



# **Saudi Mothers' Perspectives on the English Programs Taught in their Children's International Schools**

إعداد

**Somiah Alabdulkareem**  
King Saud University

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## **Saudi Mothers' Perspectives on the English Programs Taught in their Children's International Schools**

### **Abstract:**

This study aimed at investigating the perceptions of Saudi mothers who enrolled their children in international schools about the English curriculum used there, the factors that influenced their decision in choosing international schools rather than other private schools, and the benefits as well as the drawbacks of those schools as viewed by mothers. To achieve those aims, the research adopted a mixed method design using questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were sent to ninety-three mothers. After that, semi-structured interviews based on the responses from questionnaires were carried out with a total of five mothers chosen from those who participated in the questionnaires. The data collected was analysed using the mean, standard deviation, and thematic analysis. The results showed that mothers place great importance on the English language and believe it is truly significant for their children's future. It also revealed that English had a quite major effect on mothers' decision for choosing international schools over other schools alongside with their overall satisfaction with the programs used, pointing to the wide variety of teaching methods employed as well as the school's effort in developing their children's personality.

**Key words:** English curriculum, private school, perception.

### **المستخلص:**

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على تصورات الأمهات السعوديات اللاتي قمن بإلحاق أطفالهن في المدارس العالمية حول مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس العالمية والعوامل التي أثرت على قرارهم في اختيار المدارس العالمية بدلا من المدارس الخاصة الأخرى، والإيجابيات والسلبيات في ذلك كما تراها الأمهات، ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف اعتمد البحث تصميمًا مختلطًا من خلال استخدام استبيان ومقابلات. وتم إعداد الاستبيان وإرساله إلى ثلاثة وتسعين أمًا، بعد ذلك أجريت مقابلات شبه منظمة بناءً على أجوبة الاستبيان مع خمس أمهات تم اختيارهن من المشاركات في الاستبيان، ومن ثم تم تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها من خلال استخدام المتوسط والانحراف المعياري والتحليل الموضوعي. وقد أظهرت

النتائج أن الأمهات يولون اهتماما كبيرا للغة الإنجليزية ويعتقدون أنها مهمة لمستقبل أبنائهم، كما أوضحت أن اللغة الإنجليزية لها تأثير كبير على قرارات الأمهات في اختيار المدارس العالمية عوضا عن المدارس الأخرى، إلى جانب رضاهم الكلي عن البرامج المستخدمة مشيرين إلى التنوع الواسع في أساليب التدريس وكذلك جهود المدرسة في تطوير شخصية الطفل.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It is worthwhile to notice the growth of international schools, nowadays, in Saudi Arabia. The number has increased each year and is still getting higher. The International School Consultancy group (ISC) reported that “The government of Saudi Arabia is planning to increase private sector school provision, including international schools” (2017). In 2013, there were 364 international schools in Riyadh which rose dramatically, by the year 2014, to reach 569 schools with 115619 students enrolled and a total of 1666 schools spread across Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education). The thing that draws the attention is the great number of Saudi students enrolled in these schools in comparison to other nationalities. It is stated that almost sixty-seven per cent of the students in international schools are Saudi children (ISC Research, 2017). This was not the case when the Saudi Council of Ministers issued a list of regularities in 1997. It was written that those schools were opened originally for foreign children of those whose circumstances forced them to leave their country. Therefore, it was to find a suitable kind of education for their children. Saudi students were not permitted in those schools except those who have come from abroad and it was under certain conditions (Ministry of Education, 1997). Al-Arifi noted that It was not until 2009 that they started to accept Saudi students in such schools. He also pointed out that the significant number of parents who enrol their children in international schools might have influenced investors to open more of those schools in the country (as cited in Hammad, 2015).

It is usually true that every parent wants what is best for his/her child. They want them to grow in a good educational environment that will benefit them in their future life. Choosing the appropriate school

is one of their responsibilities towards their children. However, this trend towards parents sending their children to international schools could be due to the spread of the English language worldwide since it is an international language spoken in many countries. Most of the literature regarding the factors that motivated parents to enrol their children in international schools suggested that one of the main reasons was the English language (e.g. Mackenzie, Hayden, & Thompson, 2003; Ng, 2012; Watfa & Al-Mutawa, 2008). For this reason and due to the increasing number of international schools being opened these days as well as the large number of students being enrolled in those schools, this study investigated Saudi mothers' views about the English programs taught in international schools. It was also because of the lack of information regarding this topic since it was not researched before. The majority of the related studies focused mainly on the reasons that motivated parents to enrol their children in international schools, such as Mackenzie, et al. (2003), Ng (2012), and Pottern and Hayden (2004). A few also compared between those schools and others like Watfa and Al-Mutawa (2008).

This study examined mothers' perspectives on the English curriculum adopted in international schools, what they liked and disliked, the factors that influenced their choice of international schools, and what makes those programs different than those taught in other private schools in the city. This research was conducted to show what is special about those schools' English curriculum and give insight to mothers who intend to enrol their children in international schools for the purpose of acquiring the English language as well as aid them in their decision. Moreover, it could benefit other international schools by knowing what mothers are searching for in an English curriculum; what they prefer and what they are avoiding. They can also get a relatively clear picture of the pitfalls found in other schools which they could either overcome or make sure not to fall into.

The topic was examined through the use of two research methods; questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were sent to Saudi mothers in Riyadh, who have children attending international schools, through the use of snowball sampling in order to reach the largest possible number of participants in a short period of time. As soon as the questionnaires were received, the interview schedule was prepared. After that, several mothers who volunteered to be interviewed, as stated in their responses to the questionnaires, were contacted to agree on the appropriate time and place to carry out the semi-structured interviews. The questions asked in the interviews were based on mothers' responses to the questionnaires. Finally, the data collected was analysed.

This research study will be structured in such a way: First, the literature review will be presented, starting with a brief definition of international schools, and followed by a wide variety of literature which is related to the topic of this study. Different research studies will be introduced with a brief presentation of each one, including the methods used and major findings. The chapter will end with an identification of the research gap and the desired objectives gained from this study. Second, the methodology adopted in the study will be highlighted. An explanation of the research strategies used, the research population and sample as well as how they were recruited, the instruments used and how they were prepared as well as carried out will be discussed. This will also be including a brief description of the ethical considerations. After that, the results obtained from the data collected will be presented, pointing out to the procedure used for analysing the different types of data. This section will be organized according to the research questions and will be including tables and diagrams as well as extracts from the transcripts. The following chapter will highlight the key findings identified in the previous chapter and will discuss them. It will do that through relating and comparing them to the literature reported in the literature review. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the major findings, identify the

limitations of the research as well as implications for further studies, and provide pedagogical implications for schools and teachers.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The number of the international schools is considerably increasing around the world (Hayden, 2011; Taylor, 2015; Watfa & Al-Mutawa, 2008). Hayden (2006) tries to define international schools by noting that those schools perceive themselves as such because they have different nationalities within them, the curriculum used is distinct, and also the school's vision. In addition, she points out that defining international schools is relatively difficult owing to the variations between those schools, not only from one country to another, but also within a single country. However, since this study is conducted in Saudi Arabia, presenting a definition from the Saudi Council of Ministers would be more reasonable. The Ministry of Education (1997) provides a simple definition in their list of regularities which states that foreign education or international schools are those which apply a curriculum different than the Saudi one. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the primary focus of this paper will be on international schools which offer English curriculums given that "English [is] being increasingly perceived as the international language" (Hayden, 2006, p. 163) as well as the rather high number of research on this type of schools (e.g. Mackenzie, et al. 2003; Ng, 2012; Pottern & Hayden, 2004; Watfa & Al-Mutawa, 2008) in comparison to other languages.

