, and national policy.

Conclusion and Implications

1. Four perspectives were identified in the current study. Although these four predictive factors vary in their beliefs about emergent literacy, the study's findings revealed that these four perspectives share similar beliefs. Having such similar beliefs can be considered evidence of the influence of culture. Thus, a recommendation here for people who work in the higher education sector is to raise society's awareness about emergent literacy's essence by implementing an awareness campaign.

2. In early childhood education, many theories explain early literacy development. However, there are two main perspectives that other perspectives would fit into. These two perspectives are the skills-based perspective and the emergent literacy perspective. The skill-based perspective advocates an explicit systemic approach to teaching literacy through direct instruction (Crawford, 1995, McMahon et al., 1998). On the other hand, the emergent literacy perspective supports a child-centered play-based meaning-making approach (Clay, 1979). Although the current study identified four perspectives, the first two would fit within the skills-based perspective, and the other two would be more closely aligned with the emergent literacy perspective. Of the twenty-five teachers associated with the four perspectives identified within this study; seventeen associated with perspectives A and B which were identified as skills-based perspectives. This finding suggests that the majority of teachers lack the prerequisite knowledge to understand emergent literacy skills and practices. Further, although around half of the participants hold a background knowledge in early childhood education, they still revolved around the skills-based approach which suggests that the teachers' education

program needs to be improved to inform teachers of the emergent literacy perspective which places value on print awareness and early writing.

3. One of the main findings of the study is that the curriculum influences teachers' beliefs. Although the self-learning curriculum, which is applied across most preschools in Saudi Arabia, is a child-centered curriculum, it nonetheless lacks the principles of early literacy and emergent literacy skills. That being said, the study recommends applying a balanced, comprehensive literacy program that includes the five emergent literacy skills that have been investigated in this study (Head Start, 2000; IRA & NAEYC, 1998).

Morrow and Dougherty (2011) explained a comprehensive literacy model based on documents such as the *International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children entitled Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices (1998*), and *Literacy Development in the Preschool Years (2005).* They explained:

> These documents suggest that no single method or single combination of methods can successfully teach all children to read. Teachers must know the children they teach from a social, emotional, physical, and intellectual perspective. They also must know about the many methods for reading and writing instruction. Only then can they develop a comprehensive plan for teaching reading to meet individual (Morrow & Dougherty, 2011, p. 9).

4. One of the major findings of the study was the teachers' undervaluation of early writing which was found to arise due to their lack of its influence on literacy development. This finding shows that there is an urgent need for further professional development and teacher training courses related to early writing to help teachers to consider the value of "scribbling" and its role in the development of children's literacy. According to Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982), emergent literacy recognizes children's

scribbles as actual literacy behaviors and understands the essential influence of these behaviors on children's literacy development.

5. The current study concluded that teachers' knowledge and background regarding literacy influence their beliefs. A teacher indicated that they do not have any training in teaching literacy strategies. This teacher was associated with Perspective A, which supports teaching using the traditional method. Thus, professional development for teachers, especially on teaching literacy, would help them to gain more knowledge and modify their beliefs to fit the emergent literacy perspective.

6. Another finding in the study which supports the need for further professional development in emergent literacy is that the professional courses which the teachers who participated in the study actually attended failed to differentiate their beliefs in relation to emergent literacy, as all the teachers indicated that they had not enrolled in any course related to emergent or early literacy.

7. The finding of the study reveals the essential role of educational policy. Many teachers complain about a large number of students and not giving priority to the library. One teacher (PF5) indicated, "We need to focus more on the library and devote more time for reading to preschoolers"; another teacher (PTH5) noted, "the reading center is disregarded." Thus, a recommendation here for school administrations and people who work in the education sector is to provide a rich literacy environment and specific time for reading in the daily schedule.

8. Teachers in the current study recognized parents' influence; parents have an essential role in emergent literacy. Sonnenschein et al. (1997) suggested that parents' early literacy beliefs influenced the nature of the activities they provide for their children. The activities

they provide for their children influence children's emergent literacy growth. Also, Kelly (2010) argued that the misalignment of home and school literacy beliefs and practices would influence children's literacy development negatively. Thus, implementing a program to involve and educate parents would be very beneficial.

