"In the English lesson, I feel nothing: "في درس اللغة الإنجليزية، لا أشعر بشيء" : Exploring the Voice of Early Years Children about their Experiences of Learning to Speak English in Primary Schools in Qatar

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2024

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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Acknowledgments

My great thanks go to the supervisors who I worked with along my PhD journey, Dr. Lorna Arnott, Dr. Caralyn Blaisdell and Professor Kate Wall. Thank you for your great effort, support, feedback and the challengeable questions you raised that helped to positively develop and redirect the intellectuality of this thesis. Your constructive and nuanced feedback in every supervisory meeting challenged and changed my perspectives and viewpoints to produce this thesis.

I am thankful to the children, teachers and schools who participated in this research in Qatar. The research would not have happened without their support. My special appreciation goes to the children who surprised me with their outstanding capabilities in being able to make their voices visible within a rigid system. Their insistence on being active and expressing their agency in their own way enlightened and motivated me to continue my professional work with them, to discover their world from their own point of view.

I am thankful for being an employee of Qatar University. I am thankful for having access to their facilities to do this PhD whilst working. Without the facilitates, I would not have completed it.

Finally, I do not forget the great support and care of my family and friends. Without my *Mum*'s daily care and prayers, I would not be able to be where I am today. My deepest gratitude and appreciation to my brothers, *Musaab, Baraa* and *Abdullah,* and my lovely sister, *Al Zahraa* with her lovely 3 M's, her daughters, *Maria*, *Malak* and *Mais*, who filled my life with love and life and made sure I continued with this intellectual work. To my husband, *Ebrahim,* who recently joined my life and supported me with finishing this thesis on time. To my wonderful PhD friends around the world, *Ahlem, Loreain* and *Mathew*, who expressed interest and gave their time to share their experiences with me.

Abstract

This thesis explores the voice of early years children on their experiences of learning to speak English in primary schools in Qatar. The study uses finger puppets to analyse children's experiences of learning a foreign language and as a pedagogical tool as part of identifying their preferred way to learn. Children's voices and puppetry are examined in relation to the UNCRC (Article 12 and Article 13).

A review of the literature revealed extensive work on children's voice in many countries drawing on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), Article 12 that acknowledges children's right to express themselves on issues related to them (i.e. education). In the state of Qatar, 'listening to children's voices' is under-investigated. This study is designed to contribute to research in this area and generate new knowledge on children's voices in the Qatari education system.

A qualitative participatory approach was used in this research to respect the children's educational experiences and to listen to their voice (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Holland et al., 2010). The study utilised a visual participatory approach with fourteen children aged between seven and eight from two primary schools in Qatar. Visually-mediated group discussions about drawing and video recording were held with the children. This provided data on their learning experiences and the status of their voice in English

classes. The study also included in-depth interviews with two early year English teachers and classroom observations. In-depth qualitative analysis and thematic analysis were employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This study's findings reveal that the children experience learning within a controlled top-down hierarchical line of authority in Qatar. Traditional English teaching techniques are in place and the children's opinions on matters relevant to their learning are rarely sought. The rigid education system prevents playful leaning techniques (i.e. finger puppetry) from happening in the classroom.

The study findings show that the children are capable of exercising agency and using their voice to express themselves in the classroom. Policymakers, researchers and teachers can collaborate together to develop flexible learning environments that enhance the quality of learning for children. This will involve ensuring that 'space' during the lesson is allocated for playful techniques (i.e. finger puppetry) to be used. In this environment, children will find their voice within the education system and use it to influence educational matters relevant to them.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Children's voices are crucial in educational contexts. Their opinions, views, needs and perspectives need to be listened to. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 acknowledges and supports the right of children to freely express their views in their society on matters related to them (i.e. educational issues) (Robinson, 2011). However, despite the UNCRC's encouragement, children's voices worldwide, particularly in Qatar, continue to receive only selective attention and they are not always trusted to contribute to the education they receive (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015).

The term 'children's voice' is vehemently debated in the literature. Cassidy and Robinson (2022) argue that the term refers to their ability to interact and communicate with others, and to express and share views including emotions, sounds, movements, feelings, attitudes and body language, not merely verbal expressions (Arnott & Wall, 2022). Given the interest in debating the term, it is unsurprising that it has become the area of focus in educational settings to overcome selective attention. This means that researchers are interested in exploring various aspects of children's voice. This complexity makes the voice of children a complicated area of practice, and recent studies have discussed how

to provide a space for children to voice their opinions and have an audience to influence (Lundy, 2007).

It is acknowledged that there is a gap between the Convention's global commitment to the voice of children to be heard and its actual implementation when children are involved in a context related to them (i.e. education) (Lundy, 2007). This thesis explores the state of children's voices in two Qatari primary schools. It investigates how they interact and communicate, whether their expressed opinions are heard and the extent to which their say is valued in the educational system.

I referred to Lundy's (2007) Model when analysing the children's voices and acknowledging its implementations and limitations for use in my research. Providing children with opportunities to express themselves and to be listened to attentively is an essential component for their voice to exist. Taking heed of their voice is a pillar for the life of children's voice. Deciphering Lundy's Model (2007, p. 933) using the four factors (space, voice, audience and influence) and UNCRC Article 12 (1) has helped to deepen our understanding of the extent that children's voices exist in this research. The text of Article 12 (1) reads as follows:

1. "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (General Assembly resolution 44/25, 1989).

Children's right to play and have fun is essential in the life of children. Their lives are interwoven with play and play is considered an integral part of childhood (McKendrick, 2018). Article 31 (1) of the UNCRC, which emphasises children's right to play and leisure activities, reads as follows:

1. "States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (General Assembly resolution 44/25, 1989).

Play is situated at the heart of children's education and is the most important part of their learning (Mannello et al., 2020). Through play, children nurture and develop aspects of their personality (physically, emotionally and intellectually) (see Chapter 4). Consequently, there is a developmental emphasis on facilitating and supporting children's play in their lives (education) (McKendrick, 2018). There is a need for an in-

depth exploration of the status of play in primary schools in Qatar. This thesis examines the opportunities that children have to play in English classes and the levels of play that exist.

In this thesis, I will examine the level of engagement and leisure activities that children experience when learning to speak English as a foreign language by using finger puppets. To examine the extent that the children in Qatari primary schools have the right to play and have fun within English classes, I used finger puppetry as a playful pedagogical teaching technique to enable the children to articulate their learning experiences and to investigate whether finger puppetry creates a fun learning environment (see section 1.3.2).

Listening to the voice of children through the use of finger puppetry as a pedagogical teaching technique can be a catalyst for studies into the voice of children in Qatar. It provides an opportunity for children to express their voices on how they currently learn English, and how they would like to learn. These opportunities are not common in the Qatari setting. In doing so, the research will inform policy and practice in Qatar and internationally.

1.2 Research Background and Context

Research into children's voice in educational settings has increased in recent years to find ways to improve performance and learning experiences at school (Adderley et al., 2015; Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2015). Beyond educational research, the international convention, the UNCRC, put listening to children's opinions as a part of their rights on the world stage. All nations in the world have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), except the United States of America.

Qatar ratified the UNCRC on 3 April, 1995 (NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p.2; Saeed, 2018). Ratifying the Convention meant that children in Qatar have the right to express their viewpoints on matters affecting them and to have those views taken into account. Yet, the literature indicates that children in Qatar lack the right to voice their views on wider scale life issues and that they remain under adult authority and act as subservient to their elders (Al-Ghanim, 2012, p. 350).

Qatar has made a considerable effort to bring the UNCRC's rules into effect. Legislation had been amended and new institutions have been launched (the culture centre for mothers and children, the Qatari foundation for the protection of children and women and the Al Jazeera channel for children) but it is not obvious what these organisations do. Even with their best efforts, there are still difficulties when making the rights enshrined

in the UNCRC a functional reality (NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p. 2, 4 & 6). In a similar vein, children rarely articulate their opinions and views in the educational setting because of the top-down hierarchal authority that flows from adults to children (Attar, 2022). In view of this, Lundy (2007) suggests that one of the obstacles to implementing Article 12 is the adult concern that giving children more control will undermine their authority and disrupt the learning environment. In addition, some adults doubt that children can contribute to decision-making in any meaningful way. Children in Qatar are often viewed as incompetent and therefore not permitted to act on their own behalf. They are viewed as "becoming" rather than "being" (Uprichard, 2008).

Such a perception bias negatively impacts learning to speak English at schools (restricted learning that leads to the children becoming bored) (Nasser et al., 2014). Lansdown et al. (2014, p. 8) believes that providing the right of children to be heard, in relation to educational issues, will require a cultural shift in the relations between adults and children. They state that when adults are making decisions about the education of children, it is important that children are included in the issues being discussed before decisions are made.

I noticed that children did not have the right to voice opinions and were not heard in the classroom when I was working as an educator for young learners in Qatari government schools. Decisions on children's education were made without their involvement. For example, teachers selected teaching strategies based on their point of view without consulting children to find out how well the strategy engaged and interested them because they were following the system. Communication flows from adults to children in Qatar in a top-down hierarchical manner. Thus, there is a need for an in-depth exploration of the voices of children regarding their perspectives and experiences of learning to speak English and how they prefer to learn it. This thesis provides an in-depth insight into this area.

Qatar has maintained a developmental vision of education for decades. Its ambition is to develop an education system that is in line with international education standards. Qatar has paid attention to education and played a central role in taking on educational initiatives to develop educational systems and policies that have included early childhood education (Althani & Romanowski, 2013). Improving children's education is a core concern for the Qatari government. For example, Althani et al. (2016) explains that early childhood education teachers in Qatar are given a template on the practices that promote learning outcomes.

According to Althani et al.'s (2016) remark, it appears that in early childhood education, children are not given the chance to actively express their opinions; instead, they follow the modelled practices of their teachers. The teachers seem to provide ready templates to teach their children. In other words, the children are recipients of education but not participants in it. It seems that the teaching practices used in the classroom do not contain contributions from the children. Althani et al. (2016) notes that the aim of early childhood education is to provide children with creative learning and increased social competence. The intention is to fully engage them effectively in their unique worlds at both home and school. This suggests that Qatar's early childhood education aims and actual practices may be at odds with one another.

A preponderance of educational research conducted in Qatar focuses on the system and its impact on teachers, parents and students (Abu-Tineh et al., 2017; Al-Kuwari et al., 2021; Ellili-Cherif & Romanowski, 2013; Ellili-Cherif et al., 2012; Nasser, 2017; Nasser et al., 2014). Some of the research is concerned with the parents' perceptions of their children's literacy learning (Al-Maadadi et al., 2017; Sellami et al., 2022). Others examine early childhood learning policy (Althani et al., 2016). It is important to emphasise that there is no early years research from Qatar that actively engages children in an in-depth exploration of their opinions, perspectives and learning experiences.

Although the general educational practice in Qatar is not the focus of this thesis, the practice has important consequences as a background for the children's learning experiences and has helped make their voices heard, as shown in this study. Thus, it is vital to give the reader some background information about the strict Qatari school system from my professional knowledge and expertise that everyone (teachers and children) must adhere to (see section 3.1).

1.3 Rationale

The broad aim of this research and essence of the rationale is to listen to early years children's voices on their experiences of learning to speak English. At its core, there are two focal questions, specifically why is it important for me (as a researcher) to listen to children's voice on educational issues in Qatari schools and why finger puppetry is the chosen intervention pedagogy to teach young non-native English speakers.

1.3.1 The Importance of Listening to Children's Voice on Educational Issues in Qatar

The state of Qatar underwent a new educational reform in 2001 and it is still experiencing significant changes. Key focus areas of the reform were to develop the best teaching practices in English and other subjects, to respond to individual needs, provide access to life-long learning, to improve its structure and to increase the quality of teaching. The

Qatari Government and the community want to improve the curriculum and the role it has in ensuring that students are able to reach their true potential, particularly because the literature indicates that students are not reaching the required standards in English (Nasser, 2017 p.16). Nasser et al. (2014) explains that only 10% percent of students meet the required standards in English and they are too frequently bored in English classes. Nasser (2017) suggests that perhaps this is due to the poor alignment between the teaching strategies and the individual needs of children. The ambitions of the reform provide opportunities for researchers to investigate ways to improve education in Qatar. For example, listening to the voice of children and gathering their perspectives for this study can develop an understanding of why children experience boredom in English classes. It is an important step toward understanding the children's perspectives related to their experience of English classes.

The United Nations (CRC) (1989) is an international convention that has been ratified by Qatar which indicates a commitment to upholding the rights of children. In Article 12, the UNCRC states that children have to be informed, involved and consulted on issues related to their lives (Kellett, 2010). Lansdown (2004) explains that Article 12 stipulates that adults need to initiate comprehensive and respectful dialogue with young children. She believes that the word 'participation' refers to an ongoing practice, whereby children freely express their views and actively contribute to decision-making on issues that concern them (i.e. school education). Lansdown et al. (2014, p. 4) argues that everyone

in education (teachers, parents, policymakers and children) should have a stake but governments are forgetting to count the viewpoints of children when discussing education policy and how it is delivered. The government in Qatar aims to improve the education policy, curriculum, teacher practices and resources but forgets the essentiality of listening to children's perspectives on these matters.

It has been argued that improving the education system necessitates going beyond academic achievement by respecting that children are highly valued active participants in the education process (Lansdown et al., 2014). Poor English achievement and the high levels of boredom in the classroom following the Qatari reform is perhaps a result of their voices not being listened to. It is revealed in the literature that many children struggle in school because of an educational environment that disregards their opinions and hampers their participation opportunities (Lansdown et al., 2014). Therefore, this study actively listens to young children in Qatar to understand their perspectives on learning English as a second language. The children participating in this study will be able to exercise their right to share their valued opinions in the educational setting.

1.3.2 Finger Puppetry as a Pedagogical Strategy to Teach English Speaking due to Boredom

Puppetry is described in the literature as being an effective practical pedagogical tool for emotional interaction and communication. It is a learning pedagogy that can be applied at school and at home (Engler & Fijan, 1973; Korošec, 2012). Puppetry is a very old and traditional performing art that has been used for centuries by many different cultures throughout the world. Historically, puppets have been used to tell stories, deliver messages, communicate thoughts and entertain people for more than three thousand years in Egypt, Greece, Rome, ancient India, Japan and China (Gibson, 1992).

Ashton-Hay (2005) considers puppets as being an invaluable teaching strategy created to stimulate active learning, emphasising improving their expression abilities. The literature indicates that finger puppetry is a language that delivers feelings, ideas and emotions through a combination of gestures and words (Kempster et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2004) in a relaxed and spontaneous environment (Bueno, 2010; Korošec, 2012).

Puppets as a pedagogical technique enhance the relationship between the teacher and children and between the children themselves (Çağanağa & Kalmış, 2015; Korošec, 2012). With this in mind, and along with the importance of listening to young children's voice in Qatar to understand their boredom state and to relate to the UNCRC, Article 31, I used

this technique to explore and develop the experience that children have in their English lessons. I used finger puppetry to include fun activities for the children to acknowledge their right to play and engage in leisure in their educational setting. The children's right to play is vital for their development and growth (McNeill, 2020) (see Chapter 4). McNeill (2020) argues that although the UNCRC concerns the children's right to play and have leisure activities, schools appear to neglect determining the curriculum. Therefore, I wanted to investigate whether finger puppetry, as a play-based child-centred strategy could enhance the children's attention, interest and involvement in English lessons. Using play-based pedagogy to teach young children increases their engagement in the learning process and creates opportunities for their voice to be heard. It is a technique that presents children with a chance to express themselves on their educational experiences. It was also used to gauge the helpfulness of finger puppetry as a strategy to enhance their involvement and interest in English classes which involved obtaining the children's point of view.

My learning and thinking evolved during the research process. For example, the research focus began with the aim of identifying a fun teaching pedagogy. I wanted to measure the influence of 'finger puppetry' as play-based pedagogy. I wanted to enhance children's English learning in the classroom by fully engage them in joyful classroom activities. Meetings with the supervisors and exploring the literature on alternative perceptions of children and their participation rights changed the research focus toward listening to

children experiences of learning English to discover how to improve the way they learn in Qatar and to listen to their opinions and thoughts about the puppets (see Chapter 2).

Lastly, even though that finger puppetry is widely used and has been shown to be an effective pedagogical tool, no research exists on its potential for usage with young children in Qatar's educational system. This thesis contributes to the growing body of research on puppetry by examining its features, benefits, limitations for entertaining, enthralling and supporting children's voices in an inflexible educational system. Finger puppetry, therefore, is used in a dual way to both tackle the boredom in the classroom and to capture voice. Although I only used finger puppetry with one age group of children for a short time because of the COVID-19 lockdown, I was nevertheless able to explore its usefulness with children.

This study can be considered a starting point of professional change for English teachers and other academics in the state of Qatar. All educators must value the thoughts and viewpoints of children because they are competent, active and experts in their own learning. Children's right to express their thoughts is essential to their lives and education, particularly when it comes to making decisions that affect them (Baker and Le Courtois, 2022).