The high number of international schools being opened nowadays in Riyadh as well as the high demand for those schools by parents truly makes one wonder. This phenomenon is supported by a quite great number of parents which can be seen through the noticeable drift towards enrolling their children in the international school sector as can be realized through the statistics reported earlier in Chapter 1. Nonetheless, this is not only the case in Saudi Arabia, but also in many countries. Most parents around the world are drawn to the English programs adopted by those schools rather than those

found in other schools (Mackenzie, et al. 2003; Ng, 2012; Pottern & Hayden, 2004; Watfa & Al-Mutawa, 2008). Throughout the literature, there has been a quite good number of studies worldwide which dealt with the reasons that motivated parents in choosing international schools, specifically in Switzerland, Kuwait, Hong Kong, Argentina, Japan, and Malaysia. The majority of them considers the learning of the English language to be one of the determining factors for parents' choice.

To begin with, Mackenzie, et al.'s study (2003) examined the factors that influenced parental choices of particular international schools in Switzerland. Questionnaires were sent to three international schools and a total of 238 parents were involved in the study. In addition, follow-up interviews were carried out. The researchers concluded that the most important factor was that parents strongly wanted their children "to be educated in the English language" (p. 302). They also stated that "it would be difficult to interpret the apparent importance of the English language to those parents" (p. 311). In another study, Watfa and Al-Mutawa (2008) aimed at discovering the educational vision of foreign private schools in Kuwait through also investigating the reasons that made parents enrol their children in such schools and not in local ones. In addition, they explored the advantages and disadvantages that distinguished those schools from others. They did so through surveying 674 parents from seven different foreign private schools in Kuwait. The results revealed positive educational perceptions of foreign private schools from the parents' perspectives in comparison to the negative views of local schools. It also showed that the ability to master the English language was in the first rank which motivated parents to enrol their children in foreign private schools and this agrees with Mackenzie, et al.'s findings (2003). Moreover, building the child's personality; mentally and psychologically was one of the main priorities for parents. A large number of parents agreed that those schools also helped in developing their children's creativity and preparing them for their future

profession. However, the parents stated some disadvantages which were still much less than the advantages. One of the drawbacks that should be noted was the very high amount of those schools' fees.

Ng (2012) also addressed the same topic in Hong Kong and investigated the motivations that attracted Parents to enrol their children in international schools. The data was gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with twenty-five parents. The results she found were consistent with the studies discussed above. She revealed that the English language and how it could benefit the child's future and occupation was one of the priorities for parents' choice. They thought that it "can help secure their children's future" (p. 128). In addition, they wanted a good educational environment as well as "a flexible and interactive" (p. 128) curriculum for their children. However, it is important to realize that although the researcher dealt with different international schools, such as French, German, Korean, Singaporean, British, and American schools, she found that the English language was perceived with great importance by parents.

There is a study done in Argentina that dealt with the same concept as the previous studies but the only thing that differed is that they concentrated on Spanish-English bilingual schools. Pottern and Hayden (2004) collected the data through questionnaires and interviews of parents in two different schools in Buenos Aires. They reported that the parents' desire for their children to be bilinguals as well as fluent speakers of English were ranked first. Through viewing these studies, it can be noted that the English language is one of the significant factors that influence parents' choice of those schools. Although this may be true, however, the studies conducted in Japan and Malaysia had shown different results in regard to parents' preferences. The former was prepared by Mackenzie (2009) and included sending questionnaires to six international schools in Japan as well as interviewing eleven parents. The majority of the parents stressed on the fact that they wanted their children to be exposed to other countries and cultures, in addition to their desire for their



children to study abroad for their higher education. However, in the latter study that was done by Yaacob, Osman, and Bachok (2014), parents' demand for private schools was mostly due to the difference in the curriculum used in those schools in comparison to public ones. Moreover, they preferred the quality of education that was present in those schools with its environment and facilities. The researchers collected the data by sending questionnaires to different private schools in Malaysia, including international ones. A total of 150 questionnaires were answered.

Mackenzie's study (2009) can be criticized. He noted that his study in Japan was different from others because English was not the primary desire for those parents. Nevertheless, the fact that they enrolled their children in international schools so they would be able to study abroad in English-speaking countries might be a strong evidence for the parents' desire for their children to learn English for their future, even if parents did not literally state that. Looking at Yaacob, et al.'s study (2014), they reported that from the various private schools involved in the study, only one was an international school while the others most of them were religious schools. This might explain why parents did not focus on the English language in their responses.

Parental choices seem to be a major topic in the field of education especially when dealing with school choice and priorities. Britain has gone through a "period of intense reform" (p. 1) in the 1980s and 1990s in relation to education policy, one including school choice or, in other words, giving parents the right to enrol their children in a school of their choice (Woods, Bagley, & Glatter, 1998). Brown (1990) notes that this is thought to lead to a "competition between schools" which in itself would "raise standards for all and offer real choice to parents" (p. 74). Tomlinson (1990) comments on that in her review article by confirming how clever it is to allow parents to choose schools and this would contribute to many advantages. It can force inefficient schools to close down or work

their way up and thus would fortunately lead to better schools. In addition, Bast and Walberg (2004) argue that parents are able to choose the most efficient schools for their children and that they can be even better than experts in the field.

Al-Harhi (2014) dealt with parental choices when she carried out a study to investigate middle class parents' opinions and choices in relation to getting their child exposed to the English language at an early age in private kindergartens in Al-Madinah, Saudi Arabia. The participants were specifically mother who decided to have their children acquire English at an early stage and they were also inquired to justify their choice of a particular school. Teachers as well as head teachers were also involved in this research. The data was collected using a mixed method design. Questionnaires were sent to twelve schools in Al-Madinah; one was completed by head teachers while the other was answered by English teachers. Direct observation was also used to observe children's interactions between themselves and with their teacher. In addition, a blog was opened for discussion about introducing children to language learning at an early age which was open for everybody. Finally, different types of interviews were carried out with mothers, teachers, and head teachers. As a result, she found that parents endorsed the idea of Early language learning and their decisions were influenced by social and cultural aspects. For example, the mothers who chose to put their children in private schools had completed their higher education. They were also affected by the people around them, whether their relatives or friends. Moreover, they were financially capable of doing so.

