



## **Teachers' Perceptions of Supporting Pre-School Children in Self-Learning in Montessori Classrooms: A Case Study of Three Saudi Pre-Schools.**

**Maha Abdulaziz Almajed**

King Saud University  
[mahalmajed@ksu.edu.sa](mailto:mahalmajed@ksu.edu.sa)

### **ABSTRACT**

Teaching at pre-school in Saudi Arabia can involve the use of many types of teaching methods, and the Montessori educational system is one approach that can be used. Over time, this method has gained value and popularity due to its promotion of a self-learning strategy. This current study aims to explore the perceptions of Montessori teachers working in Saudi Arabia about their role in supporting a self-learning strategy for pre-school children. The research sample comprised Montessori teachers working at three schools in Saudi Arabia. Data was collected by undertaking qualitative semi-structured interviews and using an unstructured questionnaire. The interviews was piloted in advanced. The findings show that most of the Saudi pre-school teachers who participated are knowledgeable about teaching the Montessori system in the classroom, and have knowledge of applying the self-learning strategy. However, in practice, their role in supporting children to achieve self-learning is affected by various factors, including: the overall ethos of the Saudi education system, the Ministry of Education's perceptions about teaching pre-school children using the Montessori system, the teacher's background and their years of experiences working with pre-school children, and the use of individual education plans for each child.

**Keywords:** Montessori, Self-learning, Preschool, Childhood.

## تصورات المعلمات في دعم أطفال سن ما قبل المدرسة في التعلم الذاتي في فصول منتسوري: دراسة حالة لثلاثة روضات في السعودية

مها عبد العزيز الماجد  
جامعة الملك سعود

[mahalmajed@ksu.edu.sa](mailto:mahalmajed@ksu.edu.sa)

### ملخص الدراسة

يمكن للتدريس في مرحلة ما قبل المدرسة في المملكة العربية السعودية أن ينطوي على استخدام أنواع كثيرة من أساليب التدريس، ونظام منتسوري التعليمي هو أحد الأساليب التي يمكن استخدامها. اكتسبت هذه الطريقة قيمة وشعبية بسبب تحفيزها لاستراتيجية التعلم الذاتي. تهدف هذه الدراسة الحالية إلى استكشاف تصورات معلمات منتسوري العاملات في المملكة العربية السعودية حول دورهم في دعم استراتيجية التعلم الذاتي للأطفال في مرحلة ما قبل المدرسة. تكونت عينة البحث من معلمات يعملون في ثلاث مدارس تطبق منهجية منتسوري بالمملكة العربية السعودية. تم جمع البيانات عن طريق إجراء مقابلات نوعية شبه منظمة واستخدام استبيان غير منظم. تم تجريب المقابلات سلفاً. تبين النتائج أن معظم معلمات مرحلة ما قبل المدرسة السعوديات الذين شاركوا في الدراسة على دراية بتدريس نظام منتسوري في الفصل، ولديهن معرفة بتطبيق استراتيجية التعلم الذاتي. ومع ذلك، في الممارسة العملية، يتأثر دورها في دعم الأطفال لتحقيق التعلم الذاتي بعوامل مختلفة، بما في ذلك: الروح العامة للنظام التعليمي السعودي، وتصورات وزارة التعليم حول تعليم أطفال ما قبل المدرسة باستخدام نظام منتسوري، والخلفية المرجعية للمعلمة وسنوات خبرتها في العمل مع أطفال ما قبل المدرسة، واستخدام خطط التعليم الفردية لكل طفل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** منتسوري، التعلم الذاتي، رياض الأطفال، طفولة.

## 1. INRODUCTION & RESEARCH RATIONAL

Investigating how Montessori teachers' perceive their role in supporting the self-learning process is an interesting area to explore, especially in Saudi Arabia. The Montessori system has recently gained popularity in Saudi Arabia, and a growing number of pre-school teachers in the Kingdom believe in the importance of self-learning strategy. However, there are only a few studies that explore how this system works in the Kingdom. The investigations carried out in this study are recommended by previous studies. This study will provide valuable information that can be used to progress the development of the curriculum provided to pre-school children, and it will contribute positively to preparing qualified teachers to teach at this educational stage. This is in accordance with the Saudi Education Ministry's efforts in relation to the Saudi Vision 2030: a unique vision that the Saudi Government wants to achieve by 2030 (Vision 2030, 2018). The Saudi Government already recognises some of the challenges raised that related to the current study. However, national educational aims have been reformulated within the scope of national transformation (see Table 2.1).