Exploring learning experiences provides education researchers and children with opportunities for learning development. The right of children to participate and voice their opinions should be taken into account in the educational system (see section 10.3) because their voices are rarely considered in classroom activities and they are overlooked by those at the education system (see sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2).

1.4 Research Aims and Questions

A plethora of studies have proven that children are competent and have a voice. This research aims to explore the children's perspectives of their experiences of learning to speak English inside the classroom in primary schools in Qatar. The following questions were developed to guide the research process:

1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar?

2) In what ways are and can teaching strategies in Qatar be informed by the voice of children and teachers.

   a) How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language?

3) How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence the children's interest and attention in the English-speaking lesson and at home in Qatar?

a) How do the children perceive the use of puppetry as a pedagogical tool in English speaking lessons and at home?

To make the reader more aware of the sequence in which this research was conducted, I outline my thesis and list the chapters that make up this study in the following section.

1.5 Thesis Outline

I divided this thesis into nine chapters after this introductory chapter (see Table 1.1). The next chapter provides an insight into my earlier experiences as a teacher in Qatari schools, how the idea for the research began and how I conceptualise children's voices. It is imperative that the reader understands my backstory because it has unavoidably affected how I approached this research, conducted the study and analysed the data (Probst, 2015). The literature review contains two chapters that helped me develop three research questions to guide this research. Chapter five provides the research design and methodology. This is followed by chapter six that contains the thematic analysis approach used to analyse the participant perspectives. Chapters seven, eight and nine discuss the findings of the participants' perspectives. The last chapter brings together the research questions, existing literature and study findings to summarise what is discovered and to provide recommendations for early years teachers, researchers and policymakers.

Chapter One	Introduction
Chapter Two	My Personal Positionality- A Philosophical Standpoint.
Literature Review	
Chapter Three	A View on Qatar: Education, Perceiving Children, their Rights in Society and to Voice and Participate in Educational Issues.
Chapter Four	Play and Playful Pedagogy: The Potential of Puppetry as a Pedagogical Play-Based Child-Centred Teaching Tool for Early Years Children.
Methodology and Analysis	
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Chapter Ten	Conclusions and Recommendations

Table (1.1): Thesis outline.

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the study's framework. Looking through the lens of my academic experience, I provide my perspective on important aspects of the research to give the reader an insight into my thinking and ideas in relation to perceiving young children, listening to their assessment of finger puppetry and their preferred way to learn. I will be mindful at all times that my own point of view could influence my understanding when listening to young children's voices, experiencing their learning, conducting the study, and analysing the data.

A reflexive approach is maintained throughout the research process. Reflexivity has been defined as "actions that direct attention back to the self and foster a circular relationship between subject and object" (Probst, 2015, p.37). Reflexivity refers to the impact the researcher has on the participants or subject matter being investigated. It is the use of self-awareness to maximise the openness to other's worldview (Gilgun, 2008). In this study, I use reflexivity to strengthen my insight into the research and to critically investigate the research of other academics. A deeper understanding of my ontological and epistemological perspectives on perceiving children, listening to their voices and learning experiences in the classroom helps me to recognise how they influence my research.

When reviewing the literature on how children are perceived and listened to, I considered how the ontological and epistemological views of other scholars affect their work. My own perspectives are contained throughout this thesis and are expressed consistently when discussing the children's voices and learning experiences. For example, I discuss my deliberations regarding my decision to use finger puppetry as a playful teaching tool and intervention in English classes. I regularly express my thoughts and ideas on children's voices and their learning experiences in the English lessons.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

A participatory and children's rights-based approach provides the framework for this study into children's distinct experiences of learning to speak English in Qatari primary schools. Children's views and perspectives are central to understanding their experiences (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010) (see Chapter 5). In this study, I perceive children as competent and independent experts on educational issues relevant to them in relation to UNCRC, Article 12 (1). This is essential because their voices in the Qatari educational system are not heard. Their voices are marginalised because of the managerialism system (top-down hierarchical authority) that controls all those who work within it (i.e., teachers and children) (Klikauer, 2015) (see section 3.2 and Chapter 10). In this system children are unable to express how they feel about the education they receive. Adhering to Lundy's (2007) model in this study provides opportunities for children to express opinions and

participate in educational activities relevant to them. Analysing Lundy's four factor model (space, voice, audience and influence) within the education system revealed that the factors were not presented. Therefore, using a participatory approach design and keeping children in the centre of the research was necessary to understand their experiences and perspectives.

2.3 Experiences that Contribute to My Epistemology

My research interest developed as a result of my experiences as an early childhood educator, teaching in primary school in Qatar. I started working as a classroom teacher for grades one and two, (ages seven and eight years old) at Qatar Government Schools. I qualified as a primary English teacher for foreign learners from Texas A&M and Qatar University. Completing a Masters in education was the natural next step. I was able to conduct research into English teaching practices and how teachers were able to cope with the new educational reform in Qatar. It was my experience of teaching at Qatari schools that developed my interest in educational research. I progressed to working as an English teacher for third grade students (aged nine years old) and as a supervisor of other English teachers.

I then worked as an English specialist, at the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED), which is based at the College of Education at Qatar University. My

responsibility was to provide ongoing training tailored to the needs of current classroom English primary teachers and English student teachers. For example, planning and child-centred teaching technique. This led me to the Doctorate as a candidate with grounding in English teaching for young children and significant research skills.

Through my professional experience, I have observed that the Qatari education system is focused on enhancing instructional techniques used in the classroom but does not encourage children to express themselves in class (Althani et al., 2016). When I was a teacher, I did not actively consider the voice of children or whether they could generate their own ideas or viewpoints. I interpreted the various teaching methods at my disposal from my own point of view. I wanted to motivate children to learn English as a second language but did not ask them what they thought of my teaching approach because I was following the system. My role developed and I was required to analyse the teachers' classes to see how they could perform better. I observed that they seemed uninterested in how the children felt about the English lessons and were busy following the curriculum. I noticed that any student feedback on the teaching techniques used in their classrooms was overlooked.

The children occasionally discussed these issues in the classrooms when I was observing them as part of my work as an English specialist. I always attempted to talk with them

after a teacher had finished her lesson and before the next teacher arrived to deliver her class. The dialogue was on the circumstances at hand. It provided an opportunity for a brief English-language conversation. For example, I would ask them about the topic and what the teacher had covered in the lesson. The majority of them would shake their heads in response to indicate that they did not comprehend. Some would then defend this expression, expressing that they disliked English because the language was too difficult, the lessons were uninteresting and without any enjoyable features.

During the brief talks with the children, I would rephrase my question and use a few Arabic words to make my point clearer. On these occasions, the children could only grasp part of what I was saying and could not put together a complete sentence to respond. Approximately five children out of thirty in a class would understand and reply in English when I was able to question all of them together. These experiences prompted me to embark on Doctorate research to deepen my understanding of how children experience learning English as a second language in Qatar classrooms.

2.4 Impact of My World View

The process of conducting my doctoral study altered my thoughts on how I perceive children, particularly during the first year of my doctorate where I was immersed in the literature. The purpose of conducting this research was entirely different from what it is

now; I started the current research with a different intention based on my ontological beliefs and my understanding of the way children's learning can be improved and how I perceived children. Children in my teaching experiences were considered individuals to be respected and worthy of receiving high quality learning but without the right to express ideas and share knowledge. They were expected to act as learners in my practices and techniques. My information about alternative perception of children and their participation rights was very limited.

Initially, the aim of this study was to identify a fun teaching tool that would enhance children's English learning in the classroom in Qatar. This developed into a study that was going to measure the influence of 'finger puppets' as a play-based pedagogy on young learners inside the classroom and outside the classroom (at home). I became interested in finger puppetry after observing a Tunisian English teacher use puppets to teach her students English at a teaching convention. She was hired as an experienced instructor when the Qatar reform initiative was introduced at the beginning of 2000. She made a lasting impression on me when I observed her in 2005. I recall how energetic, happy and engaged her students were and I have not seen another class like hers since then. It inspired me to look into the possibility of implementing puppetry in Qatari classrooms.

I researched the literature and discovered that finger puppetry could potentially increase involvement of young learners in the English lesson. It is an age-appropriate intervention (bright colours and tactile nature) that can create a warm and intimate environment in the classroom. It encourages children to actively participate and contribute their ideas to the lesson (Çağanağa & Kalmış, 2015). This was the core, that I used finger puppetry as an intervention teaching tool to enhance children's learning and remove the monotonous part of their learning environment. Therefore, my focus on finger puppetry progressed and moved away from a purely teaching tool to a potential catalytic approach towards voice.

Fruitful discussions with my supervisors, extensive reading of the sociologist perceptions of children and the shift in the childhood paradigm (Dockett et al., 2011) changed my understanding of children and childhood and prompted me to develop my research area to voice focus. Instead of implementing a change to the teaching practices, I wanted to directly hear from children about their experiences of learning English speaking in Qatar. I realised that I needed to do this if I was to improve their learning. The research process had changed my view of children and I began to perceive them as competent and able to express ideas (James & Prout, 1997). They are "independent" and "being," not "becoming" (Dockett et al., 2011).

The meetings with my supervisors, reviewing the literature and reflecting on my assumptions about children moved the research to a new level of clarity. I was able to re-perceive my stance on children and view them as active learners with the right to make meaning for themselves (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). I realised that I needed to provide the children in this research with opportunities to exercise their agency and voice their thoughts on their learning experiences. I understood that I needed to pay attention to their voices and act on them accordingly. I realised that my thoughts are formulated by the context where I live which includes the people I interacted with and my daily experiences in Qatar. Baumfield et al. (2013, p. 15) asserts that personal beliefs and understandings about the world "will dictate consciously or unconsciously, the decision a person make at all stage of the practice." In this study, I treat the children as active beings and avoid viewing them as negative, dependent, and becoming. I regard them as being competent, active agents who are experts on their own generational issues. Believing that if given the chance, children can effectively communicate their opinions and generate learning context that is appropriate for them.

2.5 Empowering the Participants

It was important to clarify my positionality with the children and teachers who were part of this research. Awareness and respect of the differences (age, gender and class) between myself (researcher) and the participants (children and teachers) was needed to

maximise research reflexivity and maintain awareness on the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). It had to separate my pre-experience and perspectives from the newly-emerging research process and experienced perspectives. Similarities and differences between the participants and myself are discussed in the methodology chapter to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of my own positionality in this research.

Finlay and Gough (2003) argue that it is difficult for researchers to escape from their pre-assumptions and pre-understandings. They explain that the only thing they can do is to identify their identity to be able to live the participant experiences to truly understand and interpret their beliefs. Researchers who work with individuals need to make their position and approach to research as explicit as possible (p. 110). For this study, I practise continuous reflexivity on the research topic being studied, my own interpretations of the experiences I encounter and I move beyond my previous understandings. Without examining the self, one can run the risk of allowing unexplained prejudice to dominate the research findings (Finlay & Gough, 2003).

To strengthen this research, I have continually reflected on my position, experience, relations with the participants and my interpretations of the research process and journey. Reinharz (1997) explains that researchers need to bring themselves to the

research as researchers that socially and personally create their viewpoints situationally (p.5). In line with this, I reflect on the power relations between the children, teachers and myself as researcher (further details will be explained in the sections 5.6.1 and 5.6.2).

2.6 Summary

This chapter examined the philosophical framework of perceiving children and listening to their voices. As I discovered in my own reflexive journey, a sociological perspective on children's rights is fundamental to building the understanding of children's perceptions. This thesis assumed that children are competent, independent and capable individuals who are experts on educational matters that affect them. Investigating children's voices on their learning experiences made it possible to reveal how they want to learn English.

Analysing the effectiveness of finger puppetry in the classroom (see Chapter 4) helped to establish how to tackle specific learning issues. For example, boredom in English classes (see session 3.2). Children are aware of their issues, just as adults are (Valentine, 1999). This study advanced the idea that children can be 'active agent beings' rather than 'becoming'. It argued that they were competent right holders able to participate and that their voices were trustworthy sources of information about their own learning experiences. The right to participate and the need to listen to children's voices was critically examined. The voices of young children in Qatar are sources of meaning-making

on how to improve their learning context. Future chapters will critically analyse the children's participation and voice in the study and the literature.

Chapter Three: A View on Qatar: Education, Perceiving Children, their Rights in Society and to Voice and Participate in Educational Issues

3.1 Introduction

This chapter documents the history of the education system in the state of Qatar and reviews the existing conditions of education at schools where young children learn. It explores the inherent nature of the system that operates in schools and demonstrates that the voices of children are not often valued and listened to within the system. It reveals that children are not often perceived as active agent within Qatari families to deepen the contextual understanding.

The chapter examines children's rights in the Qatari educational system to express their thoughts and share their opinions on the education they receive because they are often neglected and rarely exist. For example, they cannot influence or modify the English-teaching strategies employed by their English teachers in the classroom to suit their needs and interests. Children's views are not sought from the education system, nor are the views of their teachers as well. The chapter analyses the importance of children's voices and their rights to actively participate in the education they receive. Examining the existing research and Qatari legislation, the chapter examines children's voices situationally in relation to participation and teaching techniques. The purpose of this

chapter is to investigate the extent that children's voices are recognised in Qatar's education system, society and legislations in relation to Article 12(1) UNCRC.

This chapter is divided into four parts. In part one, I will explore the literature on the structure of education in Qatar (its development and issues) and provide the historical context. I will provide detail on the educational shift that has occurred in the state of Qatar over the last three decades and reveal the extent that children's voices are heard during this shift. I will examine critiques of the educational system shift and discuss the successes and challenges of educational initiatives in Qatar. This is completed to identify the strengths and shortcomings in Qatar's educational structure to help overcome system obstacles, to identify what hinders children's learning development and to contribute towards forming successful education policies.

In the beginning, it is important to understand the system that operates in schools and the impact it has on children. Schools in Qatar have a strict system that everyone including the children must adhere to. It begins in the morning (when children arrive to school at 7:00 am) and continues until the afternoon (when children depart the school at 1:30 pm). The school day includes restrictions that prevent the children from being able to express their opinions and perspectives on the learning practices. The school day is predetermined and lessons are taught in a sequential order. For example, pupils in Year

Two must commence the day with English and then move on to other subjects (Attar, 2022). Each subject teacher (i.e. Arabic, English, Math, and Science) must enter the classroom to teach her subject and leave after forty-five minutes to teach another class.

Children have limited time to get from one desk to another because of time constraints. This means that the children are restricted to a predesigned schedule and time framework to study. As this timetable must be followed by the children and their teachers, the teachers are restricted by the limited time to act on behalf of this time framework to teach the subject matter. In most classes, children are required to stay in their seats whilst the teacher teaches within an allotted timeframe from a prescribed textbook (Attar, 2022).

Teaching the subject within a rigid system requires that traditional teaching practices are used (i.e. lecturing) to complete the textbook within the allocated time. Therefore, playful pedagogy (Goouch, 2008) does not happen in these classes and there is no space or time for children to give their opinions on the learning context (Attar, 2022). Throughout this thesis, additional information will be added when it is necessary to maximise the understanding of the education system in Qatar (see section 3.2). For now, it is clear from the literature that children in the Qatari learning context adhere to a constrained education system in which there is limited time and space for them to communicate,

interact with, and express opinions on their learning environment. Thus, it is vital that I approached this research to listen to children's voices about their experiences learning within such a restricted educational system.

Part two is focused on the perception of children's voices in Qatari society. I will examine how children are perceived in Qatari culture and within their families. I will explain the structure of Qatari society and how children are expected to function within it (i.e. in the home and at school) and how this influences the perceptions people have of them. To inform the context of my research, I explore social views and whether children's social rights are upheld within society.

Part three is concerned with examining the existing children's right to express their thoughts about the Qatari legislations. I will examine the international literature debate around the child voice and the extend that the children's right to express their thoughts is not taken into consideration in Qatari law. Lastly, part four is focused on early childhood rights internationally and in Qatari law. The four parts examine the field and highlight the gaps that this study fills.

3.2 Education in Qatar: A Critique of Past and Present

Qatar is a small Gulf country with a small population. It is rich in natural resources like oil and gas. It is considered one of the wealthiest countries in the world (Berrebi et al., 2009; Tibaldi, 2015). It has a tribal society structure and the majority of residents are expatriates who reside in Qatar to work (Brewer et al., 2007; Dye, 2007). In recent decades, the discovery of natural gas in Qatar has been coupled with economic and demographic expansion, transforming the country from an impoverished desert nomadic society to a wealthy flourishing urban society (Al-Ammari & Romanowski, 2016; Ihmeideh, 2017). These tremendous changes have accelerated Qatar's social, cultural, and educational transformation (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

Prior to the discovery of fossil fuels in Qatar, education was mostly associated with informal settings that began at the end of the 19th century, when boys and girls were taught language and religion without the guidelines of a formal system (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017). Children memorised passages from the Qur'an and learnt to read and write in traditional schools called Kuttab. Kuttab is an informal class taught in mosques or (often for girls) in the home by educated men and women familiar with Islam (Brewer et al., 2007, p.20). Children were taught these subjects (i.e. the Qur'an, reading and writing) without the guidelines of a formal system (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017). This educational system lasted until the first half of the 20th century.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) was created in 1956 and was one of the country's founding ministries (Al-Misnad, 2007). It was the first significant attempt to establish a more modern and regular form of education. Since the 1970s, the Qatari government has prioritised education as the primary means of developing human capital (Berrebi et al., 2009). The government followed a programme of compulsory and ongoing education for all children of citizens and expatriates. They were to get free schooling and the government opened several schools that mirrored the country's evolving national identity (Berrebi et al., 2009). The quality of education continues to be a significant issue in Qatar. Educating every child in Qatar would increase lifelong learning but students have not acquired the learning skills needed for their life (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017).