Parents' choice of certain schools may indicate their concerns about their child's education by trying to search for the appropriate school that meets their needs and those of their children. Vincent and Ball (2007) in their study, concentrated on middle class parents who were interested in enrolling their children in "enrichment activities" (p. 1062). The study conveyed parents' thoughts and concerns through interviewing fifty-seven mothers and fourteen fathers. As a result,

they found that most parents felt a “sense of urgency and responsibility” (p. 1602) towards their children’s development. They were eager to make their children join various extra classes because they were concerned with their children’s development, future, and their social class. Ball (2003) suggested that this was “evidence of the planning ahead” (as cited in Vincent & Ball, 2007, p. 1072). In other words, they are preparing them for the unpredictable future.

Looking at the previous studies, it seems that parents strongly value the English language and believe it is crucial in their children’s lives. The importance of English can also be seen through parents’ decisions to send their children abroad or by enrolling them in schools that give extensive English classes. Carlson, Gerhards, and Hans (2017) discussed the term “transnational cultural capital” which they defined as “skills and dispositions needed to act in social fields that transcend the nation state” (p. 750). They noted that this capital could possibly be gained by studying abroad. They considered how social class can impact parents’ choice to send their children abroad. The results indicated that upper middle-class families were very likely to do so while some lower middle-class families were able to overcome their class and send their children abroad either because they realize the importance of such thing or because their children insist to go. Taylor (2015), in his study, observed the expansion of international schools. He believed that instead of parents sending their children abroad to learn the English language in a new environment different than theirs, they could study in those schools in their own country. Indeed, it would be much easier for students to cope with international schools rather than if they were to study abroad. Taylor also noted that such schools are more flexible than others because they do not stick to a certain curriculum and can adjust it to suit the students’ needs and teachers’ aims.

Other researchers compared between the English taught in different schools. Al-Natour and Hijazi (2012) compared between public and private schools in Jordan in regard to students’

accomplishments in English. They also discussed parents' views towards private schools. The study involved 165 students and sixty-six parents from four different schools in Jordan. Students were given achievement tests to measure their accomplishment in English while parents were inquired to complete a questionnaire. The researchers pointed out that students who attended private schools had better English proficiency than those in public ones and that parents showed "positive attitudes" (p. 210) towards private schools.

"The nature of the curriculum" (p. 217) has a significant impact on parents' choice of schools (Hayden, 2011). A number of parents perceive the curriculum that has English as the medium of instruction as something crucial for their children because it can lead to fluency in English (Pottern & Hayden, 2004) and hence "a widely recognised qualification" (Hayden, 2011, p. 219). Going back to earlier studies, it shows that in Yaacob, et al.'s study (2014), parents ranked the school's syllabus as the first factor for choosing private schools. Moreover, in Mackenzie, et al.'s study (2003), the researchers pointed out that parents ranked the curriculum in third place when justifying their choice of international schools. This study was consistent with Mackenzie's findings (2009) in Japan. The curriculum adopted in international schools was also ranked third by Japanese parents. This may truly imply the importance of the type of programs for parents when deciding on a school for their little ones.

Most of the research dealing with parents and international schools was to justify their reasons for choosing such schools. Little research was done on parents' perspectives towards the English programs used in international schools or barely none. Although Al-Harthi addressed parents' views in her research, it was in relation to the idea of introducing English as a foreign language to children from kindergarten. Likewise, Watfa and Al-Mutawa (2008) as well as Al-Natour and Hijazi (2012) discussed parental views, however, it was about their perceptions towards the school in general. Therefore, this research aimed at investigating parents' perspectives in regards to the

English curriculum taught in international schools, the reasons for choosing international schools over other private schools, and what parents see as the advantages and disadvantages of their choice. Consequently, the significance of this study could be observed through its goals to help parents, who are interested in teaching their children English, with the choice of schools by showing the views of other parents towards the English programs in international education. In other words, this research study would reveal some of the information concerning international education to the society (Yaacob, et al. 2014). Moreover, it can benefit other schools by noticing the factors that motivate parents and what they are looking for in a school's curriculum. This also means that it can help in the future preparation and development of other schools (Yaacob, et al. 2014).

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In chapter 2, various kinds of literature that was related to the topic of study was presented, discussed, and compared between one another to arrive at a conclusion regarding the research gap. Moreover, the aims and significance of the research were identified. Nevertheless, this chapter will reveal the type of research methods applied, the sample as well as the instruments used to collect the data, and how the study was carried out.

#### **3.1 Mixed method design**

In order to answer the research questions, which investigates Saudi mothers' perceptions of the English programs taught in international schools, their justifications for choosing international schools over others, and the consequences of their decisions, the study adopted a mixed method design. It combined two approaches of data collection; questionnaires and interviews which is also referred to as triangulation. This method allows the researcher to look at the issue from more than one angle, giving a richer and deeper explanation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2007). Dörnyei (2007) also reported that many researchers have proposed that by using this approach, the researcher "can gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon

... Words can be used to add meaning to numbers and numbers can be used to add precision to words” (p. 45). In addition, the researcher could be able to benefit from the advantages of qualitative and quantitative approaches together (Dörnyei, 2007).

By looking at the related studies discussed above in Chapter 2, it is clear that most of them (e.g. Al-Harthi 2014; Mackenzie, et al. 2003; Mackenzie, 2009; Pottern & Hayden, 2004) used a mixed method approach, specifically integrating both questionnaires and interviews together in their studies. For these reasons, the multi-strategy design was applied in this study. The researcher chose, precisely, a sequential explanatory design where a survey was conducted at first and then followed by semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2003). The interview schedule was developed after observing the findings gained from the questionnaires to try and find answers for the surprising results. The participants that were interviewed were chosen from the respondents who volunteered to be interviewed in the questionnaires. However, it was also possible to conduct a focus group interview but due to the fear of mothers not being open to all questions and of keeping their opinion to their selves because of the presence of other mothers, this method was not applied in the study.

### **3.2 Participants**

The study was conducted in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. The focus was on mothers since “they are more likely to be involved in their children’s education” (Mackenzie, et al. 2003, p. 308). Moreover, Saudi Arabia’s schools are “gender-segregated” (p. 13) which means that boys’ and girls’ schools are separated (Al-Harthi, 2014). It is not acceptable for a woman to go to boys’ schools and interview fathers and vice versa. Therefore, the participants were the mothers of Saudi students who were enrolled in international schools. Mothers from all grades were welcomed to participate in the study.

Mothers were recruited through the use of snowball sampling since it was the most convenient way to find participants for this study (Cohen, et al. 2007). In addition, it helped in getting the greatest possible number of data in a short time. This was done through sending a link to the questionnaire via WhatsApp to several teachers in international schools, who were kindly asked to forward the message to all the mothers they knew and to inform the mother to do the same. The Mothers also sent the questionnaire to other mothers and, consequently, the number of respondents gradually rose to reach ninety-three. Few issues were encountered at this point. Firstly, the initial intention was to specify one school and send the questionnaires to the mothers of that school. In fact, this was made clear in the message sent to the mothers. However, the questionnaire spread to reach mothers from other international schools, thus mothers from different schools participated in the study. Another problem was that a non-Saudi mother also answered the questionnaire. This was resolved through contacting the mother and knowing one of her answers to the open questions, and hence her responses were deleted. This was done without knowing any personal information that related to her. As for the interviews, five participants involved in the study. They were chosen from a set of volunteers who were willing to be interviewed by providing either their phone numbers or emails in the last part of the questionnaire (see Appendix A).