Challenges	The negative stereotyping of teachers occupation.	The weak critical thinking skills of Saudi students.	The lack of educational and training output in relation to labour market requirements.
New Objectives	- Improving the polarisation, rehabilitation and the development of teachers. - Improving the financial competence of the education sector.	- Improving the educational environment. - stimulating creativity and innovation. - Enhancing the skills and values of students.	Strengthening the ability of education system to fulfil training and development requirements and labour market needs.

Source: (The Ministry of Education, 2018)

**Table 2.1: Three Challenges Facing Education in Relation to the Education Objectives 2020**



## 2. THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

This study seeks to explore teachers' perceptions of the self-learning strategies used in the Saudi pre-school Montessori system and it aims to examine the role teachers play in supporting the self-learning process.

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

### *3.1 Pre-school Teachers:*

At pre-school stage, teachers must be able to deal with all principles of the kindergarten curriculum efficiently and creating attractive ways of allowing the curriculum content to be tested by children (Curtis, 1998). Teaching styles used for children between the ages of 3-5-years entirely different from those used with older children. Therefore, teachers working with this age group need special to develop skills and qualities that are either be inherent within their personality or that can be acquired by training or/and experiences. Edgington (2004) emphasises that teachers working with pre-school children should be warmth, have empathy, be spontaneous and flexible. Thus, teachers working at kindergarten schools can play a crucial role in shaping the curriculum by interaction with the children. Their task generally is to help develop positive experiences for children with slight and appropriate intervention and to enhance the enthusiasm of children to learn and enabling that effectively (Curtis,1998).

### *3.2 Montessori Pre-school Educational System*

The Montessori approach emerged in the nineteenth century, and was initially used for special needs children (Danner and Fowler, 2015), then it is developed to become an educational method which could be used to teach all pre-school children. The framework for Montessori's development plan is divided into four stages as it is determined in Table 3.1.



0-6 years	6-12 years	12-18 years	18-24 years
Absorbent Mind	Conscious Mind	Abstract Mind	
0-3      3-6	6-9      9-12	12-15      15-18	Adulthood

Source: (Montessori, 1967)

**Table3. 1: Plan for Child Development Using the Montessori Approach**

The core of Montessori is to raise spontaneous work and enhance the personal positively and creatively through teachers' beliefs for the positive qualities and the child's inner desire to learn (Wentworth, 1999). She believed that “every child is unique” (Curtis,1998, p.6), and it is important for children to develop independently. This view led her to design an appropriate approach to teach children, centred on self-directed learning, autonomy, and creating well-prepared environment (Peng and Md-Yunus, 2014).Classrooms organised using Montessori’s approach usually comprise a mixed age-group of between three and six years-old; this provides the opportunity for older children to be partners with younger children in the group (Curtis,1998).

Montessori stressed the use of specific equipment designed to focus on engaging a child’s senses, because children of this age group depend on their senses to learning and explore (Bahatheg, 2010). In this context, Bahatheg (2010) conducted a study targets the effects of children playing with Montessori educational equipment, in relation to children’s ability to solve problems of social interaction with their teachers. This study seeks to illustrate how Montessori materials contribute to engaging a child’s senses and developing problem solving skills and creatively. In a comprehensive study, Bahatheg (2010) uses experiments to measure a teacher’s ability to encourage children to solve problems, the teacher assist children to create problems then guides the children to explore solutions sequentially and individually. This encourages children to think in detail and compare materials. Moreover, the study finds that children demonstrate individual differences in the problem-solving skill.

An important study is a Taiwanese by Peng and Md-Yunus (2014) which compares between children of different grades in primary school. The study looks at those students who have had experiences of the Montessori system when in kindergarten and those who did not.