In the 1990s, the Qatari government attempted to improve its centralised and bureaucratic traditional educational system to produce students with appropriate labour market skills and to reduce the need for expatriates to take the work (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017; Brewer et al., 2007). Horn (2002) explains that reforming education becomes necessary when schools do not accomplish the goals of schooling. Qatari leaders needed to reform education because it was failing to meet the aim of schooling and was "not providing high-quality outcomes and was rigid, outdated, and resistant to reform" (Brewer et al., 2007, p. iii). It was dependent on "rote memorisation, leaving many students bored and providing little opportunity for student-teacher interaction" (Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, 2007, p.1).

Lundy's (2007) four factor model (space, voice, audience and influence) has no relevance in the Qatari education system, which means that the students did not have a say in the education they receive. It is apparent that they rarely got an opportunity to take part in classroom activities or to express their opinion because they were not seriously listened to. It is evident in the literature that being listened to by teachers is essential for effective student learning because they feel appreciated and respected (Roeser et al., 2000). We could argue that students in Qatar were often considered incompetent and therefore not permitted to discuss or participate in their educational context. The development of transferrable life skills was virtually impossible for the students because of limited quality student-teacher interactions.

Students received information from standardised official textbooks and had to study designated subjects in a regimented way. The lack of innovation and flexible teaching techniques meant that the individual needs and interests of each student were unnoticed. Issues of this kind cause the student interest in proceedings to wane which is a serious matter because it lessens their ability to contribute to Qatar's economic and social prosperity (Erman, 2007).

3.2.1 Qatar's Educational Reform

In 2001, the state of Qatar hired the RAND Corporation (Research And Development), an American non-profit international research organization, to comprehensively examine the K-12 school system in Qatar with a view to making recommendations on necessary improvements (Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, 2007; Zellman et al., 2009). RAND was responsible for exploring the existing education system, for identifying problems with the system, recommending alternative reform options, and offering a plan to implement the chosen reform options and to lead its implementation over a ten-year timeline (Zakhidov, 2015; Zellman et al., 2009). RAND Corporation developed the concept of an 'Independent School' to replace the inflexible, hierarchical, and bureaucratic Ministry of Educational schools, as a result of the educational reform, 'Education for a New Era' (EFNE).

This reform was developed to address many of the weaknesses observed in ministerial schools, to meet social needs, to boost the economy, to offer high-quality education, and to equip students with labour-market skills (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017; Zakhidov, 2015). In particular, to emphasise "students centred practice and pedagogy" (Zellman et al., 2009, p, 75). The Education for a New Era (EFNE) combines best practices from around the world to present Qatar as a 'world-class' system that meets the country's changing needs. It aims to make a bright future for every child (Brewer et al., 2007) and to meet the ambitious Qatar National Vision, 2030 (Zakhidov, 2015). Qatar's vision for 2030 is to be

an advanced knowledge-based society capable of supporting its own economic development. It considers the education of its citizens as essential to accomplishing these objectives (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017).

Qatari envisioned high-quality schools able to build human capacity through extensive teacher professional development coupled with innovative educational and social policies (Brewer et al., 2007; Nasser et al., 2014). To achieve this, new curriculum standards were designed for all grades from K-12, particularly for Arabic, English, Mathematics and Science. The Supreme Education Council (SEC) was created to replace the Ministry of Education (MOE) to implement the new curriculum standards. The new standards require both teachers and students to perform differently. For example, teachers have to behave as a facilitator rather than as a knowledge transmitter, and students have to take responsibility for their own learning and work hard to meet the new standards being taught in English (Brewer et al., 2007).

Teachers were given increased autonomy to design and develop teaching materials in order to generate a learning environment that enabled students to engage in intentional and challenging learning activities (Fadlelmula & Koç, 2016). It is suggested in the literature that over the course of this reform, Qatar developed their education system by producing new curricula but overlooked those who are the backbone of the reform (i.e.

teachers and students). For example, they did not ask them whether they needed to reform and what they needed from the reform (Horn, 2002). It is clear that the new reform maintained the top-down authoritative hierarchy and that the earlier state, before the education shift, has continued into the present. The top-down nature of the reform infers that the goal of education is to reinforce a set of stakeholder interests and the dominance of the business and industrial sectors rather than to improve student and teacher situations (Horn, 2002).

The establishment of decentralised and independent schools was a significant component of the reform (Ellili-Cherif & Romanowski, 2013). Independent schools are founded on four basic principles: autonomy, accountability, variety and choice (Alfadala et al., 2021). The schools were free to develop their own curriculum so long as it adhered to the new curriculum standards (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017). In theory, the concept of autonomy and choice in education should have a positive impact on schools and educators, making them more attentive to the needs of both families and teachers (AlKhater, 2016). However, this autonomy and choice was obstructed by the MOE's hierarchical and centralised nature, and the complicated legislation and regulations that control schools and the education agenda (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017). The complications that Qatar's education system faces made it difficult to implement and carry out the EFNE reform.

The actual implementation of the reform launched in 2004 when the first cohort of independent schools opened (Brewer et al., 2007). Each particular year from 2004, another group of independent schools opened. For example, in 2004, cohort one consisted of twelve schools. In 2005, cohort two schools opened and in 2006, cohort three. By 2011, all ministerial schools had been transformed into independent schools (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017; Ellili-Cherif & Romanowski, 2013). Although the RAND-recommended reform resulted in a meaningful start to many educational areas in Qatar, the change was slow (Romanowski & Nasser, 2012; Zakhidov, 2015). Today, the, Education for a New Era (EFNE) has effectively been repealed, albeit without a formal declaration, as seen by the reversal of its regulations (AlKhater, 2016) and the schools have returned to a restricted structure that everyone (i.e. teachers and students) must follow to teach subjects and carry out school day routines (Attar, 2022). The analysis of the factors that impeded the reform that lead to its repeal have been examined below.

3.2.2 Criticism of the EFNE Reform

The reform's rapid adoption was one of the significant roadblocks to its success. Horn (2002) states that the timing of the reform is critical to its success. The hiring of the RAND Corporation to improve the education system occurred in 2001, and the first cohort of independent schools began in 2004. The time available to develop suitable school buildings to meet the demands of the new reform was limited (Zakhidov, 2015). The

Supreme Education Council (SEC) was forced to hire Ministry of Education (MOE) teachers who needed to be prepared for new reform standards and to staff the independent schools because of its rapid implementation.

The teachers had a limited time to receive professional development to master new teaching techniques and adjust to a new curriculum with new teaching materials (Zakhidov, 2015). According to the literature, teacher culture and working conditions contribute to either accommodation or opposition to educational reforms (Horn, 2002). If a school's teacher culture is traditional and teacher-centred, it will be difficult to implement a reform based on innovative teaching and student-centeredness. If the reform causes time commitments that are unrealistic for teachers, the reform will struggle to achieve its goals (Horn, 2002).

Qatar has a small population and does not have enough qualified teachers. Foreign teachers were imported to staff the independent schools and were trained by the Supreme Education Council (SEC). This caused difficulties in adapting the culture and having the time needed to effectively implement the reform (Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, 2007; Zakhidov, 2015). The broad extent of the reform added additional challenges. For example, it caused everyone to focus on the system-related changes which were particularly demanding for the foreign teachers since they found it challenging to

collaborate across cultures and times to implement the reform's many programmes, particularly as the number of staff and contractors increased (Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, 2007).

Abrupt decision-making, continuous switching between policies, and ignoring the voice of the teachers and students who applied the reform throughout the reform process created a feeling of instability and hampered the reform's success (Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, 2007; Zakhidov, 2015). For example, the first cohort of independent schools in 2004 had to decide which instructional language to use in teaching (i.e. Arabic or English). In 2006, schools were forced to use English as an instructional language to teach the subjects. As a result, the students struggled to transition from their mother tongue, from Arabic to English (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017). Many teachers lacked the required English language skills to teach which resulted in an influx of additional expatriates fluent in English (Zakhidov, 2015). The instructional language policy was heavily criticised by the community as being incompatible with their Arabic cultural identity. The government unexpectedly shifted the language of instruction back to Arabic in 2012, forcing many expatriates to resign and students to relearn many language concepts (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017; Zakhidov, 2015).

These interruptions caused the students to develop a negative attitude towards learning. Ellili-Cherif and Romanowski (2013, P.9) state that 40% percent of pupils during the reform period ignored homework, lacked seriousness during their studies, relied on private lessons, and became careless and less inclined to study and learn. Furthermore, the reform caused disarray, a lack of compliance with the regulations, and increased pressure on students because the standards were too high for them and the educational process concentrated on quantity, not quality (Ellili-Cherif & Romanowski, 2013). The inconsistency of the reforms resulted in an impairment in educational quality, which can explain some of the Qatari students' barriers to success in education (Tibaldi, 2015, p.23).

It can be argued that the education system in Qatar continues to experience authoritative top-down control over those who use it (i.e. principals, teachers, students and parents). Individual ideas and opinions appear to be overlooked by those at the top of the hierarchical organisation. They implement change according to an unclear education agenda, regardless of the fact that reform is carried out from the bottom of the pyramid (i.e. teachers and their students). These impactful events, witnessed by teachers and students in Qatar, have had a negative affect on their attitudes and performance when learning English as a second language. It was necessary to undertake this thesis to actively listen to children's perspectives on how they experience learning English and how they enjoy learning it.

3.2.3 Concluding Thoughts on Qatar's Educational Reform

Qatar's educational initiative was a momentous departure from Qatar's past and is a new vision for its future. Despite some successes, serious issues have impeded its full acceptance. For example, several researchers say that the challenges with Qatar's reform stem from importing Western reform elements into Gulf countries (Palmer et al., 2016). Ellili-Cherif et al. (2012) states that the new educational initiative in Qatar was not adapted for Qatari culture to be relevant within its local framework for both teachers and children. This led to there being unclear and vague responsibilities concerning the policymakers.

Ambiguity and confusion about roles has resulted in changing and shifting decision-making in day-to-day operations. Misunderstandings and conflicting messages have caused inappropriate decisions to be made by the wrong people (Brewer et al., 2007, p. 148, 149). As a result, the reform places a burden on the teachers, school principals, and pupils. Its rapid implementation and the requirement for additional training opportunities forces everyone to perform duties for which they are not prepared or do not have the opportunity to demonstrate accomplish (Ellili-Cherif & Romanowski, 2013). Qatari leaders need to rethink the implementation of the reform and any further education initiatives by taking into consideration the local cultural context, the point of

view of teachers, and those of both the students and children's parents. The culture that governs the Qatari families is examined in the following section.

3.3 Understanding How Children and their Rights are Perceived within Qatari Families and Society

Childhood is an essential part of human life and every society has engaged in extensive research on it. Childhood is unique to the society of every country and is conceived differently according to the culture and environment. This section explores the perception of children by Qatari society and its focal pillar, the 'family', as dependent and reliant. I will examine the extent that this impacts the learning context and children's voices in Qatar. Developing an understanding of children's experiences within the school system is aided by knowing the public perspective of schools as being institutions that reflect society's norms and values.

Historically, Qatari society has been dominated by a tribal system that has its own traditions, values, and beliefs. The tribal system has played an important part in developing and controlling Qatari family and society. Tribes are still the dominant rulers and provide the foundation for Qatari social norms and customs (Al-Ghanim, 2012). Qatar, like others in the Gulf countries, have experienced rapid and inexorable societal change but maintained its cultural, traditional values and identity as a Gulf country. Gulf

countries consider the family as being the central pillar of society (NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009; Saeed, 2018).   According to Noor Al Malki of the Executive Director of the Doha International Family Institute (CIRS Newsletter, 2015), Qatari families are the primary target of policymakers in Qatar. The patriarchal social system dominates Gulf families and tasks are distributed within them according to gender and age (Al-Ghanim, 2012). In Qatar, the father is the head of the family and the breadwinner. He plays a supportive parenting role when the children are older (Al-Maadadi & Ikhlef, 2015). The children are known by their father's name only (Al-Ghanim, 2012). The mother is responsible for raising children and taking care of the house (Ihmeideh, 2017; Welchman, 2010).

The link between nomadic families is clearly ruled by submission and subordination which may lead the children struggling to be strong and autonomous, as well as influencing their role and responsibilities as self-dominated individuals. The parenting approach set out in Qatari families seems to still classify children as being passive and muted. For example, they are required to follow whatever their parents decide is appropriate as custodians or guardians (Welchman, 2010). This kind of familial and social perception of children strongly reflects how they are treated and dealt with in the educational system. How children are treated in Qatari legislation, the value of their voices, the extent that their thoughts and opinions are received, heard and respected in the classroom, and the

children's participation in educational matters that are important to them are concepts will be explored in the following session (3.4).

The rapid changes taking place (i.e. the economic explosion with Qatari society) have affected social life and how children are to be perceived and treated. For example, Qatari parents are likely to be in the workplace and utilise external assistance for household work and childcare (Khalifa & Nasser, 2015). Al-Ammari and Romanowski (2016) note that around 90% percent of Qatari families depend on domestic servants and consider them an inevitable part of running the house. Families hire foreign domestic servants who are non-educated but required to take care of the children (Ihmeideh, 2017; Khalifa & Nasser, 2015; Khalifa, 2009). The presence of these domestic servants impacts the children's upbringing.

Having worked in Qatari schools for over fifteen years, I observed that most servants accompanied the children at school to drop and collect them, and to carry their bags and belongings. Solberg (2015) argues that these seemingly compassionate behaviours perhaps develop complacency in children and reduce their sense of independence, autonomy, and self-reliance. This can weaken the character of Qatari families and society in general. Corsaro (2018), while not speaking specifically about Qatar, notes that the child's voice is often absent in the debate about changes in family dynamics and how they

affect everyday life. It seems that what Qatari children experience is unique and does not concord with Qvortrup's (1993) comment that children will always be useful to society.

Children in Qatar seem to be reliant on domestic servants and adults. They are not designated roles to perform within their families. We could argue that children are often overlooked and habitually portrayed as dependent, small, and weak. Their behaviour is restricted, and limited to family and social customs (Al-Kaabi, 2004). Top-down authoritative power is exerted over them inside the family and societal norms limit their autonomy and being themselves. Traditional Qatari beliefs instil in children that they are required to obey their father without question or argument. Their behaviour is fundamentally determined by the rules of Qatari society. For example, they are not permitted to travel alone and they must conform to society's values, conventions, and views (Al-Kaabi, 2004). They must accept the father as the family leader, not openly express themselves and follow the family regulations without question (Al-Kaabi, 2004). Children in Qatar seem to be perceived as 'becoming' rather than 'being'.

The children's thoughts and viewpoints in Qatar appear to be not sought and they strictly follow adult instructions and directives. Kelly and Smith (2017) argue that conceptualising children as helpless and vulnerable can "shroud them in a protective cage that, despite best intentions, can actually serve to disable their ability to enact their full right as

citizens" (p. 859). Al-Kaabi (2004, p.28) identified key areas associated with the development and shaping of children in Qatari society (i.e. family system, school system and social system). Al-Kaabi explains that children are accepted into Qatari society when their behaviour is in accordance with these systems. Whether the systems are against their personal interests and desires does not matter.

3.4 Children's Voice and Rights in Qatar's Legislations: A Marginalised Voice

Children's voices are indispensable in modern education as it is undergoing a transformation. Children's voices have become prominent in research because the concept of 'children's voice' was bolstered by theory, ideology, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989) which was rapidly ratified by all members of the UN except the United States (Boumans, 2015; Cassidy, 2023), including Qatar (NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009). It is the first legal international human rights agreement to establish norms and standards to protect, enhance and promote children's rights (Boumans, 2015; Cassidy & Robinson, 2022).

The 'child voice' is subject to various interpretations by researchers. Some believe that the voice is concerned with identity, agency and empowerment, whilst others consider it to be a dynamic sociocultural dialogue that shapes the views of children in relation to

personal experiences (Maybin, 2013). Maybin (2013) thinks that the voice is a speaking awareness and consciousness whereby speakers are making themselves understood by others. There are limitations associated with listening to children's voices. For example, to interpret the 'voice' as a spoken language requires children to be able to express themselves verbally (Cassidy & Robinson, 2022). Wall et al. (2019) believes that there are alternative ways to communicate and express one's voice other than words and sentences. For example, children can use feelings, movements, attitudes and sounds to convey meaning (Cassidy & Robinson, 2022). The 'voice of children' is a particularly complicated area for researchers because of the gap that exists between speaking and being listened to (Lansdown et al., 2014). Researchers need to listen to a variety of children's voices in the educational setting and be prepared to understand, interpret and respond to a wide range of children's expressions.