### 3.3 Instruments

A questionnaire and an interview schedule were developed to collect the data for the study. To begin with, a few parts of the questionnaire were adapted from Alberta Education (2017), Mackenzie (2009), and Mackenzie, et al.'s questionnaires (2003) while the rest were produced by the researcher with the help of the supervisor. The questionnaire consisted of four sections (see Appendix A) with the first focusing on general information about the mothers' children. The second and third sections were in the form of a rating scale question. The former was about the degree of importance

of nine factors in the choice of international schools, while the latter contained twelve items concerning the degree of satisfaction with a number of things. The last section consisted of two closed questions as well as two open questions. The closed questions were about the extent to which the children were enjoying learning English in their school and whether the mothers would recommend the school to other mothers or not.

The questionnaire was really helpful in obtaining a great number of data in a short period of time, but it usually lacks richness to the information and this was fulfilled through carrying out semi-structured interviews which helped in getting a clearer picture of the topic (Dörnyei, 2007). The interview schedule was written based on the answers obtained from the questionnaires. It contained ten questions with probes and others questions which were specific to a number of mothers based on the answers they provided in the open questions presented in the questionnaires (see Appendix B). This kind of interview was useful in allowing the interviewee to have more space and to not feel restricted in their responses as well as allowing the interviewer to go back and forth freely between the questions and to probe further (Cohen, et al. 2007; Dörnyei, 2007).

### **3.4 Procedure**

The questionnaire was translated to Arabic by the researcher and the translation was revised for accuracy by a professor and two assistant professors from the department of education in a university located in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. One of them was the head of the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology department at that university. In addition, it was further revised by a Saudi English teacher. Consequently, the translated version of the questionnaire was modified based on their feedback. It was then sent to a pilot sample containing four mothers to assert that no difficulties or problems might arise from filling the questionnaires and that it was clear and understandable (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). Mothers feedback was taken into consideration and minor changes have been done. One



comment was related to the topic of the questionnaire which was previously written as 'Parents' perspectives' and this confused the mother whether to answer the questionnaire based on both parents' views, the mother and father, or based on her view alone. Therefore, the topic was adjusted to 'Mothers' perspectives' to make it clearer for other mothers and to not cause confusion. The second modification was regarding the second question in section two, the form of the question was changed to insure that the mothers included all the grades that their children were taught in international schools. The questionnaire was further piloted by sending it to one mother and no additional changes were needed, hence the finalized questionnaire was sent through WhatsApp to the sample.

Ninety-three questionnaires were received. The responses were observed and patterns as well as differences were noted. Based on those, the interview schedule was prepared and translated along with the informed consent form. The translation was evaluated by a colleague, who gave few comments and changes were made accordingly. Nevertheless, the researcher took a fieldtrip to carry out the interviews. The interview schedule was piloted with one mother and the interview went smoothly and quite well. After that, a total of five interviews were done; three were face-to-face interviews and took place in one of the coffee shops located in Riyadh, and two were via the phone based on the mothers' preferences. This was one of the limitations that faced the researcher; although the intention was to carry out only face-to-face interviews, several mothers preferred phone interviews. Despite the fact that the first type is beneficial in observing visual cues (Robson & McCartan, 2016), the researcher did not have any choice but to do phone interviews. The interviews lasted from fifteen to thirty minutes and all mothers were inquired to read and sign the informed consent form. As for phone interviews, the informed consent form was sent to them through email which they read, signed, and then sent back. The interviews were all audio recorded to allow the researcher to focus more on the participants and

their reactions, including face expressions, rather than on taking notes. In addition, writing the responses might affect the flow of the interview (Dörnyei, 2007).

The interviews were transcribed and translated into English to be ready for analysis (see Appendix C for a sample of the translated transcripts). The transcription was done over about a two week period which was quite challenging because it required transcribing and translating the data at the same time. However, the positive aspect was that mothers' voice was loud and clear in the audio recordings which helped in facilitating the process. As for analysing the data, on the one hand, quantitative data was analysed for mean and standard deviation because it was the suitable way to analyse the data since the research questions do not look for either differences or relationships between variables. The mean helped in presenting the average score (Robson & McCartan, 2016) while the standard deviation showed "the average distance of the scores from the mean" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 214). On the other hand, qualitative data was analysed through the use of thematic coding which was done manually. It first required careful and close reading of the transcribed data. Initial codes were then generated and attached to specific extracts from the transcripts. After that, the process of searching for emerging themes took place and the initial codes were grouped and put under each theme (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). The issues that were encountered at this stage was that few chunks of the data could be assigned more than one code. For this reason, the codes were further revised and grouped accordingly.

### **3.5 Ethical consideration**

The participants were given brief information about the intended study. They were assured that participation in the study was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time. Additionally, they were informed that the data will be anonymized and stored in a password-protected computer and any data including any audio recordings will be destroyed after the research is done. As for the interviews, mothers were aware that they will be audio

recorded. This was all stated in the informed consent form which mothers were required to read and sign before the interview. The questionnaire also contained this information, but the difference was that if they wanted to participate, instead of signing, they would complete the survey.

### **3.6 Validity and reliability**

The researcher tried hard to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. Silverman (1993) presents ways to increase the reliability of interviews, such as “careful piloting of the interview schedules ...; inter-rater reliability in the coding of responses” (as cited in Cohen, et al. 2007, p. 151). Both the questionnaire and the interview schedule were validated through piloting. Moreover, interrater reliability was calculated on approximately twenty per cent of the transcribed data taken from the interviews. The percentage of Interrater agreement was about eighty-six percent. As for the questionnaire, Cronbach’s coefficient alpha which calculates the internal consistency was used for measuring the reliability of the questionnaire items due to its suitability with the nature of the study. The alpha coefficient turned out to be 0.87, which is considered rather high. This indicates that the questionnaire is highly reliable (Cohen, et al. 2007). Validity was also enhanced through the choice of suitable research methods that helped in gaining the data for the research questions and overcoming issues previously noted. The use of triangulation may also ensure concurrent validity, specifically when two different methods arrive at similar results (Cohen, et al. 2007). This can be observed in the following chapter.

### **Chapter 4: Results and analysis**

After discussing the methodology in the previous chapter, this chapter will present the results and analysis that arose from the data collected. The analysis will be organized by research question. Cohen, et al. (2007) suggest that “this is a useful way of organizing data, as it draws together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher, and preserves the coherence of the material” (p. 468).

Dörnyei (2007) agrees with that and believes that it is more reader-friendly in the sense that it would be easier for the reader to follow the information easily. Moreover, the quantitative and the qualitative data are analysed and will be presented simultaneously under each research question and “this enables patterns, relationships, comparisons and qualifications across data types to be explored conveniently and clearly” (Cohen, et al. 2007, p. 468). In addition, since the questions in the questionnaires and interviews are closely related to one another, it would be more suitable to group them together when analysing the data.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed through the use of descriptive statistics due to its appropriateness for answering the research questions. Specifically, the standard deviation along with the mean were calculated. The mean was used to order the questionnaire items according to the highest mean and this will be useful in showing the rank order of the items based on mothers' answers. However, the qualitative data from transcripts and open questions in the questionnaire was analysed through the use of thematic coding. This was done by assigning codes to extracts from the data which then were grouped into categories, those categories were further grouped into themes (Robson & McCartan, 2016). In addition, some extracts from the transcripts will be used in the report because they contain rich meaning (Cohen, et al. 2007).