The study concludes that there are significant educational differences between children who have had experience of the Montessori system and those who have not experienced in the Montessori system when they were in kindergarten. Pupils who went to a Montessori kindergarten obtained a higher scores in maths, languages and art, but in social studies differences are not found. These findings indicate the importance of practicing strategies of independent learning at an early stage, which might influence children in some crucial subjects.

### 3.3 *The Self-Learning Strategy*

Self-learning is a technical learning strategy can be implemented in many and various learning contexts. It complements other concepts, such as syllabus negotiation, autonomous learning, and self-directed learning (Tudol, 1993; Thornton, 2010). Learners in self- learning strategy are encouraged and guided to rely on themselves to gain skills and knowledge, and they are led towards developing a variety of skills (see Table 3.2).

Cognitive Skills	Personal Skills	Academic Skills	Life Skills	Technical Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem solving skills.</li> <li>• Thinking skills.</li> <li>• Knowledge management.</li> <li>• Information processing.</li> <li>• The capacity for understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constructing Objectives.</li> <li>• Self-direction.</li> <li>• Motivation.</li> <li>• Self-management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading and writing skills.</li> <li>• Researching skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making.</li> <li>• Communication.</li> <li>• Negotiation.</li> <li>• Time-management.</li> <li>• Pressure management.</li> <li>• Confrontation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using study resources.</li> <li>• Dealing with information technology.</li> </ul>

Source: (Alansari, 2017)

**Table3. 2: Self-Learning Skills**

The application of this approach is highly integrated, and encapsulates broad educational contexts, such as learning a language, adult education, online learning, and early childhood education (Thornton, 2010). However, self-learning embraces a variety of different perspectives, which can affect how it is applied and interpreted, including the ethos of a school, for example.



This especially applies to the interpretation of this approach for pre-school education. Self-learning relies on the learner's ability to acquire knowledge using his/her self-efforts, as these fit with learner's ability, and using various forms of educational material and teacher's guidance (Alansari, 2017). Therefore, when using this approach, the learner engages in learning activities that are more relevant to students than to the teacher, who decides on, "the conceptual and linguistic content of these activities" (Tudol, 1993, p.22).

Alansari (2017) survey study measured the level of active-learning effectiveness on self-learning for primary students in Makkah; she finds that self-learning is highly influenced by active-learning, the effectiveness of active-learning to promote self-learning for the following: constructing motivations, learning habits and skills, decision-making, problem-solving, and self-dependence. However, it is unlikely to generalise the results of Alansari's study, because it used a small-scale sample drawn from students at one school. Moreover, Alansari relied on the structured questionnaire as a study tool to measure those a wide range of factors that affect self-learning. However, she encourages teaching different education stages using active-learning strategies with a supportive educational environment.

A study undertaken by Alghamdi (2016) explores the subjective beliefs of pre-school teachers towards good developmental practices and the unsuitable developmental practices in relation to the education of young children in Saudi Arabia. Alghamdi (2016) discusses whether the cultural influences might shape teachers' beliefs toward these practices used. The results indicate that there are four fundamental perspectives towards suitable developmental practices, namely: educational development for children, social learning for children, inclusive learning or a child-centred approach. The last indicated practice is the approach that must resemble the Montessori system is that which is concerned with placing the child at the centre subject of the educational process. As the content of the curriculum meets a child's needs for allowing them to learn whatever they want to learn independently, and providing multi-natural opportunities for supporting and tutoring children by using Montessori materials (Danner and Fowler, 2015).

### ***3.4 Teacher Roles in Montessori Education System and Self-learning***

The main role of the Montessori teachers is to guide children through the prepared environment appropriately, and they must be able to transfer ideas successfully to children. In this context, the role of the teacher emerges as they support children in the self-learning process. The Montessori's system emphasises independent learning for children through engaging their senses. This is done by nurturing a creative physical environment for children to learn (Bahatheg, 2010). Maria Montessori believed that every child is vibrant and creative and is able to develop their learning independently. This means that children in a Montessori environment can learn by themselves. In this system, however, the role of monitoring is crucial; the “teacher’s role as a preparer of the environment, a guide, an observer, and an educational leader is a vital part of the Montessori classroom” (Aljabreen, 2017, p. 54). Thus, children learning in the Montessori classroom learn spontaneously, and are guided by independent learning and self-decision in using Montessori equipment in a free environment. It is the teacher’s role to observe children in order to identify their interests and then prepare an interesting environment to meet children’s needs, taking into consideration children's individual differences.