9. Although the current study has not aimed to investigate the consistency between teachers' beliefs and actual classroom practices, the findings reveal that teachers always referred to their practices when they were asked about their beliefs, which explains the influence of teachers' beliefs on their practices. That said, teachers need to have an opportunity to reflect and become aware of the influence of their beliefs as they need to evaluate whether their beliefs support or hinder their teaching practices. It is essential to understand that it takes time and effort to change or modify a teachers' beliefs because they arise within a complex system. Thus, teachers need assistance to recognize their beliefs and the intercorrelation between their beliefs, practices, and context (Fives & Buehl, 2016). Gregoire (2003) indicated that "The relationship between subject-matter beliefs and practice is a complex one because, without significant changes in subject-matter beliefs, maintaining radically new ways of instruction is almost impossible" (p. 149).

Recommendation for Future Research

1. The results of the study revealed the essential role of parents in their influence on teachers and children. A study could be conducted to investigate parents' beliefs about emergent literacy.

2. Following the previous recommendation regarding parents' beliefs, another comparison study could be conducted to compare teachers' beliefs with parents' beliefs.

3. The current study did not investigate the consistency of teachers' beliefs about emergent literacy skills and their actual practices in the classroom. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct a classroom observation to investigate this matter.

4. There is a need for more research in the fields of early literacy in Saudi Arabia. The majority of the studies regarding early literacy were conducted in a western context with English and other languages.

5. Although the Arabic language is alphabetic, it is a highly diglossic language (meaning the spoken language is very different from written language), so even if the child talks Arabic, he/she might not understand the written language (Standard Arabic Language). Thus, a study to investigate the influence of this phenomenon on children's emergent literacy development in Saudi Arabia would help further to understand emergent literacy skills practices in Saudi Arabia.

6. The era of technology and globalization has resulted in cultural and linguistic diversity (Rowe, 2013). In particular, in most Arabic countries including Saudi Arabia, English, as it is a dominant language globally, is the second language and has been used widely in many sectors. Many families speak and read English children's books with their children. Children watch education videos that are in English. A study could be conducted to investigate the influence of English language dominance on children's emergent literacy development in Saudi Arabia.

7. The results of the study revealed that there are differences between private preschool teachers and public preschool teachers. A future study could be conducted to investigate the reasons behind this disparity.
8. The current study was conducted in a specific region, Medina. Additional studies could be conducted in other cities or regions in Saudi Arabia.