As these examples illustrate, 'voice' can refer to any form of communication and interaction that conveys a message that includes emotions, body language, facial expressions, gestures and spoken language (i.e., sounds, letters, words, and sentences). Baker and Le Courtois (2022) note that children's agency to voice opinions is important for their lives and learning but the 'children's voice' is marginalised or absent in both research and practice. They explain that it is important to place value on children's voices when it comes to making decisions on matters affecting them. The 'children's voice' has been extensively investigated and is a complex area of the literature.

Recent discussions focus on how to provide 'space' for children to voice their opinions and have an audience to influence (Lundy, 2007). It is important to acknowledge that a gap exists between the Convention's global commitment for the voice of children to be heard and its actual implementation to actively involve them in educational matters (Baker & Le Courtois, 2022; Lundy, 2007). Therefore, listening to children's voices in this study affords respect to their experiences and identification as active agents who have the capacity to take part in debates and make decisions on learning to speak English (Carnevale, 2020).

The analysis of the treaty in this chapter deepens the understanding of the status of children's rights in Qatar's educational system. It strengthens the determination to perceive children as right holders with a voice. The Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates a variety of rights for children regardless of age, gender, religion, race, or ability (Cassidy & Robinson, 2022). Identifying issues that do not impact or concern children is problematic because there are few situations that do not concern children (Cassidy, 2017). Children live in this world with adults and share the universe with them and matters that concern adults concern them. Therefore, facilitating participation in these matters is essential for children (Cassidy, 2017). Cassidy and Robinson (2022) comment that children need to be included in practices that allow for participation at all times. In this thesis, I involve children in discussion about learning English-speaking. In doing so, children are being recognised as having the right to participate and express their opinions

on matters that concern them. They are considered as being competent, skilful and capable human beings, whose participation in Qatari primary schools is needed.

The articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognise children as citizens and social participants in their own right (Ndofirepi & Cross, 2015; UNCRC, 2005). In the literature, researchers discuss the UNCRC implications and possibilities. For example, Bae (2009) argues that implementing children's rights (Article 12 of the UNCRC) in practical situations will mean that adults who work with children will have to change how they relate with them and modify their roles. Baker and Le Courtois (2022) note that adults who guide children should be skilful, particularly those who live in a place where the voice and choices of children are not usual. They advocate for training decision-makers on implementing the UNCRC standards to acknowledge children's rights in educational and learning settings.

It can be argued in the literature that the official details contained in UNCRC documents do not guarantee that children will be given the respect and space they need to express themselves. Researchers suggest focusing on how the everyday activities of children can generate opportunities for their views to be heard and to participate (Bae, 2009). It is also recommended that researchers interpret the children's social structure and how it influences our view of their capacity or lack thereof as adults (Bae, 2009; Prout, 2011).

Moreover, Vaghr et al. (2011) questions the connection between state party ratification of the CRC and the recognition of children's rights. Consequently, the relationship between Qatar's ratification of the CRC, its legal implementation, and recognising children's rights is examined in the following paragraphs.

Lansdown (2004) believes that children possess a level of competence in the same way that adults do and, in some areas, they possess a higher level. For example, remembering the places of things, using imagination, attaining IT skills and learning new languages. Adults fail to acknowledge the capability of children because they evaluate them from only their own perspective. Lansdown (2004, p.5) states that the competence of children should be interpreted without "subjecting it to the filtering process that diminishes their contribution simply because they are young". Children have fewer experiences than adults but we cannot presume that they lack the capacity to think for themselves or express their thoughts.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognises the capacity of children in their own right. Education should go beyond this by supporting every child to develop their skills, values and confidence to participate in an autonomous life (Lansdown et al., 2014). The state of Qatar accepted the treaty (UNCRC) and its National Constitution Law includes an array of rights for children and its citizens. Nevertheless, it does not fully

address children's rights because it lacks a comprehensive Children's Act (CRIN, 2012).

Qatar has experienced challenges implementing the laws and policies into society (Al-Kaabi, 2004). In 2005, a new constitution went into effect which included human rights measures. The measures improved the human rights (i.e. children) situation but some issues remain and new ones have surfaced (Qatar Country Review, 2018).   For example, the Country Rapporteur, Mr. Filali, explains that there has been progress in legislation in Qatar but there is very limited information on the implementation of the law (NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p.2). This means that gatekeepers do not recognise children as being necessary contributors to education decision-making.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other ratified treaties have legal force according to Article 68 of Qatar's Constitution. The proviso in that article, however, states that treaties that call for changes to the laws of the State only take effect when they are published as domestic law. This implies that the application of the Convention is barred insofar as it contains requirements beyond those found in national law. Only when the Convention's provisions have been incorporated into national law can they be used directly in domestic courts. There is no evidence that the Convention has been cited or used in national courts (CRIN, 2012). There are numerous rights provisions in Part 3 of the Qatar's Constitution that apply to children, just like they do to everyone else, but none of them directly mention children's rights (Human Rights Watch-NGO-Qatar-PSWG,

2023). However, the Constitution's second section on "the guiding principles of the society" does contain two provisions that are particularly pertinent to children:

- **"Art. 21:** requires the State to make provision in law to regulate and protect childhood.

- **Art. 22:** requires the State to make provision for the protection of young people from exploitation and physical, mental or spiritual neglect; also requires the State to create an environment conducive to the development of children's capacities in all fields based on sound education" (CRIN, 2012).

These rights are broad in reach and unclear in meaning, leaving everyone (including teachers) unsure of how the protection and development of children's capacities should be administered within an educational system. Specifics are needed in Qatari national law on the role of children within the country. Every child needs to be equipped with the necessary skills and confidence to participate in things that interest them (i.e. education).

Qatar does not have a comprehensive Children's Act but legislation that is especially relevant to children can be found in a number of legislative Acts and instruments. Relevant regulations may include but are not restricted to:

- The Juveniles Act No. 1 of 1994

- The Criminal Code No. 11 of 2004

- The Code of Criminal Procedure No. 23 of 2004

- The Labour Code No. 14 of 2004

- The Civil Code No. 22 of 2004

- The Family Act No. 22 of 2006

- The Nationality Act No. 38 of 2005

- The Compulsory Education Act No. 25 of 2001

- The Trusteeship of Minors' Assets Act No. 40 of 2004

- Act no. 22 of 2005, prohibiting the recruitment, employment, training and participation of children in camel racing and prescribing penalties for infringing the Act

- Act No. 3 of 2009 regulating penal and correctional institutions

- Act No. 4 of 2009 regulating the entry, exit, residence and sponsorship of migrants

- Cabinet decision No. 38 of 2006 on benefits for children (CRIN, 2012).

Only, "compulsory education" of the aforementioned Acts is relevant to children's education. Article 12 (1) of the UNCRC is not effectively integrated into Qatari laws and legislation.

The Committee of the Rights of the Child was established to examine and track the progress made by State Parties in fulfilling their commitments under the Convention. It is the Convention's monitoring body. One of its main responsibilities is to review the State Party reports on the steps they have taken to put the Convention into effect (Sardenberg, 1996). The Committee emerged as a result of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. It upholds and promotes children's rights because it recognises that children are subject to the rights that are interwoven into the social and political fabric of the modern world (Sardenberg, 1996).

In Qatar's conformity with UNCRC, the Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted in its 2009 Concluding Observations (a written document of State Party conformity with the Convention that included suggestions and recommendations) (Sardenberg, 1996) that extensive legislative measures had been taken to ensure the implementation of the CRC's provisions but voiced concern about "the frequent delays which obstruct the adoption of the Children's Bill". The Committee was particularly concerned that the Convention's provisions had not been directly invoked or alluded to in national courts. The Committee recommended the State to continue inspecting current legislation, implementing reforms, expediting the passage of the Children's Bill and ensuring that the Convention can be immediately invoked in court (CRIN, 2012). There is a lack of information on the CRC in Qatar's national courts and laws which reflects the current environment of primary school education and my professional experience in education.

The universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) serves as a central text to shape and inform international political and social action towards children.   Yet, Holzscheiter (2011, p.7) comments that "it has become increasingly evident that the comprehensive understanding of who is a child promoted by the UNCRC transports an ideal of childhood that, despite its inevitably fuzzy boundaries poses serious problems when applied to specific cultural contexts". Qatari society needs to provide children with opportunities to express themselves, voice their opinions and, when possible, act on their own behalf. Qatari society is duty-bound by its ratification of the UNCRC to re-perceive children as being capable, competent and independent beings.

3.5 Rights in Early Childhood

The United Nations CRC defines childhood with international differences in mind and states that a child is a human being under the age of eighteen. This means that all children under the age of eighteen are entitled to all rights enshrined in the Convention and specific rights protection measures when developing their skills and abilities. The Committee of the Convention is concerned with how state parties implement children's rights (Vaghri et al., 2019). They argue that state parties do not pay attention to young children's rights when developing laws and policies, even though they are ratified with the convention (UNCRC, 2005). The Committee assert that the CRC is to be applied

holistically to early childhood, taking into account the principals of universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights (UNCRC, 2005).

The General Comment No. 7 (2005): Implementing Rights in the Childhood (GC7) was launched in response to the observation of the UNCRC. It was discovered in state party reports on the progress of its implementation of the UNCRC that young children's rights were entirely overlooked. The obligation to uphold young children's rights was neglected. They were regarded as objects, rather than rights holders and social participants (Vaghri et al., 2011, 2019). The Convention requires that young children are respected as persons in their own right. They are to be recognised as active members of communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view (UNCRC, 2005). The GC7 offers reliable guidance to state parties on how to implement CRC duties to young children but lacks practical value without a corresponding operationalised framework of indicators. Consequently, it remains insufficiently utilised (Vaghri et al., 2011). Deeply engrained state party cultural values and traditions that are at odds with the Convention's implications for young children might be preventing its successful implementation (Vaghri et al., 2011, 2019).

The General Comment No. 7 on Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood (2005) establishes the right of young children to express their opinions and take part in

discussions that affect them. The GC7 emphasises that adults must have a child-centred

perspective, listen to young children, and respect their individuality and dignity to ensure

their right to participate. This means that the valuable contributions of children should

be sought from their culture and community.   Adults must exercise patience,

inventiveness and modify their expectations to suit a young child's interests, degree of

understanding and preferred communication method (UNCRC, 2005).

Participation rights of children are essential for them to be able to exercise their rights as

Qatari citizens. Educators must recognise their participation and agency rights,

practically, conceptually and contextually (Correia et al., 2020; Mentha, 2015, p. 623).

There is not an explicit statement that acknowledges the child as an active participant in

the formation of Qatari early childhood education policy but its guiding documents do

place emphasis on providing children with opportunities to learn in a child-centred

environment. The expectations of societies, communities and individuals differ regarding

early childhood participation rights, as outlined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of

the Child and the General Comment No. 7 (2005) that have been examined in the

research. Differences exist because they reflect the values, customs and policies of the

community (Mentha, 2015). Qatari culture and education policies do not fully take into

account children's agency (see sections 3.3 and 3.4). It is evident in the literature that

encouraging young children's participation rights in early childhood education leads to

transparent adult- child relationships. A child's views and opinions on issues directly

related to them should be respected from an early age. Children's participation is an indicator of good quality early childhood education (Correia et al., 2020).

The literature reveals that children's participation has several advantages for both children and teachers. For example, it boosts young children's self-assurance, communication, cooperation, negotiation skills and increases a teacher's respect for the children's opinions, interests, and needs (Nah & Lee, 2016). Typical barriers and obstacles to activating the participation of children in early childhood settings include the maintenance of adult power over children as subordinate, the workload and the child-adult ratio in the classroom (Correia et al., 2020). These are all factors that hinder progress in Qatar in early childhood settings (see section 3.2), along with the use of pre-designed textbooks that restrict teachers from actively encouraging children to participate in the selection of teaching techniques.

Researchers in the field aim to deepen understandings of childhood by accessing their silenced voices (Spyrou, 2011). The aim is to empower and facilitate children's voices to present them to the world. This study contributes to the literature by accessing the silenced voices of young children in Qatari primary schools who study English as a foreign language. It listens attentively to their voices and pays attention to the extent that they are heard in the education system.

It is evident in the literature that teacher's opinions vary on issues surrounding the voice of children. Some teachers want to include the views of children on educational issues that are relevant to them and others doubt that they can adequately express their viewpoint (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015). This belief is held because adult teachers are considered to have a broader knowledgebase that is gained through extensive experience, which puts them in a position of guidance for children (Simovska, 2011). The predominant view in the literature is that teachers in democratic countries (i.e. Australia, England, New Zealand, Italy and Sweden) that have ratified the UNCRC give selective attention to the voice of individual children but do not value the voice of children as a whole (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015).

Mitra (2004) and Mitra et al. (2012) have said that when children are given opportunities to actively participate in school decisions, their lives and the lives of their peers are significantly influenced and shaped. Allowing the children to make decisions about their education helps to connect them with their learning and the English lesson. When young children's voices are included in daily educational practices, they are able to cooperate with adults, identify problems in school and propose solutions (Mitra, 2004). Mitra (2004) commented that "student outcomes will improve and school reform will be more successful if students actively participate in shaping it" (p.652). Student voices help schools to make appropriate changes to important educational processes. For example, teaching strategies, student-teacher relations and teacher performance (Mitra, 2003).

Adults must analyse where the power lies in their relationships with children in order to maintain a healthy balance (Cassidy & Robinson, 2022).

The literature explains that adults have authority and power over children that is embedded in almost every relationship with them, which impedes their participation in learning (Baker & Le Courtois, 2022). Power dynamics influence the capacity that children have to improve their listening culture (Arnott & Wall, 2022). It is suggested in the literature that the key to children being able to exercise their rights is trust and the ability to express dissent. Children are able to effectively exercise rights when they can comfortably voice beliefs, whether in agreement with adults or not (Baker & Le Courtois, 2022).

The power and authority of adults in Qatar impacts Qatari national laws and the extent that children are heard in the educational system. Power pervades all of the country's institutions and affects everyone who works in them (i.e. teachers and children). This means that neither teachers nor children may express themselves or participate in matters affecting them. Consequently, children's perspectives on educational topics are not sought by their English teachers. The power dynamic that existed between the children and myself in this study will be discussed in the Methodology chapter.

Rose and Shevlin (2004, p.160) explain that listening to children's opinions enables one to "reflect upon how future developments may afford greater opportunities to those who have been previously denied". It deepens the understanding of young children's learning English experiences (Adderley et al., 2015). Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (1999) have explained that listening to children's voices at school encourages them to express themselves and strengthens the school practices. According to the literature, some European educational systems (i.e. Norway) provide children with independence when it comes to educational matters. For example, they believe it is a child's right to partake in educational issues related to legislation. In these systems, education is conceived of as two-way knowledge dissemination and children are viewed as active participants in their education (Lansdown et al., 2014).

Qatari legislation does not specify the status of a child's voice in its education system and fails to advocate for children's voices or their conceptualisation inside the system. It is said that in Qatar, the freedom to express oneself is limited and concerns for children's rights only encompass juvenile justice, gender discrimination and child abuse (CRIN, 2018). In this system, the educational process is a one-way dissemination of information from adults to children. It travels from the top-down and children are viewed as passive recipients. They have no input on school policies, curriculum, or teaching strategies. Liebel (2012) argues that the rights of children should not be designed by adults and

bestowed from above (top-down) but rather, transformed from below, through the actions of children, either individually or collectively.

Oldfather (1995) suggests that providing young children with opportunities to voice their opinions increases the awareness they have of their own abilities and encourages them to make changes for themselves as well as for others. Johnston and Nicholls (1995) note that increasing the voice of learners in classrooms develops an understanding of the ways of learning and helps the teacher more effectively meet student needs. It also helps children achieve specific objectives and equips them with self-esteem (Correia et al., 2019). Mazzei (2009) comments that researchers tend to investigate the student voice attempting to clarify and convey meaning from what is said. Mazzei (2009) argues for researchers to go beyond understanding the "voiced" in voices (i.e. the silence and the unpronounceable might reveal more about the voice of children and their views than what they actually verbalise) (Mazzei, 2009, p. 45). Researchers can go beyond the verbal voice of children to seek more than just the surface meanings (Spyrou, 2011).

The state of Qatar is lacking a theoretical framework for children and there are barely any studies designed to examine their perspectives and views on issues related to them. They are deemed to be entirely under the control of adult authority (Al-Ghanem, 2012). The concept of the children's right to participate is not an adult engineered form of

communication. It is a meaningful element of a child's learning and educational development. Children are not merely performing actors but independent actors with their own rights (Liebel, 2012).