An unpublished thesis by Alsadoun (2011) about the teacher’s role enrolled in the Montessori education system, particularly in Saudi Arabia, investigates in assisting 3-6-years-old children to develop self-directed learning in one Saudi pre-school. Drawing on interviews and observations, the study found that self-directed learning involves three essential elements; the psychological element, as represented in self-reflective learning activities, the methodological elements, as represented in developing decision-making skills, and the sociological elements which emerges in the student’s social development of analytical and theoretical thinking, via communication between students and teachers in the atmosphere of the classroom. Teachers should focus on preparing children using these three elements to hone skills that are important for their future education and life. Moreover, Alsadoun’s study examines enhancing these methodologies in education in order to positively change learning patterns for students.





### ***3.5 The Pre-School Education System in Saudi Arabia***

Although the Saudi education system was set up in 1924, the teaching of pre-school children in Saudi Arabia has only been practised for four decades (Badawood, 2006). The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the private sector share responsibility for supervising early childhood education (Abdulsalam et al., 2008). Pre-school education management seeks to promote the quantitative and qualitative development of education for pre-school children (Badawood, 2006), and pre-school education in Saudi Arabia is aimed at children aged between three and six years old. Enrolling children in the education system at pre-school stage is optional, and, typically, it is a mixed-sex learning environment, which is different from the gender segregation rule practiced at all other stages of the Saudi education system. Also, pre-school education in Saudi Arabia is divided into three different stages, according to a child's age: 3 to 4 years-old for KG1, 4 to 5 years-old for KG2, and 5 to 6 years-old for KG3. The teaching style used for pre-school children in Saudi Arabia is primarily Islamic in character, and it is mostly done in the Arabic language. However, half an hour or an hour each day is usually set aside to teach the basics of the English language, but this practice varies from school to school, depending on the individual school's vision. Badawood (2006) identifies certain basic principles that drive the Saudi education system, and they are associated with developing various skills such as: collective action learning, orderly play, and reading and writing (initially). Nevertheless, some well-known western educators and academics have influenced the development of Saudi educational principles for pre-school children, including: Freud, Montessori, Froebel, Russell, and Erikson (Abduljawad et al., 2008).

### ***3.6 The Pre-School Montessori System in Saudi Arabia***

Recently, the Montessori system has become increasingly popular in Saudi Arabia. The introduction of Montessori schools in Saudi Arabia was originally influenced by the practices used at schools set up for the children of UK and US citizens working in Saudi Arabia (Alsadoun, 2011). However, in recent years, the Montessori education system has been optionally adopted as a pre-school teaching system for both Saudi and international children living in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi education emphasises new orientations in education for all educational phases, including kindergarten, and self-learning forms an alternative learning approach to traditional learning. Simultaneously, the application of the Montessori system for early education has shaped new teaching trends that support the self-learning approach. However, Montessori schools in Saudi Arabia experience barriers to applying the Montessori view of self-learning.

A comparative study by Aljabreen (2017) looks at comparing between teachers' roles in the U.S Montessori education system and in traditional Saudi pre-schools. The study uses qualitative data collected using three methods: observations, interviews and lesson plan/student assessment documents. The study examines the philosophic, cultural and theoretical influences on teacher's role, and shows that differences appear in the way that those teachers deliver their roles and apply their philosophies in the national cultural framework. The findings conclude that although the academic, behavioural, relational, occupational and environmental roles can be similar, there are differences in the way these roles represented according to the different contexts of national culture and educational philosophies.