#### **4.1 Mothers' perceptions of the English curriculum in their children's international schools**

From the answers to the questionnaire, section three and four, and the interviews, mothers' perspectives regarding the English programs can be revealed. Table 1 shows Saudi mothers' satisfaction with a number of aspects in relation to their children's international schools ordered from the aspects that they are most satisfied with to the ones they are least satisfied with. In general, Table 1 indicates that mothers are more satisfied with their children's progress in English than anything else, specifically in listening, reading, and speaking, with

listening being the highest with a mean of 3.99. In contrast, mothers were not quite satisfied with writing. One of the interviewed mothers had elaborated on this point by stating its drawbacks:

Mother 3: The problem is with “writing”, they still do not prepare them well for “creative writing” and “free writing”. When it was the “Language arts” test, the teacher gave us an “exam plan” and said “the students will be asked to write on one of these subjects” ... They have not written or were trained at all which means that I have to help him [her son] and this is what I do not like about “writing”, they are still “dependent”, they need someone to help.

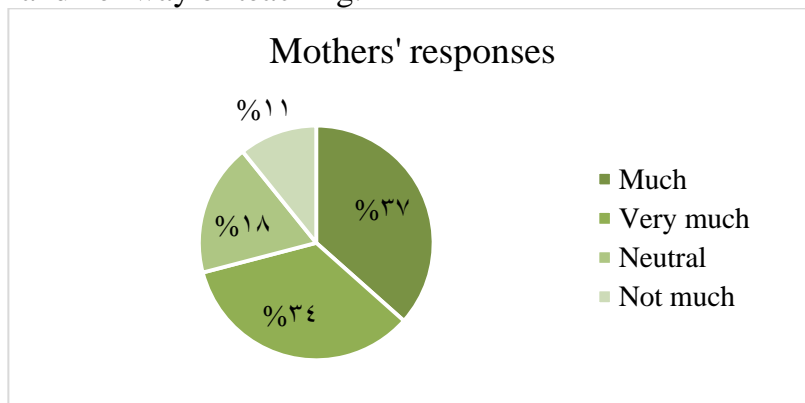
Table 1  
*Mothers' Satisfaction in Rank Order*

Item no.	Item	Mean	SD
11	Your child(ren)'s progress in listening to English...	3.99	.88
8	Your child(ren)'s progress in reading English.	3.92	.96
10	Your child(ren)'s progress in speaking English.	3.90	.93
5	The quality of English education your child is receiving.	3.85	.91
9	Your child(ren)'s progress in English writing.	3.78	.95
4	The technology available in the classroom.	3.75	.96
6	Material used in teaching English subjects...	3.72	.84
7	Teaching methods used when teaching English subjects.	3.63	.86
12	Your child(ren)'s achievements in all subjects.	3.52	.90
3	Teachers' Qualifications.	3.46	.85
2	The number of students per class.	3.34	1.05
1	The schools' fees.	2.44	1.07

Interestingly, although reading was in the second place with a mean of 3.92, in the fourth question, section four in the questionnaire, which was about the things that mothers would like to change in their children's schools, a total of twelve mothers wanted more focus on reading as well as providing ways to motivate students to read. Moving to the least three things that mothers were satisfied with were the teacher's qualifications, the number of students per class, and the schools' fees. As for the schools' fees, most mothers were dissatisfied

with the amount of money they had to pay for the school; 45 per cent chose the option dissatisfied and a further 16 per cent were totally dissatisfied.

Looking at teachers' qualifications, Table 1 shows that mothers were not quite satisfied with the teachers. It is important to notice in Figure 1, which was based on mothers' answers to the first question of section four in the questionnaire, that despite the fact that the majority of children enjoyed learning English, yet four out of ten mothers, who added some comments on the second part of the question, revealed that children's enjoyment mainly depends on the teacher and her way of teaching.



*Figure 1.* The extent to how much children enjoy learning English in international schools from the perspectives of the mothers

This was consistent with what was stated by one of the mothers in the interviews. She argued that the teacher's method of teaching affects the student's eagerness to learn, noting that teachers do vary significantly:

Mother 1: The teacher looks qualified and looks good but all the students are not able to accept her because of her way of teaching. However, last year, the teacher changed the entire class and this is especially in the first grades. The way of the lesson was like games. Therefore, they enjoyed the lesson ... and she [my daughter] comes to

me with amazing information. In contrast to this year, she is pushed to go to school.

A number of mothers agree with Mother 1 on that point. Mother 2 noted that her son once had a teacher who she characterized as loyal. The teacher focused on all of the students and whoever was weak, was given more attention. However, Mother 5 recounted her story about a teacher who had a strange accent and that her son was affected by it. The mother had to correct his pronunciation every time. Nevertheless, answers to the open questions in the questionnaires ranged from positive to negative comments on teachers, with negative ones being the majority. Mother 4 from the interviews when asked about teachers, interestingly, argued that because there is no mechanism for measuring teachers' performance, teachers might be blamed unjustly while the problem may be from the students themselves.

Based on section four from the questionnaires, which asked about the things mothers liked about their children's school's approach to English teaching and the things they wanted to change, plenty of teaching methods were specified. Answers to the former indicated the things that mothers were pleased about. A number of mothers were impressed by the creativity and wide variety of teaching methods used in their children's international schools. Another group was fascinated by the way the school utilized modern methods and used technology in teaching, such as the interactive whiteboard and iPads. Another set was happy with their children being asked to research and find the information by themselves. In addition, several participants showed their satisfaction with the existence of foreign teachers. However, there were several things that mothers were not satisfied with. They would like the students to be entertained through teaching and have fun learning. Others would like to foster their children's self-confidence through presenting and giving them more time to discuss and speak in English. A number of mothers believed that the Science subject given in international schools was difficult

and needs to be simplified. Surprisingly, several mothers would like more focus on research and others wanted the school to employ foreign teachers. In fact, this shows that not all mothers agree on one thing and conveys the inconsistency in their responses.

4.2 Reasons for choosing international schools over other private schools

#### **4.2.1 Factors influencing mothers' decisions**

Table 2 lists the factors that motivated mothers and made them decide on choosing an international school for their children arranged from the most factors that they perceive as having great importance to the least important. Teachers' qualifications turned out to be the most important thing mothers thought about. Comparing this to Table 1, where it was one of the bottom three, this shows an apparent contradiction between the two and this might imply something. However, the table shows that mothers do place great importance on the reputation of the school and its academic achievement. The mothers who were interviewed were asked about the criteria for measuring the reputation of the schools' academic performance, interestingly, a mother confidently raised an issue about reputation:

Mother 5: Reputation is what parents say about the school but unfortunately, it is not enough. Let me give you an example ... we have schools with great reputations but this reputation is "fake" not true. My son makes me decide. When I see his progress and results, it is the thing that tells me that the school is truly able to achieve that or not.