3.6 Summary

This chapter provided a review of the education system in Qatar and the positionality of children's voices within it. It explored the structure of Qatari society, family, and the way children were perceived by them. The chapter examined how children often did not have the right to voice and participate in matters that affect them in the Qatari educational system.

In this chapter, I had developed an understanding of how the education system in Qatar operates. This included an exploration of the educational approach in Qatar and its shift. The literature showed that Qatar's education system has a centralised top-down hierarchical approach to management. Decisions were made without consultation with all those involved. For example, children's voices were not involved and heard by stakeholders when policies were formed.

The chapter explored how children were perceived by Qatari families and whether their social rights were upheld in society. The literature revealed that children were dependent and reliant on adults. They were restricted by family and societal norms, which limited their autonomy and freedom to be themselves. Traditions in Qatar required children to obey adults without discussion and interactions were to preserve hierarchical ties. Adults appear to not step back and allow children to take the lead. When adults neglect children, it has a significant impact on their independence and autonomy. Therefore, this thesis acknowledged children as being capable and competent.

This chapter analysed the legal documents of the country to understand the nation of 'children's voice' in the educational context. The chapter argued that children's voices were w left behind regardless of Qatar's ratification of the UNCRC and that its stipulations were not adequately taken into account in Qatar. Policies in Qatar contradicted its practices, challenging children's voices. Fully incorporating the rights into Qatari legal documents would be an important step towards activating them in the educational context. It would help strengthen the implementation of them by educators in primary schools. Children need to be aware of what their rights are and make connections between themselves and their lives to practise agency (Liebel, 2012). Children need to be active rights-holders if they are to have influence in the educational context. They need to understand their rights to be able to put them into practice (Liebel, 2012).

The efficacy of the UNCRC is determined not by ratification but by whether its provisions make a difference in children's lives. For example, incorporating the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Qatar's legislation does not ensure the children's right to participate and freely express themselves in the educational setting (Boumans, 2015). Promulgating a level of decision-making to children, the Convention (U.N. General Assembly, 1989) is a positive step but remains challenging to implement in cultures where openness to expression and confidence are valued less than duty fulfilment and where adult-child interactions are traditionally hierarchical (Murphy-Berman et al., 1996, p.1259).

It is argued that the UNCRC document affectively accesses different cultures but criticism surrounds its interpretations and implementations by them. For example, some maintain that the rights of children are exploited by people who have power and that these people act as "moral watchdogs" without regard for differing cultures and ways of living (Murphy-Berman et al., 1996; Valentin & Meinert, 2009). The UNCRC principles assert that children's rights must be upheld as part of operating within democratic societies that value equality (Liebel, 2012). In Qatar, children's right to participate in the educational setting is not authorised by policymakers or national law. Those in positions of power miss the opportunity to uphold equality and maintain a reciprocal respect of children in educational society. Decision-makers need to become sensitised to the rights of children and restore balance to the educational context. The aim is to facilitate two-way

knowledge dissemination and help children be recognised as active participants (Lansdown et al., 2014).

Chapter Four: Play and Playful Pedagogy: The Potential of Puppetry as a Pedagogical Play-Based Child-Centred Teaching Tool for Early Years Children

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how children learn during the early stages of their development in the state of Qatar. I define what play and play-based pedagogy means and how early years children should be taught to provide background to the study. The chapter discusses puppetry's potential as a play-based pedagogy and its potential impact on children's involvement and interest in learning.   The chapter examines the literature on play as a pedagogy to teach children contextually according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and analyses Article (31) on the children's right to play. The chapter is comprised of three sections that each discuss the aforementioned topics.

4.2 What Play and Play-Based Pedagogy Means in Early Childhood and its Impact on Children's Learning

It is important to begin this chapter with an explanation on the meaning of play and play-based pedagogy because it underpins the use of play-based teaching approaches in primary schools in Qatar. Play-based pedagogy is not a new concept in education but since 2000, there has been a shift in some countries towards activating play pedagogy in early childhood learning (Danniels & Pyle, 2018). Play-based pedagogy is an approach

that originates from the late nineteenth century. Froebel was one of the pioneers who discovered the advantages of play for children (Lunga et al., 2022). There is no definitive definition of play because what it is, why children engage in play and its role in human development continues to be debated in the literature (see Cheng & Johnson, 2010; Sutton-Smith,1997). There are a variety of activities that can be considered play. Finding similarities amongst them is not common because each activity is distinct in itself, in a particular way and has a different influence on children. Play means more than just engaging in an activity because some aspects of play satisfy a child's particular needs and interests. For example, having fun, exploration, manipulation of tangible objects, solving problems and involvement in an action (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012).

According to Zosh et al. (2018), play encompasses a wide range of human experiences over time and place. It is rich, diverse and can take place in a variety of ways. Play is described as an activity carried out for no other reason than for its own sake. It is adaptable and uplifting (Zosh et al., 2018). A review of the literature reveals that children's play is freely chosen, actively engaging, spontaneously acted, pleasing, creative, intrinsically driven, and more concerned with means than ends (Keung & Cheung, 2019; Pyle & Danniels, 2017). It improves children's social, emotional and personal skills (i.e. self-control). Children learn and nurture through play and by experimenting with new things and exploring them differently while having fun (Keung & Cheung, 2019; Pyle et al., 2018).

Every human is a unique case and they vary in their perception of experience. They learn in various ways. Some children learn by imitating the abilities and actions of others. Others pick up knowledge through observation, reading, exercising, socialising, conversing and using their own skills and efforts (Moyles, 2015). We could argue that educators (i.e. teachers) need to recognise that children learn through different kinds of play and work with children on this basis. If we are able to do this, the children's personalities, learning, experience and self-image will grow and enable them to practise their agency.

The literature reveals that learning is not necessary for an activity to be perceived as play but remains fundamental to the definition of play-based learning (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). It is argued that learning and play are interwoven into a child's everyday life. Children take every opportunity to play either in the classroom or outside of it. This helps them to develop personal skills. For example, self-regulation, problem solving, literacy, numeracy, motor and gross skills (Hope-Southcott, 2013; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012).

Play is considered a necessity to be activated in English classrooms in Qatari primary schools. There are different conceptualisations on the notion of play but this study is not attempting to define the concept of 'play'. Two types of play have received significant attention in research that has looked into the advantages of play-based learning. 'Free

play' is directed by the children themselves (Fleer, 2011) and 'guided play' includes teacher guidance or engagement (Fisher et al., 2013). In this study, play means using playful child-centred activities that are guided by the English teachers. The aim is to engage young children in the English-speaking lessons and to lessen the controlled teaching environment (see section 3.2). Playful child-centred activities are used to provide children with the space to express their opinions and perspectives on the subject being studied. This study uses puppetry as a playful pedagogy with children to stimulate and engage them in the oral English language lessons.

Eberle (2014) describes play-based pedagogy as a complete motivation that may be the most important factor in promoting the growth and wellbeing of young children in their early life. Lunga et al. (2022) regards play-based pedagogy as an essential support for children throughout their early years education. Incorporating play-based pedagogy into early years education enhances holistic skills development. For example, children develop moral thinking, recognise the emotions of others when communicating with them and develop intellectual skills, such as analytical thinking and problem solving.

Play-based pedagogy helps children to acquire linguistic abilities. For example, vocabulary is expanded through play, sentence structures are developed, following directions is enhanced and messages are effectively delivered as part of the children's overall

development (Lunga et al., 2022). Zosh et al. (2018) argues that play pedagogy contributes to academic achievement because children are active throughout the course of play. We could argue that play-based pedagogy enhances the children's physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills and is necessary for acquiring linguistic and academic skills. This study examines puppetry's influence on the children's engagement with learning as a play-based pedagogy.

In Qatar, playing should be an essential activity rather than a luxury for young children based on the UNCRC Article 31 (see section 4.3 for further details). Moyles (2015) considers play as a means for children to display their knowledge, abilities, and conceptual comprehension. Play can help children learn more effectively and connect well with the learning process. Children can make errors and take risks without feeling fear in this safe and fulfilling atmosphere. It helps children deal with situations where they do not know things for a very long time. Through play, children can rehearse, practise, and learn new things. This kind of play is important for children in the Qatari education system.

Play is a risk-free approach to learning new information or reviewing prior knowledge. It boosts confidence and self-worth (Moyles, 2015). Research shows that play impacts positively on children's motivation and engaging in meaningful experience (Whitebread,

2018). Allee-Herndon et al. (2022) notes that play helps children learn while also making them happy. They explain that teachers are responsible for creating engaging content and playful pedagogy in the classroom. Allee-Herndon et al. (2022) argues that engaging content and playful pedagogy can be used by teachers to create playful learning environments for children that are interactive and tailored to their interests. We could argue that playful learning environments are the scaffolding that supports learning discovery. They connect the children's prior knowledge to their everyday setting.

Young children are social interactors and construct knowledge from their interactions with the peers and adults in their surroundings (Vygotsky, 1967). Scaffolding is a critical factor in their language and knowledge acquisition. It helps them to receive knowledge, information and encourages them to develop their own understanding (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015). Children are physically energetic and fascinated by tangible phenomenon. They learn and receive objects through their senses (i.e. eyes, ears, and hands). The physical world is dominant in their world all the time (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). Active and interesting learning activities are needed in classrooms where children spend entire days. They need to be able to connect physically to their environment and activate their senses. They should regularly talk with the teacher and their classmates, and not be seated in rows and rarely talk (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015; Wells, 1989). Learning in Qatar needs to encourage a vibrant classroom environment that activates and responds to a child's sense of discovery through facilitating playful activities.

4.3 Playful Pedagogy is Essential Not Optional to Learn English as a Foreign Language

The advent of English as a global language and the existence of multiculturalism within societies is a fact that teachers have to realise on a daily basis in various foreign contexts. Multilingualism is a growing phenomenon in classrooms all over the world. Educators need to be aware of a range of new pedagogical considerations in their efforts to ensure that learners have the required skills to enjoy their learning and to express their viewpoints (Xerri, 2016). Educators must confront the difficulties that can arise when students learn English as a second language.

English is being taught in an increasingly multicultural world. Classrooms are placing pressure on educational leaders, policymakers, curricula designers and teachers to meet the needs of students who find themselves in a relatively new atmosphere in their classroom (Xerri, 2016). Moyles (2015) indicates that there is a belief spread out amongst society (i.e. educational leaders, policymakers, curriculum designers, teachers and parents) that formal education benefits children's learning and that formal education benefits children more when it happens younger. Nonetheless, Grey (2014) argues that most of the knowledge and understanding we use in our daily lives does not come from formulae (i.e., formal) or memorised responses learnt in school. Instead, it comes from the necessity of life experience, awareness, knowledge, and creative talent. These experiences are entrenched in play for children. Playful learning methods have come

under danger in schools because of the emphasis on rigid rules, which leads to more instructional teaching methods and teaching for exams with playful learning viewed as ineffective (Whitebread, 2018). This mirrors the method of education used in Qatar, which is the rote memorization of a set of formulae where play seems to vanish in the classroom.

Policymakers and teachers alike should keep in mind that children have a universal right to play to develop their unique needs, language, abilities, and interests. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31 (1) explains:

1. "States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts." (UN General Assembly resolution, 44/25 1989)

Based on this right, the format and type of play are not specified in the CRC but play can take many forms in a variety of contexts for a diverse range of abilities and children's interest and engagement (Davey & Lundy, 2011; Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). The teachers' role is crucial in supporting children's learning and intervening in their play. This reinforces Vygotskian's understanding that children learn in a social context with adults

being scaffolders of their learning (Vygotsky, 1967; Keung & Cheung, 2019; Whitebread et al., 2015). Sylva et al. (2004) argues that providing teacher-initiated activities with expanding child-initiated play is perhaps the ideal teaching strategy. Hsieh's (2018) study reveals that children can provide valuable information on their learning of English.

Given that literacy acquisition occurred outside of direct whole-group and small-group instruction, it was more pronounced in the play-based classroom (Allee-Herndon et al., 2022; Cremin et al., 2015). Cremin et al. (2015) stated that teachers must adopt creative and innovative tools in their English teaching to shape the curriculum in response to the children's needs. Cremin et al. (2015) said that methods that frequently involve "real – life" contexts for learning motivate, engage and stimulate a child's capabilities. Teachers need to make learning exciting and focus on developing a child's ability to experience being given information alone and with others. This can happen through engagement with playful activities (Cremin et al., 2015).

When children perceive experience as meaningful, it helps to create personal meaning, which helps the associated knowledge, skills and understanding remain in their long-term memory. Isolated experiences that are meaningless do not stay in the long-term memory. Learning must apply to the children's present-day situations (Moyles, 2015). This raises concerns regarding the accountability that teachers have in a rigid educational

system (i.e. Qatar), and whether the responsibility is the same for teachers in a system with more latitude. To what extent can teachers exercise their autonomy and responsibility to foster a playful environment for children to scaffold their learning? It is important to note that the teaching strategies used in Qatar's primary schools are inferred from the learning outcomes of the learners rather than being actively examined (Mostafawi & Shaaban, 2019).

In Qatar, there is a gap in the literature on teaching methods. For example, how English teachers teach English and how children would like to learn English as a second language. Little research has been conducted on the rigid educational system which suggests that there has been a prevalent implicit belief that if teachers receive more linguistic and pedagogical training, the learners will learn English effectively. This may imply that the teaching methods used are not those that are playful, and that the children's perception of their learning experiences was not sought out. Teachers also need training in effective pedagogies that cater to the children's ages and interests (Ellili-Cherif & Alkhateeb, 2015; Ellili-Cherif & Romanowski, 2013; Ellili-Cherif et al., 2012; MacLeod & Abou-El-Kheir, 2017; Nasser 2017; Nasser & Romanowski, 2011; Romanowski et al., 2013).

Althani and Romanowski (2013) conducted a comparison study between schools in England and Qatar to deepen the understanding of Qatari educational practices and policies. They discovered that schools adapted some Western teaching methods but were fundamentally "clinging to the status quo" (p. 8), perhaps because of a lack of necessary training on how to use the methods (Althani & Romanowski, 2013). With this in mind, teaching strategies in the Qatari educational setting appear to be challengeable and need to recognise Article 31 (1) of the UNCRC and implement teaching methods that are appropriate to the children's age and interests.

Policies require revision to ensure that adequate teacher training is provided. Perhaps the responsibility that Allee-Herndon et al. (2022) imposes on teachers to provide playful learning experiences for children can only happen when new policies are in place that ensure supportive playful pedagogy in the classroom. In the meantime, teachers continue to use teacher-centred activities and not child-centred activities in Qatar. Their role is that of a "direct teacher" and not "facilitator" (Althani & Romanowski, 2013).

4.4 The Potential of Puppetry as Play-Based, Child-Centred, Playful Pedagogy for Young Children

The Qatari educational reform of 2001 has resulted in some improvement when it comes to student learning and teacher performance. However, there are not enough

opportunities for learners in Qatar to learn English in a natural environment. The effective use of English in the classroom continues to be a challenge. Inside and outside of the classroom, learners are having trouble with the written and conversational components of the English language. According to recent data, Qatar's educational reform has not improved the country's academic standing compared to other nations in terms of literacy (Cheema, 2014). The literature reveals that the English language proficiency among students in Qatari schools falls short of the required standards (Nasser, 2017). Nasser (2017) explains that it is a result of a lack of alignment between the teaching methods and the particular needs of learners. According to Cheema (2014), the effectiveness of any educational reforms depends on the precise identification and comprehension of the root causes of unsatisfactory academic performance.

Over a ten-year period, I worked as an early childhood educator in Qatari schools, where I experienced the changes brought about by the reform first-hand. To adapt to the teaching methods and techniques of the English curriculum requirements, the existing teaching strategies and techniques were changed. This required teachers to accommodate the requirements and skill levels of their students and to promote the use of English both within and outside the classroom. The use of prepared textbooks in the classroom for young children was one of the norms set by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The MOE has created a teacher's guide to assist teachers in coming up with effective teaching methods that spark student interest and increase participation in the

classroom. Time constraints on completing textbooks meant that the students did not have time during the school day to converse in English as a second language with their teachers and peers inside the classroom (Attar, 2022). Regular real-life classroom activities to pique their interest and promote learning were also lacking. Consequently, teachers resorted to using the teaching methods that were in use before the transformation phase (Education for a New Era) (Althani & Romanowski, 2013). For that reason, I conducted this study to examine the level of interest children have in classroom activities.

Data and information on learning is essential to teachers involved in designing and implementing educational materials. For example, some teaching strategies are appropriate for some students but not others. Therefore, teachers can vary the teaching strategies they use to maximise their effectiveness in the classroom. Puppetry is a strategy that creates a fun and lively atmosphere in the classroom that can encourage children to express their thoughts and opinions (Prendiville & Toye, 2013). In this section, I examine how puppetry gets children interested in learning experiences and its potential in the educational field.