### ***3.7 Research Question***

To achieve the main aims of the study, the following research question is posed: **What is the Saudi teachers' perception of their role in supporting pre-school children in self-learning as a part of the Montessori education method?** In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions are posed:

1. What is the perceived best role that a Montessori teacher can play?
2. What are the teacher's views about self-learning?
3. To what extent can the intervention of a teacher help in self-learning process?
4. How do Montessori teachers describe their role in the preparation of a suitable environment for children so that the children can achieve self-learning?



## **4 DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### ***4.1 Case Study Approach Design***

This study employs the case study approach. It concerns on three Saudi private pre-schools employ the Montessori programme in their classrooms, but each of the three schools at which the teachers taught had its own vision statement: 'Each child has a unique personality', 'Leadership in science and mathematics education', and 'We are working to make your child a source of pride'.

### ***4.2 Research Paradigm***

The research paradigm used in the current study is the interpretative approach. This approach was chosen in order to provide opportunities for participants to deliver their views and their understanding of the Montessori teacher's role in supporting children in the self-learning process. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain, this paradigm emphasises a subjective approach, and it tends to rely on qualitative methods to collect data by means of comparison and repetition.

### ***4.3 Research Sample***

The study sample was selected comprising fifteen specialist teachers in teaching pre-school children in Saudi Arabia that employ the Montessori programme. Sampling was restricted to three Saudi private schools (A,B, and C), five teachers per school. The reasons behind choosing these schools were because: they form group of schools that employ the Montessori programme effectively; they have specialised in applying the Montessori system for a substantial period of time; two schools, in particular, are specialise in providing places only for children between 0-6 years-old. Additionally, permissions were taken from the schools' administration and the teachers themselves, to participate, and permission was sought in advance in order to comply with the ethical requirements of the research.

#### ***4.4 Research Methods***

For this study, it was felt that using interpretive qualitative research methods was the best way of obtaining the perceptions of how Montessori's teachers perceive their role in supporting children to achieve learning independently. The participant teachers were given an opportunity to describe their experiences and the researcher listened to their views. Pre-school education involves children learning to "make sense of things" (Edgington, 2004: p.145) and this view pairs well with using interpretive qualitative research methods which are designed to record how people make sense of their lives and experiences (Aljabreen, 2017). Therefore, the most appropriate methods to use in this study were interpretive qualitative research methods in order to answer the primary question of: **"What is the Saudi teachers' perception of their role in supporting pre-school children in self-learning as a part of the Montessori education method?"**

#### ***4.5 Research Tools***

Two main methods were used to collect data: semi-structured interviews with participant Montessori teachers, based on a semi-structured questionnaire which was used to guide the interviews, and an unstructured questionnaires explore the use of Montessori materials which form essential part of the Montessori approach, its approach to self-learning, and the classroom environment.

##### ***4.5.1 Pilot Interview Questions***

Collecting pilot data helps the researcher judge his/her tools in terms of how they affect the participants, and helps identify problems in advance (Cohen et al., 2011). I interviewed three participants in order to pilot the questions and test for quality. The data gathered from these interviews helped me to further development for conducting the semi-structured interviews. I used the pilot data to examine problems and issues that needed to be solved in relation to the interview questions.

#### *4.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews*

Montessori teachers from three Saudi schools were interviewed using semi-structured questions guided by a questionnaire. Interviews were classed as a fundamental tool used to collect data in order to obtain teachers' perceptions of their role in supporting children to achieve self-learning. I used the semi-structured format to allow teachers a space to express themselves, and address their experiences. The interviews were led by fourteen questions, target obtaining data answering the four sub-questions which formed themes for data analysis, these themes include further details are elicited through the questions.

#### *4.5.3 Unstructured Questionnaire*

Two types of questionnaire were used in the current study: a semi-structured questionnaire was used to guide the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix [2]). Indeed, this questionnaire was then employed as a uniform list of semi-structured interview questions, in order to draw deeper responses that served the research questions. Another unstructured questionnaire used six pictorial information to ask three questions about how Montessori materials are used by teachers to deal with children daily in the classroom (see Appendix [3]). Teachers were asked about how they perceive and interact with these six tools. The data gathered from this questionnaires help me to compare and confirm teachers' responds gathered from interviews.