Table 2

*Factors Motivating Mothers to Send Their Children to International Schools in Rank Order*

Item no.	Item	Mean	SD
9	Teachers' Qualifications	4.75	.46
1	The reputation of the school.	4.74	.44
2	The reputation of the schools' academic achievement	4.67	.56
8	The number of students per class.	4.60	.51
3	The quality of the resources in the classroom...	4.59	.63



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4	A desire for my child(ren) to be educated in the English language.	4.57	.65
6		4.55	.58
7	The English curriculum used in the school.	4.30	.80
5	The school's design and architecture.	3.86	.93
	The recommendation of other parents who have children in this school.		

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Two other mothers agree with Mother 5 by stating that the schools' academic performance can be evaluated by personal experience, specifically their children's achievements and performance. Others noted that this can be seen through the competitions the schools are involved in as well as the awards they receive. Nevertheless, two mothers still believed that they can benefit from other parents' views.

In section two from the questionnaire, mothers were given more space to add other factors that they believe helped them with the choice of schools. Answers from the questionnaires and interviews were grouped in Table 3 to form a list of factors starting with the most reoccurring ones stated by mothers. It is important to realize that mothers do really care about their children's national identity and try to find ways to strengthen it. Although it is an international school, mothers believed that the Arabic and Religion subjects were given much attention. In addition, their children's school takes a great interest in the Saudi culture and its social events. Interestingly, mothers asserted that they enrolled their children in such schools because they wanted them to learn English and to be "exposed" (Mother 3) to the language since it has become a necessity. Here, mothers perceived English with great importance while compared to Table 2, this was not the case, English was in the sixth place of importance. However, when looking at this item alone, it turned out that about 64 per cent perceived it as extremely important and another 29 per cent believed it to be important. This is quite a big number which can indicate its major importance to mothers and can confirm the results found in table 3.

Table 3  
*Additional Factors Provided by Mothers*

Order	Factors
1	The national identity is given great importance in my children's school.
2	The acquisition of the English language.
3	My children previously studied abroad.
4	Wide range of extracurricular activities.
5	The move towards international schools.
5	Good relationships between parents and school.
5	Location of the school.
5	Strong disciplinary policies

Interviewed mothers stressed the various future benefits that can be obtained from learning the English language. Mother 4 pointed out that it will provide better opportunities for her children in universities as well as jobs. Moreover, mother 5 noted that if her son were to study abroad, the language would not be an obstacle for him. Mother 3 cared more about research and that her children are "updated". Knowing English will open the doors for her children to read scientific research since English research is more "rich" in quantity.

Being abroad was another reason for choosing international schools. A number of parents' work demand them to travel to different countries where it is difficult to find Arabic education; therefore, they enrol them in English schools. They come back feeling that the most suitable place for their children to study in is international schools. However, looking at the interviews, one mother gave an unusual answer when asked about the reasons for choosing international schools. She was different from all the other mothers. She stated that she was forced after the school who she used to put her children in, which was a regular private school, changed to an international school. The reason she did not want international education was attributed to her desire for her children to receive Arabic education and that she did not want the attention that was placed on the Arabic and Religion subjects to decrease.

#### 4.2.2 Comparisons between schools based on the English curriculum

Mothers who were interviewed were asked to distinguish between international and private schools. Three mothers agreed that the English language is more “intense” (Mother 3) in international schools than in other private schools. Mother 3 explained by pointing to the use of English as a medium of instruction by stating that the students will be taught the “content” of most of the subjects in English. Furthermore, Mother 4 noted that international schools prepare students for the “SAT” and “IELTS” tests. Mother 5 elaborated on this topic and suggested that, in both schools, students receive “knowledge” but the difference is in the education system; international schools have a good educational system because she believes that they focus more on the students’ skills and on applying what they have learnt. She also provides interesting variations between the types of schools showing that English is given more importance in international schools:

Mother 5: Private schools have a secondary language teaching system because they apply the national curriculum ... and is required that the study plan as well as the examination system and assessment are totally identical to what is found in the national curriculum ... Sometimes Science and Maths in “English” but it is not essential ... In “international” schools, this is the core curriculum...

You will find that those [in private schools] who are given additional subjects in English, their English level is uneven ... However, in the international curriculum, it is rare to find this significant variation among students.

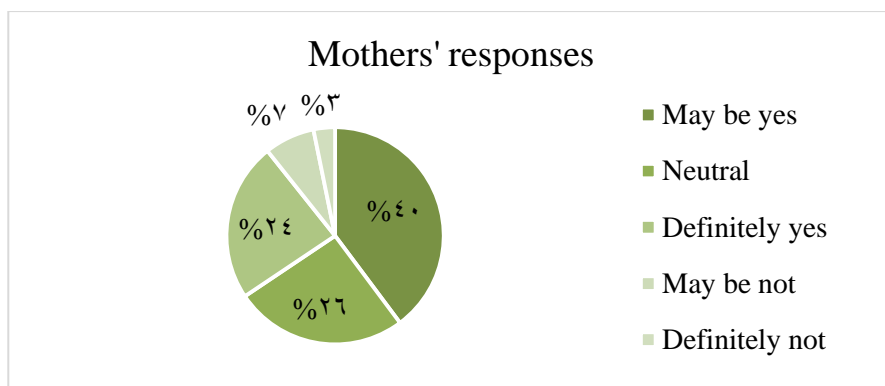
### 4.3 The advantages and disadvantages that parents see from their choice of an international school

#### 4.3.1 The advantages

Mothers were asked in the questionnaire about whether they would recommend their child’s English curriculum to other mothers or not. Overall, mothers’ responses indicated positive attitudes

towards their children's schools. Figure 2 shows that 40 per cent of the mothers replied with 'May be yes' and a further 24 per cent replied with 'Definitely yes' which shows that the majority were quite satisfied with the schools' English educational system. Similarly, answers from the open questions in the questionnaire and interviews revealed that thirteen mothers agreed that the curriculum used in international schools is strong and very good and a further three mothers noted that they liked the intensity of it. 'Strong' seems to be a significant word used by mothers to signal their satisfaction with the program.

The second thing mothers were truly pleased with was the learning of the English language. Twelve mothers considered talking English most of the time and listening to it as a great advantage for their children, one mother even added that it is like studying abroad. Moreover, several mothers were pleased that their children were fluent in English. Mother 2 recalled that she had realized a sudden improvement in her sons' English language when they were in the first grade. She believed that it was due to the surrounding environment; they hear English a lot and are forced to speak English with their peers and teachers.



*Figure 2.* Mothers' willingness to recommend their child's English Program to other

The focus on building the students' personality was another considerable benefit from international schools based on mothers' point of views. They enforce self-learning by making students present projects where they have to search for the information by themselves and then present it. Mother 5 agrees by reporting her child's experience:

Mother 5: He divides them into "groups". They were young, they were in the fifth grade and he chooses for them the name of the project .... After that, he gives them questions and tells them to go as a group and search. I really like it and the teacher's interference is limited.... He is not with them step by step and this is a good thing. When they finish their work, they show it to him ... the teacher starts to evaluate and direct them. Then, they present it again to the teacher "you approve it" or "you do not approve it".