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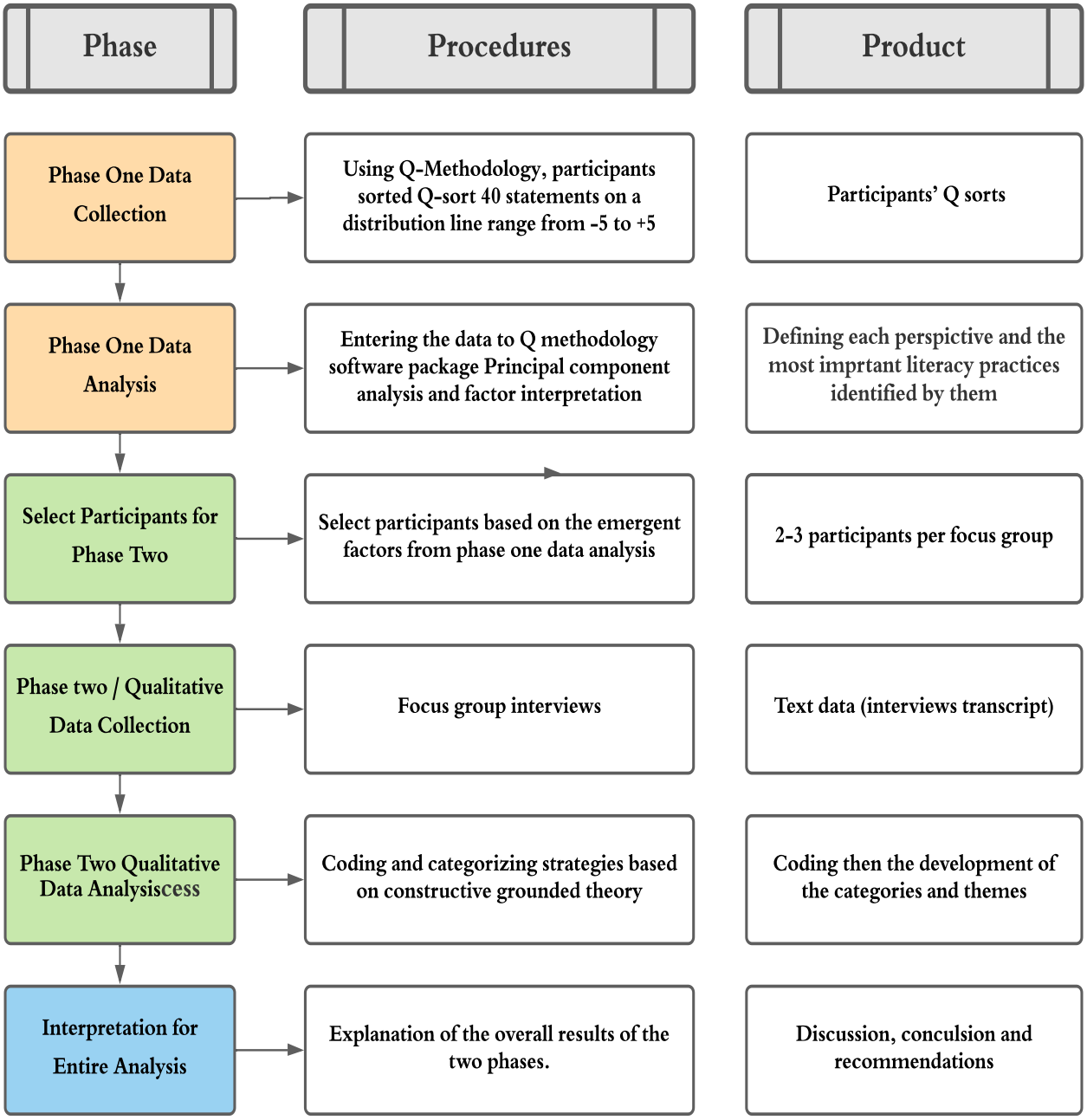
APPENDIX A

VISUAL MODEL FOR MIXED METHODS PROCEDURES

(SEQUENTIAL EXPLANATORY MIXED METHODS DESIGN)


Phase
Procedures
Product
Phase One Data Collection
Using Q-Methodology, participants sorted Q-sort 40 statements on a distribution line range from -5 to +5
Participants' Q sorts
Phase One Data Analysis
Entering the data to Q methodology software package Principal component analysis and factor interpretation
Defining each perspictive and the most imprtant literacy practices identified by them
Select Participants for Phase Two
Select participants based on the emergent factors from phase one data analysis
2-3 participants per focus group
Phase two / Qualitative Data Collection
Focus group interviews
Text data (interviews transcript)
Phase Two Qualitative Data Analysiscess
Coding and categorizing strategies based on constructive grounded theory
Coding then the development of the categories and themes
Interpretation for Entire Analysis
Explanation of the overall results of the two phases.
Discussion, conculsion and recommendations

APPENDIX B

THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN USE APPROVAL FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM
Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use

470 Administration Building
701 20th Street South
Birmingham, AL 35294-0104
205.934.3789 | Fax 205.934.1301 |
irb@uab.edu

APPROVAL LETTER

TO: Hafiz, Fatimah H

FROM: University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board
Federalwide Assurance # FWA00005960
IORG Registration # IRB00000196 (IRB 01)
IORG Registration # IRB00000726 (IRB 02)

DATE: 11-Mar-2019

RE: IRB-300002725
Saudi Arabian Preschool Teacher's Beliefs Toward Emergent Literacy Skills and Practices

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The IRB reviewed and approved the Initial Application submitted on 05-Mar-2019 for the above referenced project. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Type of Review: Exempt
Exempt Categories: 1
Determination: Exempt
Approval Date: 11-Mar-2019
Approval Period: No Continuing Review

Documents Included in Review:

- recruitmentcomms(P2Arabic).190303
- othermisc(PrincipalEnglish).clean.190303.docx
- datacollection(demogrphic).190303.docx
- recruitmentcomms(P2English).190303
- recruitmentcomms(P1English).190303
- recruitmentcomms(P1Arabic).190303
- othermisc(PrincipalArabic).190303
- infosheet(arabic).190303
- surveyitems(English.Arabic).190303.docx
- exempt.clean.190303
- othermisc(scoresheet).190303
- datacollection(distrubitionsort).190303.docx
- infosheet(english).clean.190303

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: SAUDI ARABIAN PRESCHOOL TEACHER'S BELIEFS TOWARD EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS AND PRACTICES

IRB Protocol:

Principal Investigator: Fatimah Hafiz, doctoral student

Explanation of Procedures:

You are being invited to take part in a research study regarding your beliefs as a preschool teacher. The purpose of this study is to learn more about Saudi preschool teachers' beliefs toward the importance of emergent literacy skills and practices on children's literacy development. You have been selected because as preschool teachers you will be able to provide valuable information regarding your teaching experiences and pedagogical practices in your classroom. The information will help us understand the literacy practices of Saudi teachers in preschool settings.

If you choose to participate in this study, your participation will take place in two phases. In the first phase, you will be asked to rank 40 statements (cards) in a distribution line range from -5 to 5+ based on your beliefs as most important and most not important emergent literacy practices. The second phase will involve a follow-up focus group interview for the teachers who share similar viewpoints. The interviews will discuss your literacy practices as a preschool teacher as well as your beliefs toward emergent literacy skills and practices. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the principal investigator; the duration of the interview is expected to from one hour to two hours.

Risks:

We do not anticipate any inconveniences or risks resulting from this study. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or withdrawal of your consent in the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits. If you decided to participate, you may stop participating any time and you may decide not to answer specific questions.

Benefits:

Although you will not benefit directly from participating in this study, you will make a major contribution to help to understand and identified teachers' beliefs toward emergent literacy practices in Saudi Arabia.

Confidentiality:

The principal investigator will maintain confidentially of the research records or data. The research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet/password-protected data file in the personal possession of the investigator.

The information that has been collected from this study will be used for the purposes of this study only. And any publications in the future that might result from the findings of this study the participants will be not identified.

Legal rights:

You are not waving any of your legal rights by signing this form.

Person to contact:

If you need any further information or if you have any question, please contact the principal investigator Fatimah Hafiz at +1(678) 650 6612 or +9665433039903 or via email fhafiz@uab.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the UAB Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (205) 934-3789 or toll-free at 1-855-860-3789. Regular hours for the OIRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached, or you wish to talk to someone else.

Unforeseeable Risks:

There may be risks that are not anticipated. However, every effort will be made to minimize any risks.

Costs and Compensation:

There are no costs or monetary compensation to you for your participation in this study.

Consent:

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

Signature_____ Date_____

APPENDIX D

PRINCIPAL PERMISSION LETTER

PRINCIPAL'S LETTER FOR PERMISSION

[Name of preschool]

[Address]

Dear_____,

My name is Fatimah Hafiz, I am a doctoral student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. This Spring semester of 2019, I will be conducting a research as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Early Childhood Education The title of my research is: “Saudi Preschool Teachers’ Beliefs Toward Emergent Literacy Skills and Practices.” This study will involve 30-35 preschool teachers in Madinah, Saudi Arabia. 3 preschools will be selected randomly from a list of all public preschools and 3 schools will be selected randomly from a list of private preschools. The teachers will be asked to about their beliefs regarding literacy skills and practices in a preschool setting which will provide me with valuable information and insights to contribute to the success of my research study.

The study will involve two sequential phases. In the first phase, teachers will be asked to rank 40 statements into a quasi-normal distribution. The distribution ranks from +5 (most important) to -5 (most unimportant), and in the middle, there is 0, which represents the neutral categories, where the participants place the statements that are considered as relatively “without meaning.” The statements are about teachers’ beliefs and experiences toward on emergent literacy practices and skills. The statements will be printed on a 3x5 inch cards. The sorting process is expected to last from 15-25 minutes

The second phase of the study is based on the results of teachers’ ranking in the first phase. Teachers who similarly ranked the statements will be group together which indicate that they share similar viewpoint. From each group of teachers who share a similar viewpoint, 2 to 3 teachers will be chosen for further investigation through a follow-up focus group interviews. The interview aims to investigate what factors might account for participants sharing similar views, and to check the consistency between teachers’ beliefs and practices. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the principal investigator, the duration of the interview is expected to be from one hour to two hours.