#### *4.6 Practical and Ethical Issues*

The current study considered all relevant ethical practices, including maintaining the trustworthy and confidentiality of information shared by teachers with the researcher. Different verification techniques were used to inform participants of the nature of research, to notify them of the purpose of the study, and to gain permission for participation. Moreover, written approval from each research participant was taken before commencing both the interviews and issuing the questionnaires. Approval was also sought from each school's administration body. The researcher must ensure the privacy of all information and of the participants, and must store information gained from interviews and questionnaires in a safe place where only the researcher can access it.



Equally, the anonymity of the research participants and schools must be preserved. Participant teachers were also given the right to refuse permission for their interviews to be recorded. For this current research, all the participants consented to their interviews being recorded using an audio device. Also, Bell (2005) suggests that interviewers should transcribe information gained as soon as the interview is over, and the researcher undertook this activity promptly as suggested.

#### ***4.7 Research Limitations***

When undertaking this study, I faced some limitations, most notably in relation to the timeframe chosen for data collection. Moreover, some interviews had to be conducted via phone, and so I was not able to gauge facial expressions or use eye-contact. Also, it is difficult to apply generalisation to the information gained from the participant teachers because of the sample size which is only three pre-schools in light of the number of Montessori pre-schools operating in Saudi Arabia.

### **5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Some factors might influence teachers' perceptions and practice of their role in this context. This including schools' policies and philosophies adopted on self-learning support. It also influenced by the orientations of the Saudi Education Ministry. Moreover, teachers' perceptions of the role in supporting self-learning were generally restricted by the individual plans made for children, in that teachers must apply an individual plan and allocate tasks for each child. However, when teaching this plan, the teachers must consider how they represent themselves as teachers, and they must follow the administration instructions of their school.

A teacher's academic specialisation and background experience impact on the extent to which they understand their fundamental role in teaching pre-school children generally and in the Montessori method particularly.

All of the teacher participants held a Bachelor’s Degree in Education, but in diverse disciplines, as illustrated in Table 5.1, and all of them had undergone a specialised course for teaching pre-school children using the Montessori system before working in the educational system.

Teacher Specialism	Early Childhood Education	English Language	Special Needs Education	Arabic Language	Mathematics	Psychology	IT
A	3	2					
B	1			1	1	1	1
C	2	2	1				

**Table 5. 1: Classification of the Fifteen Teacher Participants According to Discipline.**

The majority of participants showed a comprehensive understanding of the teacher’s role in delivering a self-learning strategy. However, teacher specialisations, where they attended university and the number of years’ experience they had working in both the Montessori system and the pre-school traditional system, affected how they perceived their role. The results show that this training as well as teaching experience can positively influence a teacher’s perception of the self-learning strategy. The fundamental roles that the Montessori teachers defined themselves as playing were those of guide and observer. However, in this respect, the teachers described their role in different ways. They asserted the importance of being a guide, an assistant, and of being a patient and positive supervisor, and a flexible and motivated person, more than being a teacher. Edgington (2004) emphasises the importance of flexibility in the role of the pre-school teachers, and Marshall (2017) notes the ‘observation’ and ‘guidance’ appear in the most descriptions of the Montessori teacher’s role. Participants perceived their role in the terms outlined in Table 5.2 below.

Motivated Promoting self-directed learning.	Patient Observing children’s feelings.	An Assistant Looking for opportunities availability.	A Directed Focusing on the tiny details.	A Supervisor Intervening if necessarily.
Promoting thinking-skills.	Enabling freedom within a sensible	Teaching without	Promoting learning from imitation and	Facilitating the

Promoting playing-learning.	space for each child.	indoctrination.	simulation without verbal direction.	educational process
Promoting creativity.	Listening to the child's views and implementing them if possible.	Enriching the child in a variety of fields.	Promoting independent learning for the child, focusing on the child's abilities.	
Enticement to making learning attractive.				