As educators, we need to recognise that we no longer require individuals to execute regular computations, follow instructions in a robotic manner or continually seek pre-

existing information (Grey, 2014). But we do need people who can provide new ideas, seek new solutions to old problems, and anticipate problems before they happen, which demands the capacity for creative thought. A playful mind is a creative mind (Grey, 2014). When we consider that children who are having fun learning pursue it for its own sake, it suggests that if we want to support them both now and in adulthood, we should adopt much more playful and creative teaching methods with young children (Moyles, 2015), and puppetry would be one of these playful pedagogies.

Puppetry is an ancient visual performing art and has spread from theatres to the classrooms of many countries around the world (Egypt, India, Greece, and China) (Stutheit, 1981) but not to classrooms in Qatar. In essence, puppetry is an art that has had eras of success (Reidmiller, 2010). The history of puppetry indicates that incorporating it into the classrooms in Qatar can add a new dimension to teaching practices and heighten student learning. It is an effective teaching tool when puppetry pedagogies are based on learning concepts that are tied to the learner's learning stages (McGuinn, 2014). The dramatic potential of puppetry and play advantages have been evaluated in relation to its ability to generate fun, interest, and learning for the children in learning to speak English in Qatar. Research shows that child-centred activities should concentrate on the motivating factors of a child's learning. Teaching must be integrated with life and support the idea that everything that stimulates, expedites, and improves a child's learning quality should be used (Stutheit, 1981).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, puppetry experienced a shift in direction as a result of new views towards education (Tierney, 1995). Since then, puppetry as a performing art has been introduced into the educational stream and become one of its critical components (Reidmiller, 2010). Demircioğlu (2010) notes that one of the most important principles of second-language teaching is to provide a natural learning environment. She argues that a classroom is not the ideal place to learn a foreign language. Demircioğlu (2010) explains that there needs be a target, a context, a stimulation and an interest in using the language. She asserts that puppetry is a creative valuable addition to classroom instruction. Prendiville and Toye (2013) explain that teachers need to implement teaching strategies that empower learners to talk and have an open dialogue with each other. They believe that puppetry (role-play) is an effective teaching tool that engages young learners and enables them to converse and engage in dialogue together. Using puppetry as a teaching strategy provides teachers with an insight into the child's level of knowledge, understanding, and speaking skills (Prendiville & Toye, 2013).

Puppetry is essential for early year's work as children bring to school pretending and role-playing skills. Teachers need to be aware of how children make sense of the world around them at that age and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. Puppetry provides an innovative way of dealing with subject matter that can develop a child's imagination, which can encourage them to learn (Prendiville & Toye, 2013). Wallace et al. (2004)

conducted a study into the relationship between student interest and the use of puppetry in the classroom among first-graders in Brooklyn, New York. They found that puppetry increased the student's attention, involvement, and interest in the classroom activities.

Puppets can easily be incorporated into education contexts. Their possibilities for use in classrooms are endless because they are able to draw and stimulate the learner's interest. Puppetry creates an inner language through a mixture of meaning and body movements. It can help to differentiate between facial expressions and body language and is able to interpret meanings (Hatamiya, 2011). Based on this, this thesis believes that puppetry is a powerful art that has been used in classrooms to teach various subjects to many people (Hatamiya, 2011).

This study used finger puppets with young children in Qatari classroom and at home to examine whether they can engage children in English-speaking lessons. It evaluated whether they can help children be at ease when expressing their thoughts on their preferred method of learning English. I used the finger puppet in the dramatic sense as a, "vehicle to gain understandings and insights from young people" (Fitzgerald, 2007, p. 253). Finger puppetry can promote the production of children's voices in a negotiated procedural context. It provides a platform for them to share their ideas without being changed or disrupted by adults (further details in the Methodology chapter).

Puppetry can develop a flow of communication that helps children reveal their views and ideas in their educational context but it will not always result in the engagement of all children. For example, barriers might be because of the children's individual learning styles, personalities or the social structure they belong to. Kullman (2012) comments that innovative and visual tools might not automatically be "fun" for everyone. To address these issues, teachers need to discuss the teaching methods they use in Qatari classrooms with the learners and talk about the advantages and disadvantages. Facilitating learning in this way ensures that the 'children's voice' is presented, and this prompts teachers to think critically about the methods they employ (Kullman, 2012).

4.5 Summary

This chapter had highlighted the importance of using play-based child-centred teaching pedagogies to teach young children in English lessons in Qatar that are appropriate for their age group. Puppetry has a profound affect on children's engagement and interest in learning.

Implementing finger puppetry as a play-based child-centred teaching technique in this study to explore and develop the experience that children have in English lessons was congruent with the research aims. It is proven in the literature that puppetry has great potential to enhance children's attention, interest, and involvement in learning (i.e.,

English as a second language). Using play-based pedagogy to teach young children enhances their engagement with the learning process and creates opportunities for 'voice' to be heard. It is a technique that presents the children with a chance to express themselves on their educational experiences. Obtaining their point of view increases the accuracy of gauging the helpfulness of finger puppetry as a strategy to benefit involvement and interest in English classes.

In this chapter, I had highlighted that children learn and gain knowledge through the modes of play and practical experience. Play is proven in the literature to be necessary for children and not optional because it inspires valuable learning opportunities. Children spend a considerable amount of time in school and have a universal right to play and to participate in other interest-based activities. Gatekeepers must therefore support play for children in educational settings in order for it to happen in schools.

It is vital to employ a playful approach to teaching English lessons in Qatar. Finger puppet usage in oral English lessons and with children reflects the study's recognition of the children's inherent right to play and partake in leisure activities. In Qatar, finger puppetry had been utilised to examine whether it captivates and interests young children in English language learning. It was also utilised as a tool to collect the viewpoints of young children. Finger puppetry is widely used and has been shown to be an effective pedagogical tool but no research exists on its potentiality with young children in Qatar's educational

system. This thesis contributed to the growing body of research on puppetry by examining its features, benefits, limitations for entertaining, whether it is enthralling, and how it may support children's voices in an inflexible educational system.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research design and study aims and objectives. I utilised a participatory approach to understand the children's perceptions of experiencing learning English speaking as a second language and the use of finger puppetry. My qualitative six stage methodology is presented to elicit the children's voices and explore their perspectives. The six-stage method was utilised to gather the data to provide answers to the three research questions. I highlight the ethical considerations associated with the children's consent forms contextually using the methods implemented to listen to their viewpoints in Qatar because they are important when researching young children's voices and perspectives.

This chapter provides insight into my positionality as a previous early years teacher and a Professional Development Specialist. This is a privileged researcher position, emphasising some of the concepts covered in Chapter 2 (my personal positionality). It is crucial and pertinent to consider my positionality because it has an impact on the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I interpreted the children's viewpoints based on what they have said through my professional early years academic lens (primary and early years teacher, education, experiences, and background). The

analytical approach is discussed in the next chapter to connect the frameworks utilised in the analysis and the study's findings.

5.2 Qualitative Participatory Approach

This qualitative research aims to answer the following research questions:

1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar?

2) In what way are and can teaching strategies in Qatar be informed by the voice of children and teachers?

    a. How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language?

3) How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence the children's interest and attention in the English-speaking lessons and at home in Qatar?

    a. How do the children perceive the use of puppetry as a pedagogical tool in English-speaking lessons and at home?

The research questions determine the choice of qualitative study as the main aim of this thesis was to explore and obtain an interpretative account (Creswell, 2014) of the early years children's perspectives of their experiences of learning English as a second language

and to understand what stimulates them to learn it. A lack of research on early childhood experiences with English-speaking in the early years Qatari setting prompted the use of an exploratory, interpretative, and participatory approach. A qualitative participatory approach facilitates an interpretative account of the early years children's perspectives of their experiences of learning English as a second language. It enabled me to examine the viewpoints of children within primary schools in Qatar (Creswell, 2009).

5.3 Employing a Participatory Approach

I employed a participatory approach to achieve the qualitative aims of the study. A participatory approach is a research strategy within qualitative research. The participatory approach is defined as, "collaborative research activities" that aims to "produce knowledge in collaboration" between the researchers and participants (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, p. 195). Investigating the young children's perspectives entails understanding that their viewpoints are primary sources regarding their experiences and perspectives. They are treated as being capable of making their thoughts known and acting on them (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Morrow & Richards, 1996). The participatory approach enabled me to respect their unique educational experiences and meant that I could facilitate their agency and voice (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Holland et al., 2010). This was important because their perspectives and voices are marginalised in the Qatari education system and society (see sections 3.2 and 3.3).

A participatory methodological approach enabled early years children in Qatar to actively participate in the study (Clark & Statham, 2005) and afforded them the space to express their views on learning to speak English as a second language in classrooms (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). It also facilitated the evaluation of the use of finger puppetry as a teaching aid. As this research was concerned with understanding how children experience learning English speaking from their own perspectives (i.e. insiders' perspectives), it was important to know their perspectives first in order to provide, develop and create teaching strategies that interest and involve them in learning English.

The intention of this research was not only to understand how children experience learning speaking but also to go further to accomplish verstehen, which means understanding children from their own perspectives and in their own situation (as second language learners), listening to their ideas on learning speaking (Hennink et al., 2011). It was necessary to construct meaning around the phenomenon through both etic and emic interactions (Hennink et al., 2011). The etic interaction in this research refers to the researcher's views, thoughts, and beliefs (outsider's view) about the possibility that finger puppetry can increase a child's interest and involvement in an English-speaking lesson. The emic perspective refers to gathering the views of the children on how to learn English speaking and what they think about finger puppetry as a mode of learning. This study sought to obtain information from 'the insider' to generate understanding of the subjective meaning that children have of their experiences inside the classroom.

Adopting a participatory approach with the children meant that I needed to address any power imbalances to develop supportive and fair relationships with the children (see section 6.6 for further details). This does not mean equal power in all contexts but a shift from a framework with activities that control children to a more flexible setting in which they feel comfortable and empowered to have a say (Kirby et al., 2003). A participatory approach provided them with an element of power and authority in the research process (Corsaro, 2005). Waller and Bitou (2011) explain that play is important to children and any fun activities set by the researcher will fully engage them. This enables the researcher to concentrate on the observation and collection of data. During this process, the children can invite the researcher to join in the activities if they wish to do so.

This study provided an opportunity to observe the kinds of issue that arise when working with children. For example, it must be acknowledged that there are significant physical differences between children and adults. Chesworth (2018) explains that children will often surprise the researcher with their responses to the activities set. For example, some children might want to deviate from the activities and others may want to strictly follow the procedures. Some children might want the researcher to join them in the activity, and others might prefer to complete the activities alone but do not have the power to prevent researcher involvement. Some children will be confident discussing the research process and others won't be (Waller & Bitou, 2011). I maintained a flexible and tolerant participatory approach at all times. This involved understanding the complexities

of the interactions that occurred between the adult researcher and child participants in this study. Participatory data collection methods included visually-mediated group discussions with the children on their drawings and teacher interviews. My aim was to develop an in-depth understanding on the children's thoughts and perspectives to generate deep qualitative data to answer the research questions.

5.4 Participants

Fourteen children participated in this study (see Diagram 5.1). They were all in grade two, aged seven-eight years old at the time of the data collection, and belonged to two different primary schools, one for boys and one for girls, in Qatar. Two early years English teachers, one from each school, participated in this study (see Table 5.2) with permission from their schools to take part. Primary schools in Qatar are segregated by gender into boys and girls. The teachers in both types of school are female. The children recruited for this research were male and female (see Table 5.1). Seven children were invited to participate from each school to keep the focus during the group discussion and to minimise distractions when obtaining their views (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2009).

The recruited teachers were female English teachers who worked at the two primary schools (further details are provided in section 5.6.3). In qualitative research, it is usual to conduct research in the natural environments of the participants (Creswell, 2014;

Creswell, 2009). Data collection occurred when the children were at school from September 2020 to May 2021. My aim was to construct a collective meaningful reality through interactions with them. This involved building meaningful relations with the children to obtain their experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Holloway & Brown, 2012, p.15).

16 Participants (14 Children and 2 English Teachers)

Boy's School (7 males' children, aged (7-8) years old and a female English teacher). Data: September 2020 - May 2021.

Girl's School (7 girls' children, aged (7-8) years old and a female English teacher). Data: September 2020-May 2021.

Diagram (5.1): Mapping of the participants.

Participant Children	Boys	Pseudonyms	Kai (8 years old)	Mecuri (8 years old)	Ninja (8 years old)	XR (7 years old)	MS (7 years old)	Benten (8 years old)	King Qatar (7 years old)
	Girls		Daisy (7 years old)	Roro (7 years old)	Nora (8 years old)	Nastiya (7 years old)	Amaya (7 years old)	Sara (7 years old)	Amal (8 years old)

Table (5.1): Participant children.

				Teacher's Age	Teacher's Education	Years of Experiences
Participant Early Years English teachers	Boys	Pseudonyms	Sally	37	Doing Masters in Education in the United State of America.	Thirteen years (five years at preparatory schools and eight years at primary schools).
	Girls		Maya	30s	B.A/English Literature.	Eight years at primary schools.

Table (5.2): Participant teachers.

5.5 Methods of Data Collection

This study used a variety of innovative qualitative methods to triangulate and strengthen the rigor and trustworthiness of the data collected. The collection methods obtained authentic information from the participant's real-life experiences to understand how the children experience learning English as a second language in their lived environment. I investigated the children's perspectives of the use of finger puppetry as a teaching tool in the classroom and at home. I explored their preferred method of learning English in school. To critically answer the research questions, I applied several research techniques:

- In-depth qualitative interviews with early years English teachers. The interviews were conducted:

1) Before the finger puppet intervention to explore teachers' thoughts about children's right in the classroom, the techniques they use to teach English, and their perspectives on how children would like to learn English.

2) After completing the intervention to obtain feedback on the influence finger puppetry had on children's interest and engagement in the English-speaking lesson.

- Three children's group discussions took place on the following topics:

1) The drawing they created to understand their beliefs and perspectives on how they would like to learn English-speaking

2) The videos they recorded about themselves using finger puppetry at home with their preferred person. It aimed to investigate the influence finger puppetry had on children inside the classroom and at home.

3) The utilisation of finger puppetry as a teaching tool inside the classroom to obtain the children's evaluation of the finger puppet as a pedagogical tool.

- Qualitative classroom observations of finger puppetry to assess its potential as a teaching technique and to establish the extent that children's rights were recognised in the classroom (see Diagram 5.2).

Phase 1

Review of the Literature: Play-Based Pedagogy

Phase 2

Collect Data: Before the Finger Puppet Intervention.

Teachers' In-Depth Interviews

Children's Drawings

Children's Group Discussions

Phase 3

Implement the (Intervention): Conduct a mini workshop with teachers on how to use puppets with children in classrooms and its possible use in the home.

Phase 4

- Teachers implement the use of finger puppetry in classrooms.
- Children video themselves at home with a family member.

Classroom Observations: From the beginning of the intervention.

Children's Group Discussions: During the intervention and after recording their videos. Using finger puppets.

Phase 5

Collect Data: After Completing the (Intervention) – Evaluation/Seek Feedback.

Children's Group Discussions. Using finger puppets.

Teachers' In-Depth Interviews

Phase 6

A meeting with teachers and parents to discuss the findings of the study. A friendly puppet book to discuss the findings with children.

Diagram (5.2): Research method and techniques diagram.

The use of triangulation in this study can increase the rigor of what is discovered about the experiences of early years children in learning English and their views on the effectiveness of finger puppetry in a Qatar educational context (Borg & Gall, 1989; Gray et al., 2009; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). These methods are listed in Table (5.3), along with their relevance to the research questions and data generation.

Phases	Methods Used	Research questions Answered	Generate Data or Not
Phase 2 Collect data before the Finger Puppet Intervention	Teachers' in-depth interviews	**First and second questions:** 1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar? 2) In what way are and can teaching strategies in Qatar be informed by the voice of children and teachers?	Empirical Data Collection
	Children's drawings	**Sub-second question:** 2/a) How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language?	Pedagogical Intervention Process
	Children's group discussion	**First and the sub-second research questions:** 1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar? 2/a) How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language?	Empirical Data Collection
Phase 3 Apply the Intervention: Conduct a mini workshop with the teachers	Mini-workshop with early years English teachers on how to use puppets with children in classrooms and its possible use in the home.	————	Pedagogical process/ Generated perceptions and overviews
Phase 4 Teachers implement finger puppetry in classrooms. Children video themselves at home with a family member.	Classroom observations	**First and third questions:** 1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar? 3) How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence children's interest and attention in the English-speaking lesson and at home in Qatar? **At home is not answered by this method.**	Empirical Data Collection
	Children's group discussion (During the intervention and after recording their videos)	**Second and third questions:** 2) In what way are and can teaching strategies in Qatar be informed by the voice of children and teachers? a. How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language? 3) How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence children's interest and attention in the English-speaking lesson and at home in Qatar? **At home is answered by this method.**	Empirical Data Collection
Phase 5 Collect data after the Finger Puppet Intervention finished to obtain feedback from the participants	Children's group discussion	**Sub-third question** 3/b) How do the children perceive the use of puppetry as a pedagogical tool in English speaking lessons and at home.	Empirical Data Collection
	Teachers' in-depth interviews	**First and the third research questions:** 1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar? 3) How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence children's interest and attention in the English-speaking lesson and at home in Qatar?	Empirical Data Collection

Table (5.3): Research methods with the relevant research questions and data generation.