Data collection process will last around two months beginning in January 2019 and ending March, 2019. Participation in the study will be voluntarily at no cost. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. The principal investigator will maintain confidentially of the research records or data. The research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet/password-protected data file in the personal possession of the investigator.

All participants will be asked to sign a consent form that explains the study and their rights and will be provided a copy of said consent form, this research study will be approved by the IRB (Institutional Review Board for Human Use) using an Exempted Review of Human Subjects Protocol from the University of Alabama at Birmingham Office of Research. This study was reviewed by the Department of Education in Medina region, and the principal investigator has given permission to conduct the study with preschool teachers.

As principal of_____ preschool, I am asking your permission to access to your preschool and teachers. If you have any questions, please contact me at +1(678) 650 6612 or +9665433039903 or via e mail fhafiz@uab.edu. Thank you for your support.

Best regards,

Fatimah Hafiz, Principal investigator.

Early Childhood Education

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

APPENDIX E

CRIB SHEET FOR THE FOUR PERSPECTIVES A, B, C, AND D

Factor 1 crib sheet with distinguished statements

	Highest Ranked Statements	
19	Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters	5
27	Children use letter stamps or letter sponges	5
	Positive Statements Ranked Higher in factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays	
12	Children practice retelling stories?	4
40	Children practice tracing letters/words	4
26	Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them what is the name of this letter, what sound does it make?)	4
20	Children memorize and sing rhyming songs	3
29	Use flannel boards with letters/words?	3
31	Read alphabet books	2
11	Children predict stories?	2
13	Reread stories to children	2
7	Post a written task list (e.g., line leader)	1
	Negative Statements Ranked Lower in factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays	
17	Children practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g., "f" in fish)	0
32	Children make letter collages (e.g., cut and paste pictures that start with the letter "B")	-1
23	Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changed according to the short vowel attached to it.	-1
34	Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools	-1
30	Introduce new letters	-1
10	Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages	-3
3	Encourage children to use dramatic play area with literacy-related props that include print (e.g., letters for post office)	-3
33	Children practice writing their name	-4
8	Show children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left	-4

	Lowest Ranked Statements	
39	Children practice invented spelling	-5
37	Children write in journals	-5

Factor 2 crib sheet

	Highest Ranked Statements	factor 2
33	Children practice writing their name	5
19	Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters	5
	Positive Statements Ranked Higher in factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays	
17	Children practice identifying initial sounds in words (e.g., "f" in fish)	4
22	Children practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., "c-a-t " = cat)	4
38	Use templates to help children form letters	4
1	I use my finger to follow words as I read aloud	3
25	Encourage play with alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	2
21	Children identify syllable units (e.g., "Fri-day")	2
7	Post a written task list (e.g., line leader)	1
14	Provide children with a variety of books for induvial preferences	1
3	Encourage children to use dramatic play area with literacy-related props that include print (e.g., letters for post office)	0
	Negative Statements Ranked Lower in factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays	
12	Children practice retelling stories?	0
27	Children use letter stamps or letter sponges	-1
5	Display children's writing around the room	-1
20	Children memorize and sing rhyming songs	-1
18	Play rhythm games practicing sounds in words	-2
29	Use flannel boards with letters/words?	-3
6	Point to print while reading aloud to teach children that print, not pictures, tells the story	-4
	Lowest Ranked Statements	