**Table 5. 2: Division of Tasks According to Agreed Roles.**

All the teachers agreed that they must support children in self-learning as part of the daily programme, particularly, during working cycle time when children are encouraged to interact with different activities freely, as well as in their acquisition of different skills, such as numeracy and literacy. In this respect, the teachers perceived their best role as that of supervisor, and their secondary role as a helper to the children, and they acknowledged their role as intervener at an appropriate time, if the child allows this. One teacher said that her best role during working cycle time is to encourage joint play by beginning a group game then gradually withdrawing to leave the children to play by themselves. Indeed, the Montessori system advocates that children in pre-school age tend to enjoy individual play, referred to as the 'working Out' phase (Montessori, 1967). The Montessori system promotes self-learning that encourages self-selection and self-correction, and this distinguishes the Montessori method from traditional pre-school programmes (Marshall, 2017). Moreover, during the working cycle, children are able to select activities freely and find the rhythm of their own learning (ibid). The teachers' personal interpretations of self-learning as a learning strategy used in the Montessori method are dissimilar and they are mostly positive and incorporate a self-learning framework. The perception of the teacher about themselves inside the classroom reflect on their perception and knowledge about self-learning. Drawing on the interviews, all of the teachers agreed that self-learning is an enjoyable learning strategy to work with. They also agreed that this strategy leads to the development of important skills including exploration and reconnaissance skills; self-confidence; academic skills, and life skills. As the self-learning is a flexible teaching method, teachers assert that it is a better strategy to use than traditional teaching methods of





indoctrination, and it is a necessary need for the future education, because each individual possesses their own tendencies for learning.

Self-learning is supported in the Montessori system by using materials that stimulate children's enthusiasm for exploration. Teachers give children the liberty to choose materials and activities, and teachers practice their role of supervision. However, teachers must also create individual plans and goals for each child that must be achieved during the week, and this can limit a child's freedom to decide on the activities they engage with during the working cycle. Some of the teachers said that individual plans can be used to assess children, and the child's interaction with their plan can be classed as an element of self-learning. Teachers noted that children use materials provided in class based on their individual abilities, with minimal teacher intervention. The participant teachers' ideas about intervention focused on encouragement, choice suggestions, thrill, persuasion, and attraction to the work. The teachers made decisions about intervention depending on the way the child engaged with the tool. For example, when the child uses the tool in a way that cause damage himself or the tool. Also, the teachers clarified their responsibilities when revisiting neglected activities. Ways of organising the presentation of materials in Montessori classrooms reflects each teacher's personality and their perceptions of teaching. For example, one teacher might prioritise developing a child's skills in language and maths, and when she prepares the environment she will place materials to facilitate these goals at the top of her list of available tools for all children to work with.

Self-Skills	Cognitive Skills	Intellectual Skills	Life Skills
Self-control	Exploration	Critical Thinking	Organising
Self-correction	Self-learning	Unlimited Thinking	Creativity
Independence	Renewing	Extension the	Attentiveness
Leadership	Knowledge	Imagination	Stimulating a child's
	Stimulating	Intelligence	senses
	Curiosity		
	Learning Motivation		

In terms of environment preparation, all the teachers agreed that preparing a stimulating environment is one of the essential tasks of Montessori teachers. They noted elements that might motivate children in the Montessori classroom

environment. These elements are classified based on the type of skill that needed development (see Table 5.3).

**Table 5. 3: How Teachers Use Motivating Elements in the Montessori Environment.**

### ***Conclusion***

This study sought to explore teachers' perceptions of their role in supporting children to achieve self-learning. The results based on qualitative data collected from interviews show that teachers understand how to teach using this system and particularly, they understand the self-learning strategy. However, in practice, the implementation of self-learning faces limitations. Factors that affect the ability of teachers to fully apply self-learning strategies include the policies and teaching orientations followed in each school, headteachers instructions, and the overall ethos of the Saudi educational system. Many of the participant teachers perceived self-learning as the completion of an individual plan, and prioritised the fulfilment of the plan's requirements, without really considering how to employ plans with the children.

Thus, the Saudi Montessori teachers' perceptions of their role in supporting pre-school children in self-learning are influenced by the extent to which they are able to apply Montessori principles for teaching pre-school children in their school.