1) Phase Two

I interviewed the early year English teachers and asked the participant children to draw themselves in the English-speaking lesson and then used their drawing for the group discussion. This data was collected before the finger puppet intervention and occurred during the COVID- 19 lockdown. In the beginning of 2020, COVID- 19 hit Wuhan, a city in China. The virus travelled across the world and affected people in all countries, including Qatar. The pandemic changed people's lives, work, teaching and learning (Flores & Swennen, 2020). It was more challenging for educators and learners to carry out the learning process in an uncertain environment. Schools across the world including Qatar experienced partial and total lockdown (Al-Jaber & Al-Ghamdi,2020). This led schools to close and move to online or hybrid learning. The need to rapidly adapt to online learning overwhelmed the teachers. Incorporating the research activities for this study into the school schedule was challenging. For example, the participant teachers were burdened with additional duties because of COVID-19 and in some instances, had to synchronise their teaching because of restrictions. They had to present lessons to one group of children at school and the other at home but still managed to organise time for me to work with the children outside of their lesson time.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted on the conceptualisation and implementation of the data collection stage. It had a detrimental effect on the time available to implement the

finger puppetry intervention. It reduced the frequency of finger puppetry usage in the English classroom from two months to only two times. It limited the interactions I had with young children in the classroom. I was forced to stop communicating with the schools during lockdown, which caused around a six-month delay in data collection. The pandemic also necessitated some changes to my research plan. For example, I had to combine the second and third group discussions together because COVID-19 limited availability of the children. This meant the discussion on their recorded videos (second group discussion) also included their evaluation of the puppet intervention (third group discussion). Despite this, I did not need to alter any ethically-related issues during the data collection phase because everything proceeded according to plan when the schools reopened.

In hindsight, I could have implemented finger puppetry as an online activity for the children to practise English-speaking. This would have replaced the two months activities and the observations that I had planned. Online learning would have provided the children with a platform to give opinions on finger puppets implementation. This can lead to a more inclusive and student-centred learning environment where all voices are heard. Nonetheless, the strict education system in Qatar (see section 3.2) might have hampered their ability to express themselves and participate in meaningful ways. I would think about the strengths and limitations of incorporating finger puppetry into an online learning environment.

5.5.1 Teachers' In-Depth Interviews

The aim of the qualitative in-depth semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews with two primary English teachers who teach English to second grade children was to explore their beliefs on including children in the selection of teaching strategies used in the classroom. This information was gathered to answer the first and second research questions. The interviews were also designed to find out what the English teachers thought about the rights of children in the classroom and why they thought the way they did. I was prompted to investigate this because of the literature on Qatari culture that does not recognise children as rights holders within its educational system, which impacts the children's rights in the education system (see sections 3.2 and 3.3). The views of the teachers were explored on puppetry as an intervention used in the classroom to influence the engagement of early years children in English-speaking lessons. Appendix A contains a full version of the two teacher's interview questions.

The interview process for this research provided me with access to information that could not be obtained from other methods (observations) alone. In-depth interviews as a qualitative technique were designed for this thesis to explore the issues further and provide answers to the important 'why' questions (Cohen et al., 2011; Opie, 2004, p.95, 111). It was focused on discovering what was on the teachers' minds. For example, what they think, how they feel and perceive, what their concerns are, and their interests,

attitudes and preferences (Cohen et al., 2011; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p.455; Gray et al., 2009).

Using in-depth interviews with the early year English teachers enabled me to evaluate the impressions formed through observations (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Gray et al., 2009). Interviews are defined as a meaning making activity between the researcher and participant that produces a knowledge dialogue. The English teachers and myself co-created meaning during the interview setting and co-constructed the meaning (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 109; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The information gathered from the teachers reflected the insider view (emic) of the study participants (Cohen et al., 2011; Hennink et al., 2011). During the interview, I focused on understanding what the research topic meant to the participant teachers. I tried to balance my perspective on the topic or my knowledge of the literature so as to not impact the participant teacher's understanding (Creswell, 2014). I maintained a reflexive approach at all times (see Chapter 2). I wanted the teachers to provide their experiences of working in Qatari government schools. It was important to build rapport and ask appropriate questions to motivate them (Cohen et al., 2011) (see section 5.6.2). I wanted the teachers to feel trusted and comfortable when providing insights into their educational experiences. As a strategy, probing questions were used to construct the deeper meaning (their rights in the MOE and teaching practices implemented in the classroom).

I developed and wrote the interview questions in accordance with the knowledge obtained from the literature on question design and English language speaking. They were modified and improved to enable the participants to elaborate on their ideas (Creswell, 2009). The teacher interview questions for this study focused on the key issues identified in the literature that matched this study. For example, whether the teachers in Qatar were aware of the variety of teaching strategies that exist for use in the classroom. The questions sought to identify the extent that primary English teachers consider the rights of children in the classroom. They were designed to explore the teacher's perspectives on how they would like to teach English speaking and how their children would like to learn English. The questions were concerned with the influence that finger puppetry had on the children's interest and involvement in the English-speaking lesson. I wanted to understand the teachers' experiences from their perspective from the answers they provided (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Creswell, 2014).

The interviews were conducted in a language that was preferable to the teachers. For example, the teacher who worked in the boy's school chose to alternate between English and Arabic, her mother tongue, whilst the girl's English teacher decided to use the English language through the entirety of the interviews. The interview questions were sent to the teachers two days before the actual interviews. Both teachers selected a time and

place that was comfortable for them. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and an hour. For example, the boys' English teacher's interview lasted approximately thirty-four minutes. The girls' English teacher's interview lasted approximately fifty-two minutes. Table 5.4 summarises the volume of data collected. The interviews were incredibly insightful and teeming with ideas. The teachers were collected and focused during the interviews. They spoke candidly about their challenges when teaching English speaking as a second language. They appeared relaxed and they freely exchanged their opinions with me (further details about the power relation with the teachers is detailed in section 5.6.2).

5.5.2 Children's Drawings

The aim of the children's drawings was to obtain insights into the children's views and perspectives on learning English as a second language in primary schools in Qatar and to improve the classroom learning environment for the children. It answered the sub-second research question. There has not been a study in Qatar that approaches children directly and invites them to draw their experiences and feelings. Therefore, this was an area where this study could contribute to the body of knowledge.

I used this technique as a participatory visual method designed to collect the insights, views and opinions of a small group of children to strengthen the research process and

findings. Using drawings with the children in this study improved the quality and trustworthiness of the research data (Johnson et al., 2012). I invited the children to draw themselves in a way that reflects how they feel when learning English speaking and how they would like to learn. I asked them to draw what they believe is their role during the English lesson. The drawings can neutralise any imbalance of power that exists between the children and the researcher. They can facilitate effective communication and reduce any pressure and stress they might feel (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). They can make it easier for them to more freely express their opinions and emotions. They can convey meaning through their drawings (Deguara, 2019).

The drawing technique helped to amalgamate the research methods of the study by capturing the opinions of the children who were more inclined to express themselves through drawings (their experience and perceived role in the classroom). Drawing is a child-centred activity that children enjoy. It can be completed without the presence of a researcher (Johnson et al., 2012). The children can communicate through the drawings they produce without having to speak directly about their experiences and roles in the classroom (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 484). The drawings are a platform for the Qatari children to express themselves and share their ideas and for me to elicit their insights and perceptions (Bland, 2018).

The use of a participatory visual method stemmed from my desire to keep the children central within the research. It is my belief that children are experts in their situations and therefore able to truthfully inform the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using a visual method adds a creative element for both the researcher and children (Kara, 2015). Drawings can generate meaning, enhance thinking and encourage discussion (Deguara, 2019). Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.488) argue that drawings require children to describe, reflect and use emotions in a way that facts and logic are unable to. Mason's (2008) project included working with disabled participant children who are considered vulnerable. Mason argues that visual methods (drawings) enable the participants who have limited abilities when it comes to speaking and writing to convey their thoughts, understandings and emotions in a way that language does not. I believed in the effectiveness of drawing for use in this study with children whose voices are marginalised in the Qatari educational system and the society they belong to (see Chapter 3).

The visual method was used during the first discussion with the children and before implementing finger puppetry to stimulate their responses on learning English in Qatari classrooms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The data collection period at both schools was short and challenging because of the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions. The drawing technique took a short time for the children to complete. They completed it successfully without training. It was undertaken naturally and easily because drawing was a familiar task for them (Deguara, 2019; Johnson et al., 2012). I invited the male group to join me

at the end of the English lesson to sit inside the classroom to complete the drawing activity. The girls group completed the drawing activity in the school auditorium. The English teachers chose a setting that suited them (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). Any children whose parents did not wish them to take part in the study but wanted to be involved were allowed to join the drawing activity. Their drawings were not included in the research data. I did this to be in ethical accordance with the research regulations of the state of Qatar. It indicates that consent should be sought from the children in synchronicity with their parents or guardian (Handbook for Ethical Rules and Regulations for Research Involving Human Subjects, Qatar). When the participant children had completed their drawings, I explained that we would talk about them at the next group meeting. The meetings were held according to teacher availability (further details in the next section).

Reflecting on the drawing activity, both groups completed the task with enthusiasm and some had a smile printed on their faces. The drawing activity stimulated their desire to draw other pictures of parks. I noticed that some of the boys and girls were worried about drawing their feelings. I reassured them and explained that they could draw whatever they felt. The worries some of the children experienced perhaps stem from their anxiety about revealing their feelings about the lesson to the teacher. Perhaps they were expecting me to inform their teacher what they felt about her lesson.

It was important to respect the children's sensitivities and their decisions on matters that concerned them (Holloway & Brown, 2012). I reassured the children by explaining that I was committed to maintaining their anonymity as stipulated in the information sheet that we all discussed together. Providing a "safe space" for the children was necessary, in which they can be assured that their feelings won't be used against them and that they would not face any consequences for express critical or opposite views (Bergold, & Thomas, 2012, p. 196). It is important to emphasise that the power adults have over children is embedded in almost every relationship with them which hinders their expression of feelings and participation in learning (Baker & Le Courtois, 2022; Grover, 2004).

The drawing exercise was an opportunity for the children to use their agency (Chesworth, 2018). For example, a girl yelled out that she liked to learn by drawing and others immediately chimed in. Some were apprehensive about the activity and behaved as if they did not know me well enough and needed reassurance to get involved (see section 5.6.1).

It is argued in the literature that child-friendly techniques carry the risk of forcing children to embrace fixed identities to uphold the hierarchical educational structure. The fixed identities are formed through concepts of empowerment, giving voice and dichotomous constructs of the powerless kid and powerful adult. An educational environment of this

kind controls social spaces and limits, rather than increases the children's participation in the research process (Chesworth, 2018, p. 853). At all times during the research process, I maintained awareness of the importance of respecting the children's human right to realise their agency and give suggestions, when they chose to do so.

5.5.3 Children's Group Discussions

The children's group discussion as a research method was utilised to gain insight into their views and perspectives and their preferred way to learn English speaking in the classroom, and to give them a chance to discuss their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Appendix B contains a full version of the three children's group discussions questions. Group discussions were conducted three times throughout the study to address the first and sub-second research questions (see section 5.5 and diagram 5.1). It was crucial for me as the interviewer to enter into their world on their terms to discover the situations they face from their own point of view and not through the lens of mine (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). The group discussions provided a platform for their voices to be heard on issues that matter to them to increase their presence in contexts that lack their existence (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

I facilitated a conversation with the children about the drawings they produced for the completion of the first technique. We discussed what they believed are their roles in the

English classes and how they would like to learn English speaking. We discussed the influence that puppetry had inside the classroom and at home. They gave proposals on ways to improve the learning of English in the classroom. I used group discussions with the children to inspire affective interaction and communication rather than acquiring short and simple responses to my questions (Cohen et al., 2011).

A group conversation was empowering for children in that it challenged its members to elaborate on each other's ideas (Creswell, 2014). The interaction was between the children rather than between a single child and myself (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010). For example, I asked the children whether the teacher listens to them and they interrupted each other when asserting that she does not and proceeded to build on each other's thoughts (see section 7.2.2.1 for further details). The group discussion encouraged the presentation of new ideas and engaged the children in a way that might not occur in a one-to-one adult-child interview (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Cohen et al., 2011).

For this study, I organised a dramatic situation through the use of puppetry with the children to inspire a conversation with them on whether they liked it and for them to suggest ways that they would like to learn English. I used a finger puppet as a "playful technique" to create an environment that enabled them to speak (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 157), to activate discussions and to make the interview more age related, non-

threatening, more enjoyable and less formal (Cohen et al., 2011). It established a rapport

and built trust to avoid overreaching (more details in section 5.6.1). It was important to

manage the group discussion by ensuring it was as a pleasant experience for the children

by using language suitable for their age. The children needed to be in the "here and now'

and provided with enough time to think (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 433). I asked the children

questions with my finger puppet on and asked them to wear their finger puppets when

responding to the questions. This approach was followed to avoid me having to ask direct

questions to them using the traditional interview approach. Diagram (5.3) summarises

phase two.

Phase 2

Collect Data: Before the Finger Puppet Intervention

Teachers' In-Depth Interviews

Two volunteer early years English teachers from two different boys and girl's schools were interviewed. The interview explored how English teachers interpret children's rights. It explored how they acknowledged the need for children to provide opinions on the strategies used by their teachers to teach them English.

Research Questions

This method was utilised to answer the **first and second research questions:**

1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar?

2) In what way are and can teaching strategies in Qatar be informed by the voice of children and teachers?

Empirical Data Collection

Children's Drawings

Drawing was employed with fourteen (seven boys and seven girls) children to strengthen the research findings. It was included to gain their ideas, perspectives, and opinions on their positions in the English-speaking class and their preferred method of learning a foreign language. I invited the children to draw themselves to reveal their feelings towards learning during the English speaking lessons and the roles they believed they had.

Research Questions

This participatory visual method (child-friendly) was utilised as a mediator to enable children to express themselves. It was acknowledgment of their rights to express themselves in matters related to them. Thus, drawings were used to answer the **sub-second research question:**

2/a) How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language?

Pedagogical Intervention Process

Children's Group Discussions

The group of children who completed the drawing activity met with the researcher to talk about their drawings. The children's discussion provided rich and insightful data for the research. It allowed the researcher to perceive the world through the eyes of the children rather than through her own. It also conveyed to the children that the researcher valued their opinions. It was a valuable platform for children to express their views and opinions, as well as for the researcher to comprehend the children's learning experiences.

Research Questions

This method was used to answer the **first and the sub-second research questions:**

1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar?

2/a) How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language?

Empirical Data Collection

Diagram (5.3): A summary of phase two.

The first's group discussion with the children happened after five meetings with them. The meetings were held to introduce them to the research process, to do the visual activities, to read the consent sheet and to complete the drawing activity (Appendix C provides a full version of the activities completed with the participants). The children were relaxed and comfortable with my presence in their classroom. Closeness and intimacy became stronger over time during the group discussions as they became accustomed to me. They considered me an integral part of their classroom.

2) Phase Three

I conducted a mini workshop for the early year English teachers in both schools on how to use puppets with children in the classroom and its possible use in the home. It was presented to the teachers during the school day and conveyed knowledge, fun and joy. I worked hard to make sure that the workshop content was effectively communicated and delivered to the teachers. I gave a practical demonstration of puppetry and set tasks that enabled the teachers to converse with one another. Open questions were posed to the teachers to brainstorm their thoughts and elicit their opinions. I provided them with relevant literature on puppetry and ways to improve professional practice. The boy's school workshop lasted approximately one and a half hours and the girl's school workshop, approximately two and a half hours.

5.5.4 Conduct a Mini Workshop with Teachers on how to use Puppets with Children in Classrooms and its Possible use in the Home

A mini workshop with the early year English teachers was to discuss how to use puppets with children in the classrooms and its possible use in the home for this study. The workshop was designed for all English teachers who teach students in grades one and two in both boy's and girl's schools, along with their coordinators. My primary role was to train the teachers and provide them with professional development. I envisioned the workshop as professional development for the early years English teachers. However, the unexpected circumstances of COVID-19 that affected the schools meant that the training session was only delivered to the participant English teacher at the boy's school because the other teachers were quarantined. The coordinator was busy managing the classrooms. The training session in the girl's school was delivered to the early years English teachers and their coordinator (two teachers who teach grade two, including a participant and a teacher who teaches grade one students).

The workshop elicited the teacher experiences and opinions on the influences in the classroom that affect the capacity of children to speak during the English lesson. It also established the strategies the English teachers preferred to employ in their classrooms. Implementing finger puppetry during COVID-19 meant that the teachers were not able to follow my plan for their use in the classroom (a two-month implementation to assess their effectiveness in engaging children in English speaking lessons). The constraints

meant that they were not able to familiarise themselves with the puppets as a teaching tool in advance of their use in the classroom with the children. The teachers opted to use them in their class with the children the day after the workshop because of their fear of lockdown. This impacted my ability to assess puppetry's effectiveness with the children over a longer period of time. The teachers used them twice at the boy's school and once in the girl's school. I was present on all occasions and was able to observe that finger puppetry engaged the children in the English-speaking lessons despite the limitations I experienced (see Chapter 9 for further details on finger puppetry).