13	Reread stories to children	-5
4	Use a written schedule	-5

Factor 3 crib sheet

	Highest Ranked Statements	factor 3
30	Introduce new letters	5
9	Read to children every day	5
	Positive Statements Ranked Higher in factor 3 Array than in Other Factor Arrays	
23	Children learn the symbols of the short vowels and learn that each letter's sound changed according to the short vowel attached to it.	4
15	Give children chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them	4
5	Display children's writing around the room	3
29	Use flannel boards with letters/words?	3
13	Reread stories to children	2
25	Encourage play with alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	2
11	Children predict stories?	2
18	Play rhythm games practicing sounds in words	1
39	Children practice invented spelling	0
2	Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator	0
	Negative Statements Ranked Lower in factor 3 Array than in Other Factor Arrays	
16	Provide literacy-enriched play environment	-1
40	Children practice tracing letters/words	-1
1	I use my finger to follow words as I read aloud	-1
14	Provide children with a variety of books for induvial preferences	-2
26	Children practice letter sounds during read-aloud time (I point to the letter in the word and ask them what is the name of this letter, what sound does it make?)	-2
22	Children practice blending sounds together to form words (e.g., "c-a-t " = cat)	-3
24	Children match rhyming words	-3
35	Children write and/or receive letters/postcards in class	-3
6	Point to print while reading aloud to teach children that print, not pictures, tells the story	-4
7	Post a written task list (e.g., line leader)	-4
28	Play games that teach letter/word recognition	-4
	Lowest Ranked Statements	
36	Children make their own books	-5

37	Children write in journals	-5

	Factor 4 crib sheet	factor 4
	Highest Ranked Statements	
19	Children learn the sounds of the letters, not only the names of the letters	5
34	Present children with opportunities to use a variety of writing tools	5
	Positive Statements Ranked Higher in factor 4 Array than in Other Factor Arrays	
8	Show children that text in books begins at top left corner of page and is read from right to left	4
10	Children practice holding books correctly and turning pages	4
16	Provide literacy-enriched play environment	4
28	Play games that teach letter/word recognition	3
32	Children make letter collages (e.g., cut and paste pictures that start with the letter "B")	2
4	Use a written schedule	0
24	Children match rhyming words	0
	Negative Statements Ranked Lower in factor 4 Array than in Other Factor Arrays	
25	Encourage play with alphabet puzzles/magnetic letters	0
20	Children memorize and sing rhyming songs	-1
21	Children identify syllable units (e.g., "Fri-day")	-2
35	Children write and/or receive letters/postcards in class	-3
31	Read alphabet books	-3
15	Give children chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them	-4
11	Children predict stories?	-4
7	Post a written task list (e.g., line leader)	-4
	Lowest Ranked Statements	
37	Children write in journals	-5
2	Introduce books by talking about the title, author, and illustrator	-5

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General questions about the teachers:

1. How do you explain your own literacy experience in preschool? Do you remember how the teacher was teaching you reading and writing? How do you feel about that experience?
2. Does this experience (learning to read and write in preschool) influence your teaching beliefs? If so, could you explain how?

General questions about emergent literacy:

1. What does emergent literacy mean to you?
2. Tell me about your background (education, professional training) in emergent literacy? How do you feel about your education and training?

General questions about classroom teaching practices:

1. How do you decide what activities to use in your classroom?
2. What is your school policy? How would you describe it?? How does it influence, if at all, your literacy teaching decision and practices?
3. What curriculum are you teaching? Do you think it is the best way to teaching literacy? why or why not? Are you allowed to make some changes? If so, what would you change?
4. What do you think about classroom resources with regard to their influence on your teaching practices? Could you give examples from your own experiences?
5. Do you have a library in your classroom? What is the role of having a library in your classroom? Do you think it's important to have one? Could you explain why?
6. Do parent's expectations influence your teaching decisions and practices? if so, could you explain how? Can you give examples from your own experiences?

Then, specific questions for each group based on their unique perspective will be asked. The questions will be more focused during the interview based on participants' answers and discussion.

Note: for each question I ask, I will address the opposite view, so the data would be subjected to comparative analysis. For example, after asking the following question "For your group, there was a general consensus that teaching simple practices, teaching simple literacy practices such as children use letter stamps or letter sponges, children practice tracing letters, and children sing songs for preschool teachers, do you agree with? Could you explain why?" I would ask them about using complex activities.