Mother 5 believed that this is proper learning when the teacher is eager to help the students in gaining those skills. Several mothers found that international schools encourage students to become self-reliant in learning and that was what mothers liked most.

Mothers also stated other advantages that were equally found in both data sets. They were happy with the use of technology in education although a small number compared to those who found it as an advantage, thought it to be a disadvantage because they believe that the school is heavily relying on it. In addition, preparing students for tests like the "TOEFL" and "IELTS" was another thing that three mothers were impressed with in international schools. Three other mothers were happy with the extracurricular activities and that the school provided a wide variety of them, such as field trips, learning karate, and chess competitions.

#### 4.3.2 The disadvantages

A total of ten mothers raised the issue of the national identity subjects. They were not satisfied with the time devoted to Arabic and Religion. They think that the amount of content is really little and that the school is not paying great attention to them or on choosing their

teachers. However, this shows different perspectives among mothers when compared to what was discussed earlier although this view might seem stronger due to the number of supporters.

Four mothers were upset about the Science subject, pointing out that students do not apply what they take in the laboratory. Furthermore, teachers do not relate the lessons to the students' daily lives although, as Mother 3 stated, "Science" is rich with information. Mother 5 emphasized this by providing an example of this deficiency. She stated that her son had a lesson about the weather and the weather those days was changing a lot. She believed that it was the perfect time to take the students out and ask them about it, but unfortunately, the teacher did not.

The focus on quality over quantity when teaching is what mothers strongly desire. Unluckily, this was a drawback found in international schools from the perceptions of four mothers. Several teachers, as mothers stated, were more concerned with finishing the book rather than making sure the students actually understood the concepts. Mother 4 who is also a teacher in an international school noted:

The teacher should give, give, repeat, and repeat. He should assess students regularly to know who understood or still because students differ in their abilities...

For me, the student's achievement depends on what they have actually learnt and not the amount of what I give. The "Maths" book I don't finish it... I let them "practice, practice".

She pointed to what she believed as being a crucial point which was repetition and making sure all the students have grasped the idea before moving to another. The following chapter will shed light on the major findings presented in this section as well as try to find interpretations through comparing them to previous research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter 4 presented the results and analysis that helped in answering the research questions. However, in this chapter, the researcher will discuss the most striking results as well as try to interpret and find answers for them through comparing them with the literature covered in Chapter 2. It could be realized, from the results, the degree of importance mothers gave the English language. Despite the fact that answers to the questionnaire items regarding the factors influencing mothers' decision for choosing international schools (see Table 2) showed it to be in the sixth place of importance, when this item was observed alone, a total of 64 per cent of the mothers believed it be extremely important and another 29 per cent as important. This seems to be a big number which can indicate the importance of the English language to mothers. This view can also be confirmed by the responses to the open question and the interviews; Table 3 showed that English was ranked second. The result from this study is rather consistent with results found in Al-Harathi (2004), Mackenzie, et al. (2003), Ng (2012), Pottern and Hayden (2004), and Watfa and Al-Mutawa's studies (2008). Although parents in Mackenzie, et al. (2003) and Watfa and Al-Mutawa's studies (2008) ranked English first, but the thing that all studies share in common was that parents perceived the English language as truly an important factor. Likewise, this idea was also present in this study.

It is worthwhile to notice the code switching between the Arabic and English language that was obvious in mothers' interviews. Even though the interviews were in Arabic, all five mothers used many words in English as seen in the extracts from the transcripts found in Chapter 4. Several words were put between brackets to indicate that they were originally said in English, such as 'creative writing', 'dependent', 'fake', 'international', 'groups', 'Maths'. This may convey mothers' knowledge and education; one of the mothers has stated that she had her Master's degree in the United Kingdom while the other one had a PhD degree in TESOL. Al-Harathi (2004)

reported in her study that mothers who wanted their children to learn English at an early age have completed their higher education and this might be the case also here. It might also show that mothers know English and they would like their children to follow their footsteps. Additionally, the significance and value of the English language for mothers might also account for their behavior.

English was seen by the majority as a necessity in their daily lives. It appears that nowadays, as mothers indicated, universities and occupations demand people to know English. Mackenzie (2009), Ng (2012), Pottern and Hayden (2004), and Watfa and Al-Mutawa (2008) emphasized the significance that parents attached to English as being beneficial for their children's future; whether in their profession or for studying abroad. The results from this research confirms those studies since mothers believed that learning the English language would open doors for their children; they will have better opportunities in the university as well as work. Indeed, this view was also asserted by Hayden (2011). In addition, mothers also noted that it would make the experience of studying abroad much easier for their children.

When asked about the differences between international schools and other private schools, most mothers asserted the intensity of the English language and that it was given more importance in international schools. In other words, they were pleased with the use of English as the medium of instruction and that their children are being surrounded by that language either by listening to it or speaking it. They consider it as a great advantage; one mother described it as resembling studying abroad and that was similar to what Taylor (2015) argued about such schools that instead of sending children abroad to study the language, they could experience a similar environment in international schools. In fact, this seemed to be one of the factors that made mothers drawn to the international education. It appears to be supporting as well as reinforcing how mothers perceive the English language with great importance. Previous studies like Al-Natour and Hijazi (2012), Watfa and Al-Mutawa (2008), and Yaacob,



et al. (2014) also compared different schools, however, the type of schools chosen were not identical to this study. Watfa and Al-Mutawa (2008) compared international schools to local ones and found that parents favored the first one. Nevertheless, Al-Natour and Hijazi (2012) and Yaacob, et al. (2014) compared private schools to public ones and the results of both studies showed more preference to the private sector.

The English curriculum in international schools, which is the focus of this study, had established a quite good reputation between mothers. A great number of the sample were glad with the programs adopted in those schools, emphasizing how strong and well organized they were. This was also confirmed by one of the mothers noting that international schools had a good educational system. They were not only satisfied with the curriculum but were also happy to recommend it to other mothers. Although they did not describe it as being flexible as indicated by Ng (2012) and Taylor (2015), yet it was praised and given considerable importance. This was seen in the data presented by Mackenzie (2009) and Mackenzie, et al. (2003) which revealed that the curriculum had occupied the third place in relation to parents priorities when choosing a school for their children whereas in Yaacob, et al.'s study (2014), it was ranked first. In general, they all imply the significance attached to the type of programs.

In addition to the curriculum used, mothers highlighted several advantages of international schools. For example, they apply a wide variety of modern teaching methods and prepare students for international tests like the 'IELTS'. Moreover, developing the child's personality was another great benefit that mothers believed could be gained from international schools and this was consistent with the results found by Watfa and Al-Mutawa (2008). However, a great variety of comments were noticed in mothers' responses which ranged between mothers who agreed with several aspects and others who disagreed with them. For instance, in spite of how several mothers were delighted with the employment of technology in teaching and

learning, another group thought it to be as a disadvantage and believed that the school is overusing it. This was also the case with subjects; a few were happy with the intensity of the books while others believed it to be too much for students. Furthermore, the availability of foreign teachers, whose first language is English, was seen as a great benefit, however, other mothers noted that they would like the school to hire foreign teachers. The diversity found in participants' answers might be attributed to the difference in points of view among the sample. It could also be due to the participation of mothers from various international schools and this might show how those schools differ from one another. Nonetheless, it is important to realize that this point was not indicated in previous literature listed in Chapter 2.