### **REFERENCES**

- Abduljawad, N. M., Alkhatib, M. S., Alsenbl, A. A. & Metwally, M. (2008). *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Education System*. Riyadh: Al-kheraiji. [in Arabic].
- Al Ansari, F. (2017). Effect of Active Learning on Self-learning. In: *The Fourth International Conference on Folklore Studies Entitled: The Popular Heritage Between Egypt and Indonesia, 20/22 February 2017, Ismailiyah*. Saudi Arabia: Education Office in Aljomom, pp. 282 – 229. [in Arabic].
- Alghamdi, A. (2016). *Examining Preschool Teachers' Subjective Beliefs Toward Developmentally Appropriate Practices: A Saudi Arabian Perspective*.



(Doctoral dissertation, The University of Alabama at Birmingham) (pp.1\_282). Birmingham, England, The University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Aljabreen, H. (2017). *A Comparative Multi-Case Study of Teacher Roles in U.S. Montessori Preschool and Saudi Public Preschool*. (Doctoral dissertation, Kent State University College) (pp.1-433). Kent, Kent State University College.

Alsadoun, D. (2011). *The Teachers Role in Supporting 3-6 Year Old Students' Achievement of Self-Directed Learning in Montessori Education: A Case Study of a Montessori School in Saudi Arabia*. (The degree of master. London Metropolitan University,2011) (pp.1-94). London, England: London Metropolitan University.

Alshaer, A. (2007). Education for All Programmes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008 Education for All by 2015: Will We Make It?. UNESCO.

Badawood, A. (2006). *Relationships Between Shyness and Language Development in a Sample of Preschool Children in Saudi Arabia*. Cardiff University.

Bahatheg, R. O. (2010). *How the use of Montessori sensorial material supports children's creative problem solving in the pre-school classroom* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southampton, 2010) (pp. 1-445). Southampton, England: University of Southampton.

Bell, J. (2005). *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education, Health and Social Science*. 4th ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Method in Education*. 6th ed. London: Routledge Falmer.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2011). *Research Method in Education*. 7th ed. London: Routledge Falmer.



Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Curtis, A. (1998). *A Curriculum for the Pre-school Child*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

Danner, N. & Fowler, S. (2015). Montessori and Non-Montessori Early Childhood Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion and Access. *Journal of Montessori Research*, 1(1), 28.

Denscombe, M. (2014). *The Good Research Guide*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Edgington, M. (2004). *The Foundation Stage Teacher in Action*. 3rd ed. London: Poul Chapman Pub.

Education, M. (2018). *Education and Vision 2030*. Retrieved July 09, 2018, from <https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/Pages/Vision2030.aspx>.

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research: Denzin, K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*: Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Hadeed, J., & Sylva, K. (1999). Behavioral Observations as Predictors of Children's Social and Cognitive Progress in Day Care. *Early Child Development and Care*, 154 (1), 13-30.

Lillard, A. S. (2005). *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lillard, P. P. (1996). *Montessori Today: A Comprehensive Approach to Education From Birth to Adulthood*. New York: Schocken.

Marshall, C. (2017). Montessori Education: A Review of the Evidence Base. *Npj Science of Learning*. 2 (1),1-9.

Montessori, M. (1967). *The Absorbent Mind*. New York: Dell.



- Newby, P. (2010). *Research Methods for Education*. Harlow; London: Longman.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Donnell, M. (2013). *Maria Montessori: A Critical Introduction to Key Themes and Debates*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Peng, H. and Md-Yunus, S. (2014). Do Children in Montessori Schools Perform Better in the Achievement Test? A Taiwanese Perspective. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 46 (2), 299-311.
- Thornton, K. (2010). Supporting Self-Directed Learning: A Framework for Teachers. *Language Education in Asia*. 1 (1),158-170.
- Tudor, I. (1993). Teacher Roles in the Learner-centred Classroom. *ELT Journal*. 47 (1), 22-31.
- Vision 2030. (2018). *Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved July 09, 2018, from <http://vision2030.gov.sa/en/node>.
- Wentworth, R. A. (1999). *Montessori for the millennium*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.