Focus group 1 (teaching surface literacy out of context whole group instructions)

1. For your group, there was a common theme that teaching simple practices, teaching simple literacy practices such as children use letter stamps or letter sponges, children practice tracing letters, and children sing songs for preschool teachers, do you agree with? Could you explain why?
2. If you agree, can you give examples from your own experience on how simple literacy activity are more appropriate for preschoolers' literacy development?
3. There was a general conclusion that your group support the whole class instructions which mean that children involve in the same activity at the same time, and the activity is directed by the teachers. For example, asking children what is the sound and the name of this letter during reading aloud time, retelling stories, singing songs, and using templets to form letters? Do you agree? If you agree then why this is important? If you don't agree, then why you disagree?
4. Activity that required individualization such as practicing writing names, making their own books, and writing in a journal has been identified as unimportant? Do you agree? Could you explain why?
5. Research support teaching literacy within context (through stories and writing activities) however, if was concluded that you support teaching literacy out of context (isolated activities such as worksheet), do you agree? If yes, how you explain that?
6. Concerning literacy skills? There was a general agreement on prioritizing letter knowledge? Do you agree? Could you explain why?
7. Print awareness (children's knowledge about print and its characteristics), as well as children's motivation (encourage children to connect with the print), has been identified as not important? Do you agree? Could you explain why?
8. What is your belief about the influence of early writing on children's literacy development?

Focus Group 2 "skilled based isolated literacy teaching"

1. Analyzing the q sorts categorized you as believing in teaching literacy in isolation. To illustrate, practices such as "children practice writing", children learn the sounds of the letters", "children practice blending sound", and so on are related to a very specific skill. Could you explain why? What do you think is the benefit of teaching skills in isolation?
2. On the other hand, research support teaching literacy within context (through stories and writing activities) however, you support teaching literacy out of context (isolated activities such as worksheet), how could you explain that?
3. What kind of instructions in teaching literacy do you believe is the best? Could you explain why? Could you provide examples from your own teaching experiences?
4. One of the characteristics that differentiate you from other perspectives is that your belief in the importance of all levels of "phonological awareness", do you agree

with this conclusion, could you explain why or why not? Can you give examples from your own experience?

5. The results of the analysis implied your belief that early writing such as invented spelling is not important for preschoolers' literacy development? is that correct? Could you explain why or why not?

6. Print awareness (children's knowledge about print and its characteristics), as well as children's motivation (encourage children to connect with the print), has been identified as not important? Do you agree? Could you explain why?

Focus group 3 "both direct and contextual literacy (reading) through the lens of child center approach"

1. Based on the way you sorted the statements, you have been found to share similar beliefs toward emergent literacy. It showed that you support teaching literacy through both direct and contextual approaches. How much do you support that? Could you explain why?

2. The analysis of your sorts shows common agreement toward the importance of children's motivation, do you agree with this conclusion? Could you explain why?

3. In your actual classroom practice, how do you motivate children toward literacy? Can you give a specific example?

4. Your sort indicated that you place a value on reading books to teach literacy. To illustrate, many activities related to reading such as, read to children every day, give children a chance to choose what book they want to be read aloud to them, and Reread stories to children have been identified as most important, do you agree with that, could you tell me why? Could you provide examples from your own experience?

5. It looks like you value your children's interest in the classroom, do you agree? Why? How does that influence children's learning? Can you give examples

6. What is your definition of a child-centered approach? What do you think about it? How does it influence children's learning?

7. What is your belief toward letter knowledge and alphabetic awareness?

8. What is your belief about the influence of early writing on children's literacy development?

Focus group 4 "teaching literacy through simple hands-on experiences with the consideration of the role of the classroom environment"

1. The analysis of your q sorts indicated that you believe in hands-on and direct experience. such as allowing children to experience turning pages (direct experience with books), cut and paste pictures to make letter's groups. Do you agree, if so, why is this

important? How do you implement this in your actual teaching practices? could you provide examples?

2. Unlike other perspectives, you place a value on the role of the classroom environment? Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. Who do you think is responsible for the classroom environment? (the school, the teacher, the ministry), why?
4. What the influence of the classroom environment on children's learning? Could you provide examples from your own experiences?
5. A special character for this perspective is that you believe in the importance on print awareness such as showing children that text in books begins at the top left corner of the page and is read from right to left and allowing children practice holding books correctly and turning pages, do you agree with that, why?
6. Do you implement print awareness in your classroom, if so could you provide examples?
7. Based on the analysis, you undervalue complex activities such as invented spelling, writing in journals, exchanging postcards? Do you feel that correct? If so, why?
8. What is your belief toward letter knowledge and alphabetic awareness?