The data collected from the interviews as well as the open questions in the questionnaires reveals how strikingly thoughtful mothers are about the education their child is receiving. The way they recall their stories about the different types of teachers they have encountered, their feelings towards them and towards what they have experienced, the views they express about the various aspects they liked and those that they wanted to change, all this shows how that sample seems to be a peculiar variety of the population. They commented on teachers and were very critical about them; pointing to how they varied significantly. Mother 4, who was a teacher in international schools, argued that the most important thing for teachers to put in mind is repeating the lessons and making sure that all students have understood, putting herself in the position of a teacher and a mother at the same time. It can show how she, as a mother, wants her child's teachers to be like. Mothers also discussed a number of other aspects, such as noting that giving students homework which requires them to research was a positive feature in international schools, however, others wanted more focus on research. This was also the case with reading. The problem with writing was also covered above when Mother 3 criticized the way her child's school dealt with this skill and how children are not trained to write in school. As a

result, this may lead to children being dependent on their parents when writing.

Mothers' perspectives show how concerned and reflective they are regarding their children's education. Likewise, participants in this study look similar to the parents in Vincent and Ball's study (2007); they all care a lot about their children's development and feel that it is their responsibility to make sure they are receiving the right kind of education to prepare them for their future. It appears that they feel it is their duty to do so.

In addition, several interviewed mothers pointed to the reputation of the school, noting that they would not ever judge a school by its reputation because some schools have false reputations. Therefore, they believe that personal experience and their children's achievements are what determines the quality of a particular school. This could indicate how careful mothers are when choosing a school for their children. According to Bast and Walberg (2004), parents can choose the best school for their children. This might be conveyed, in this study, by mothers who do not trust what is said about a school and believe that they should try it for themselves.

It is noteworthy to notice mothers' perceptions towards the school's fees as shown in Table 1. The majority of the sample were not satisfied with the amount of money they had to pay for international schools. However, this dissatisfaction was not justified by mothers in this study. It might be because they think they have not got what they paid for or, to put it differently, the education their child is receiving is not worth the money they have paid. Nevertheless, this might not be the most appropriate reason for that because a great number of mothers were quite satisfied with the English education found in their children's schools as well as their children's progress. In this case, a more logical explanation could be identified in Watfa and Al-Mutawa's study (2008) which emphasized the high amount of international schools' fees. Therefore, mothers might be pleased with

their children's schools but believe that the amount money they have to pay is rather high.

Mothers have raised a few limitations of their children's international schools that cannot be overlooked which have not been discussed in prior research studies. It could be because these drawbacks did not exist in the schools which participated in those studies. One limitation was the Science subject and how the lessons being taught were not applied in the laboratory. This might be due to the teacher's fault; not wanting to go to the lab or it could be that the school is not well equipped with tools that can help aid teachers in their lessons. The other drawback was the focus on quantity over quality which most mothers complained about. This also might depend on the teacher, however, the school's administration may also account for this deficiency. That is, they may put pressure on teachers and require them to finish the whole book. Teachers might also be evaluated on that. For this reason, the best solution for mothers could be by contacting the school and discussing the problem in order to reach a satisfactory resolution or an explanation.

Overall, despite the few negative comments on international schools, mothers, in general, showed quite satisfaction with the English curriculum used in their children's international schools and conveyed a rather positive picture about those schools. In addition, their answers revealed how much attention they gave to the English language. They believed that it has a critical role in their child's present and future, pointing to its importance nowadays as well as indicating its influence on their choice of school. This sample also conveyed how mothers' were concerned about their children's education and development; making sure they are in the right track.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The idea of this study was drawn from the apparent growth of international schools in Saudi Arabia and the strong endorsement of those schools by parents which can be seen through the drift towards enrolling their children in them. According to major research studies presented in the literature review, the acquisition of the English language was one of the substantial factors for parents' tendency to send their children to international schools. Therefore, this research investigated mothers' perspectives on the English curriculum that is implemented in their children's international schools. Moreover, since there were limited research in the Saudi context regarding the topics related to international schools, the study also focused on the factors that influenced mothers' decision and made them choose international schools rather than other private ones. In addition, it touched upon the merits and demerits of international schools as perceived by mothers.

In order to answer the research questions, the study was conducted through the use of a mixed method design. Questionnaires were first distributed to mothers through the use of snowball sampling and was then followed by semi-structured interviews. The design used was extremely useful in collecting valuable data which helped in clarifying a number of answers that were found in the questionnaires as well as adding richness and depth to the data collected. It was also useful in generating effective questions for the interview schedule which serves the research questions.

The findings offered quite supported the importance of the English language and confirmed previous studies. It revealed how mothers valued it and believed that it plays an essential role in their children's present and future, in the sense that it provides them with better opportunities in universities and careers as well as the ability to study abroad with less barriers. Moreover, several data seemed to imply the significance of the English language and its effect on mothers' choice of school. First, the use of many English words by all of the interviewed mothers might confirm that point. The answers to

the question regarding the difference between international schools and private schools appeared also to assert the previous idea by mothers conveying that they preferred international schools because of the intensity and extensive use of the English language which seemed to imply their desire for their children to learn English.

It was also important to realize, despite the existence of few limitations, the overall satisfaction by mothers with the English curriculum adopted in those schools. They praised the use of different teaching methods and the way the school worked on developing their children's personality. The findings also revealed few drawbacks found in international schools. Mostly noticed was the schools' fees; the majority of the participants were not satisfied with the amount they had to pay for international schools. However, it appeared that the advantages surpassed the disadvantages.

### **6.1 Limitations and implications for further research**

In the questionnaire, the question about the reasons that motivated mothers in choosing international schools which was in the form of a Likert scale question, although it was useful in showing how important each factor was in helping mothers with their decision, many factors were considered important by mothers. This did not truly help in showing the most influential factor that made mothers choose international schools for. Therefore, it would be more beneficial if participants were asked to rank order the items according to their importance in influencing their decision. Assigning numbers to factors to show the rank order would have given more accurate results in comparison to the type of question already used.

### **6.2 Pedagogical implications**

Awareness should be raised regarding the disadvantages stated previously by mothers in relation to their children's international schools. Schools should set up well-equipped laboratories that can aid teachers in their lessons and are useful for clarifying and applying what was taught in classes. Sensitizing teachers about its benefits and encouraging them to make use of it is also considered essential. In

addition, more attention should be paid to quality rather than quantity. This means the arrangement of reasonable amount of lessons that can be covered and revised throughout the term. In other words, as noted by a mother, it is most important to reinforce what students have learnt in classes because students vary in their skills and abilities; a number of students might grasp the idea quickly while others may need more time.

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