The workshop provided a theoretical framework and step-by-step regarding the inclusion of puppetry in language teaching. It demonstrated how it helps children to develop a diverse range of language skills and abilities. For example, encouraging them to talk using the English language. The workshop provided English teachers with a step-by-step guide for using finger puppetry in the classroom (Appendix D provides full version of the workshop content). The workshop generated insights into the teacher perceptions on teaching speaking skills to early years learners. This phase of the data collection was an important platform for the subsequent phase which was the implementation of finger puppetry into the classroom by the teachers for the study. The workshop helped to distinguish the different personalities of the teachers I was working with and their teaching qualities.

Both English teachers had limited knowledge on how to teach English speaking to children. The English teachers for the boy's school explained that she taught them according to academic level (low, middle and high) and achievement. She explained that the workshop content was too high a level for her students (early year boy's English teacher workshop, p.2). The workshop also provided an opportunity to consider the limits imposed by the Ministry of Education (see Chapter 3). The English teachers explained that following the English teaching textbook is mandatory. They explained that all teachers are restricted by a teaching timeframe for every lesson. They said that teachers are not able to apply teaching practices that they feel are appropriate during the lesson. The children are challenged by both the teaching practices and the educational system in Qatar.

This data collection phase was necessary for me to observe what the teachers agreed on at the workshop regarding the stages of teaching speaking and their actual teaching activities in the classroom. I proposed steps for introducing finger puppetry in the classroom and then observed the teachers' real teaching practices in the classroom. Diagram (5.4) presents the third phase.

Phase 3

Implement the (Intervention): Conduct a mini workshop with teachers on how to use puppets with children in classrooms and its possible use in the home.

This training session was designed for all English teachers who teach students in grades one and two in both boys and girl's schools, along with their coordinators. However, because of the unexpected circumstances of COVID-19 that affected the schools, the training session was only delivered to the participant English teacher at the boy's school because the other teachers were quarantined. The coordinator was busy managing the classrooms. Yet, the training session in the girl's school was delivered to the early years English teachers and their coordinator (two teachers who teach grade two, including a participant and a teacher who teaches grade one students - four altogether). The goal of the training was to elicit the teachers' experiences and opinions on the influences in the classroom that affect the capacity of children to speak during the English lesson. It also sought to find out which strategies the English teachers preferred to employ in their classrooms.

The workshop provided a theoretical framework regarding the importance of employing puppetry in language teaching. It emphasised how it helps children develop a diverse range of language skills and abilities. For example, encouraging them to talk using the English language. This data collection phase of the study offered the English teachers a step-by-step guide for using finger puppetry in the classroom.

Using this strategy enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of how teachers think about and perceive teaching speaking skills to early years learners. This resulted in clear relations between this phase and the next, where the English teachers implement finger puppetry into the classroom. The workshop helped to clarify the different personalities of the teachers and their teaching qualities. It also provided an opportunity to consider the limits imposed by the Ministry of Education. This data collection phase was necessary for the researcher to observe what the teachers agreed on at the workshop regarding the stages of teaching speaking and their actual teaching activities in the classroom. The researcher proposed steps for introducing finger puppetry in the classroom and then observed the teachers' real teaching practices in the classroom. The researcher was able to identify that what the teachers discussed and agreed upon during the workshop did not manifest to the same level in their classroom activities.

Pedagogical Intervention Process

Diagram (5.4): A summary of phase three.

3) Phase Four

In phase four, the early years English teachers implemented finger puppetry in the classroom. I observed the teaching classes during the puppetry intervention. The children took the puppet home after they had used them in the classroom and videoed themselves with family members. Four videos were recorded and returned from the participant boys, and three videos from the girls. Some of the participant children had no interest in making a movie, whilst others were unable to record it because their parents were too busy. I discussed with the children their produced home videos.

5.5.5 Whole Classroom - Observation

The aim of conducting a class observation was to observe how the children interacted in the classroom setting with their teachers during the oral English language lesson to provide insight into whether the rights of children were being acknowledged in Qatari classrooms. This method is related to the first and third research questions. The collection of observational data was necessary because "what individuals regularly say is not what they do" (Christensen et al., 2011, p. 57). I collected detailed observations to strengthen the design and findings of this study. For example, I observed the facial expressions of the children when experiencing finger puppetry in relation to the extent that they were motivated, stimulated and interested in the English lesson.

Observing their body language, gestures, tone of voice and words used whilst interacting with each other, using the finger puppets, provided rich data in relation to the research questions on whether they were engaged in the English-speaking lesson (Hennink et al., 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The classroom observation provided me with an opportunity to gain insight into the subtle non-verbal communication that took place between the children (Hennink et al., 2011). Callen et al. (2011) noted that researchers who use the "naturalistic method" of observation must consider children's needs and feelings. I was aware of whether the children were willing to be observed or were tired and made fair decisions on whether to continue observing or to stop. Ethical considerations throughout the classroom observations included the mood of the children and the time frame of my research (Callen et al., 2011).

Observing the classes helped to ensure that I correctly interpreted the information collected from the participants (Gray et al., 2009). The inclusion of observation (living practice) deepened my understanding of the influence that finger puppetry has as a teaching aid to stimulate the involvement of children in the English-speaking lessons in Qatar. As an observer, I was able to experience its use inside the classroom, the reactions (emotional) of children towards it and the extent that it evokes a sense of aliveness that is an authentic children-centred practice (Higgs et al., 2011, p. 7).

As a privileged active participant in an observation, I was able to watch the teachers introduce the speaking skills using finger puppetry as a teaching strategy. I observed the children whilst they were practicing speaking with each other through the use of finger puppets. I was hoping to engage with the participants regarding the dialogue that took place in the classroom. COVID-19 constraints meant that I was unable to discuss dialoguing with them when they were interacting with finger puppets. There was insufficient time to them to talk and we had to keep physical distance between us. I was able to monitor their facial expressions and involvement with the finger puppets. I activated my position as a privileged active participant during the second observation at the boy's school when there was a need to do so. I was compelled to interject by properly presenting the speaking lesson and to explain to the boys what they needed to do.

As an insider and outsider (emic and etic), I was able to obtain insights, views and new understanding about finger puppetry and the power dynamic that exists between the teacher and her children (Hennink et al., 2011). The more the teacher used the finger puppets, the more the difference in power became more apparent. An imbalance of power between adults and young children will always exist. Observing the teachers explaining to the children how to speak English using the puppets highlighted the power dynamics in the classroom (Hennink et al., 2011). Observing the children from a distance without participating with them strengthened my understanding from my own perspective (etic). Interacting with them whilst performing finger puppetry enabled me

to witness the activity truly engaging and stimulating them from their perspectives (emic) (Hennink et al., 2011). Observations can unearth the beliefs that teachers have regarding children's rights in the classroom.

An observation is an idiosyncratic activity. Field notes are an effective way to gather and record on-site material for use in qualitative research. The field notes for this study included the pertinent characteristics of the classroom setting (Gray et al., 2009). I took detailed field notes whilst observing the lessons (Gray et al., 2009; Hennink et al., 2011). The notes consisted of two kinds of information. Descriptive information on what was happening in the classroom (Gray et al., 2009). For example, how the early years children interacted with the finger puppets and with each other during the lesson. The notes also included reflective information on my own experiences, the existing literature knowledge and my thoughts on the observational data (Gray et al., 2009). For example, does finger puppetry encourage children to express themselves in the English class? I prepared a protocol before entering the lesson that included a list of questions to guide the observation (Gray et al., 2009). Any data that was gathered that was not part of the observation protocol was added to the list for coding and analysis.

5.5.6 Children's Home Videos

I used visual activities to strengthen the participatory research approach being used in this study and to increase the potentiality of collecting rich data (Robson, 2011). I invited the children to film themselves at home with a person they would like to converse with using finger puppets (parents, siblings, cousins, friends or their neighbours). Seven videos were produced by the children (four from the boys and three from the girls) that lasted seven minutes and thirty-eight seconds (see Table 5.4). I involved the children in collecting the research data to ensure that the focus was on researching 'with' children and not 'on' them. For example, I asked the children to video themselves with a person they would like to speak with at home using finger puppets. The recorded activities helped to develop an understanding of the children's authentic reactions and body language. The recorded video was as a supplementary indicator about whether or not they perceived puppetry as an aid to learning and involvement in the lesson (Hennink et al., 2011).

Data Collected						
	Boys	**Girls**	**Total (Boys & Girls)**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total (Minutes) (Boys & Girls)**
	NO. Of Data Items			**Duration of the entire meetings across the research phases (Minutes)**		
Children's Group Discussions	3	4	7	64.59	124.57	189.16 (m)
Teacher's In-Depth Interviews	2	2	4	81.24	79.48	160.72 (m)
Classroom Observations	2	1	3	100	50	150 (m)
Drawings	7	7	14	20	20	40 (m)
Videos	4	3	7	3.53	3.85	7.38 (m)

Table (5.4): A summary of the data collected from the participants (children and teachers) for all research phases.

This activity was supported by interviews that incorporated the videos to elicit the voices of the children on the lived experiences they practiced with their families (see Diagram 5.4 that details the process). I asked the children to identify the level of enjoyment they experienced by involving them in an analysis of the video. They were to choose a segment they liked and then explain why they had chosen it. There was a discussion on what had been learnt. I said to the children, "What were you doing here was interesting? Can you talk me through what was going?" (Baumfield et al., 2013, p. 82-83). Video interpretations increased the meaningfulness of the participation and strengthened the validity of the research.

Forman (1999, p. 4) argues that video can become a "tool of the mind" when collecting data. He suggests that when children re-watch their recorded videos, they do not focus on the actions they perform but instead negotiate the purpose and intention behind their actions. In this study, the children 'download' information about their actions when replaying the video. They release their minds to reflect and interpret their behaviour in it. The children presented their home videos in the classroom and reflected on their attitudes towards the puppetry experience. This generated new ideas and understandings that I had not previously considered (Forman, 1999).

Using visual research methods in a creative manner in this study with children at an early age, for them to see and hear themselves speaking a foreign language, was an empowering experience (Higgs et al., 2011). For example, each child led the interview process by talking about the film they produced themselves with a person they preferred, using finger puppetry. The children preserved a sense of control which further permitted them to express their own perspectives (Higgs et al., 2011). On an inductive level, the children watched each other participating in finger puppetry activities on video. Using visual techniques in this way increased the value of the 'voice' of the children in this study (Higgs et al., 2011).

Mukherji and Albon (2010) assert that there are specific ethical considerations when using videos with children. They explain that particular details need to be contained in the informed consent forms. For example, who will see the video, where will the video be securely stored and how long will it be stored for? An in-depth discussion of ethics and home videos is provided in section 5.6.5. The videos, as a participatory tool to elicit the children's perspectives, provided invaluable data and facilitated analysis and learning (Robson, 2011). Diagram (5.5) presents the fourth phase.

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                          │   Phase 4   │
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- Teachers implement the use of finger puppetry in classrooms.
- Children video themselves at home with a family member.

Classroom Observations: From the beginning of the intervention.

Children's Group Discussions: During the intervention and after recording their videos. Using finger puppets.

COVID-19 impacted the putting of theory into practice. It dramatically accelerated the procedure. As a result, when the training was presented to the teachers, they immediately introduced finger puppetry in their classrooms and invited me to their first applications. I sensed that perhaps they had not adequately planned the activity before implementing it with their students. Although I only observed one lesson in each school, I was able to observe many points and concerns that defined the teachers' methods of teaching, interactions with children, and how the children's rights were addressed via their activities with children. The observations showed the extent that the teachers were able to put into practice what they had learnt. For example, implementing procedures for teaching speaking that were outlined in the workshop.

The English teachers encouraged their students to film themselves with the puppets they had been given and later to send them back to their teachers.

I intended for this discussion to take place during the classroom observations (live observations and within the process of observation). However, COVID-19 constraints and the closing of the schools meant that the children were unable to attend school until their final examinations. Therefore, when the children arrived for their final exams, I had the opportunity to discuss their videos and the experiences they had while videoing themselves.

Research Questions

Research Questions

This method was utilised to answer **the second and third research questions:**

2) In what way are and can teaching strategies in Qatar be informed by the voice of children and teachers in Qatar?

    a. How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language?

3) How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence the children's interest and attention in the English-speaking lessons and **at home in Qatar?**

At home is answered by this method.

This method was utilised to answer **the first and third research questions:**

1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar?

3) How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence the children's interest and attention in the English-speaking lessons and at home in Qatar? **At home is not answered by this method.**

Empirical Data Collection

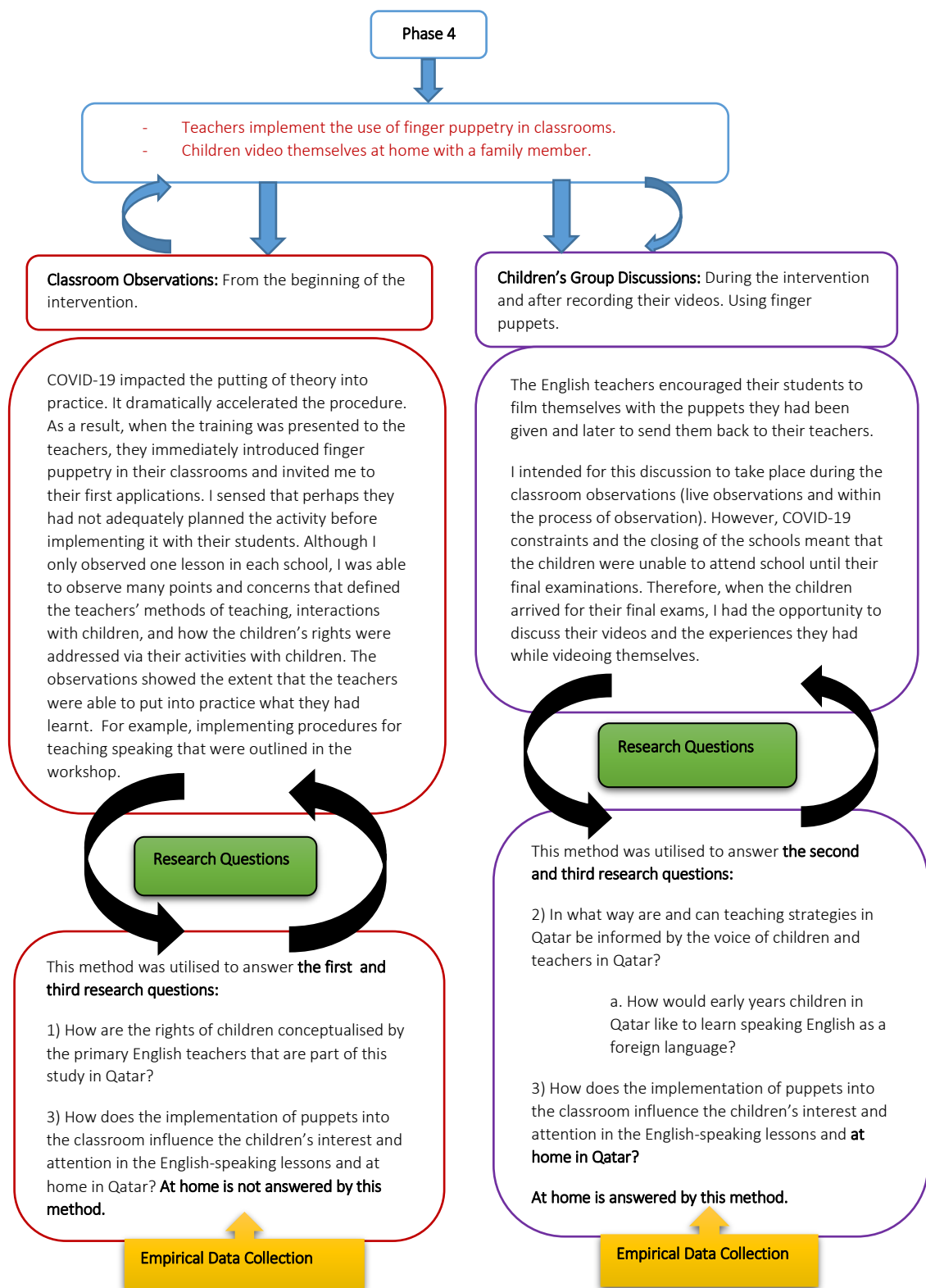**Empirical Data Collection**

Diagram (5.5): A summary of phase four.

4) Phase Five

In this phase, the first and third research questions were answered. I collected data after the finger puppetry intervention had finished. I initiated a group discussion with the children and English teachers to gather their feedback on the puppetry intervention. Diagram (5.6) summarises the data collection.
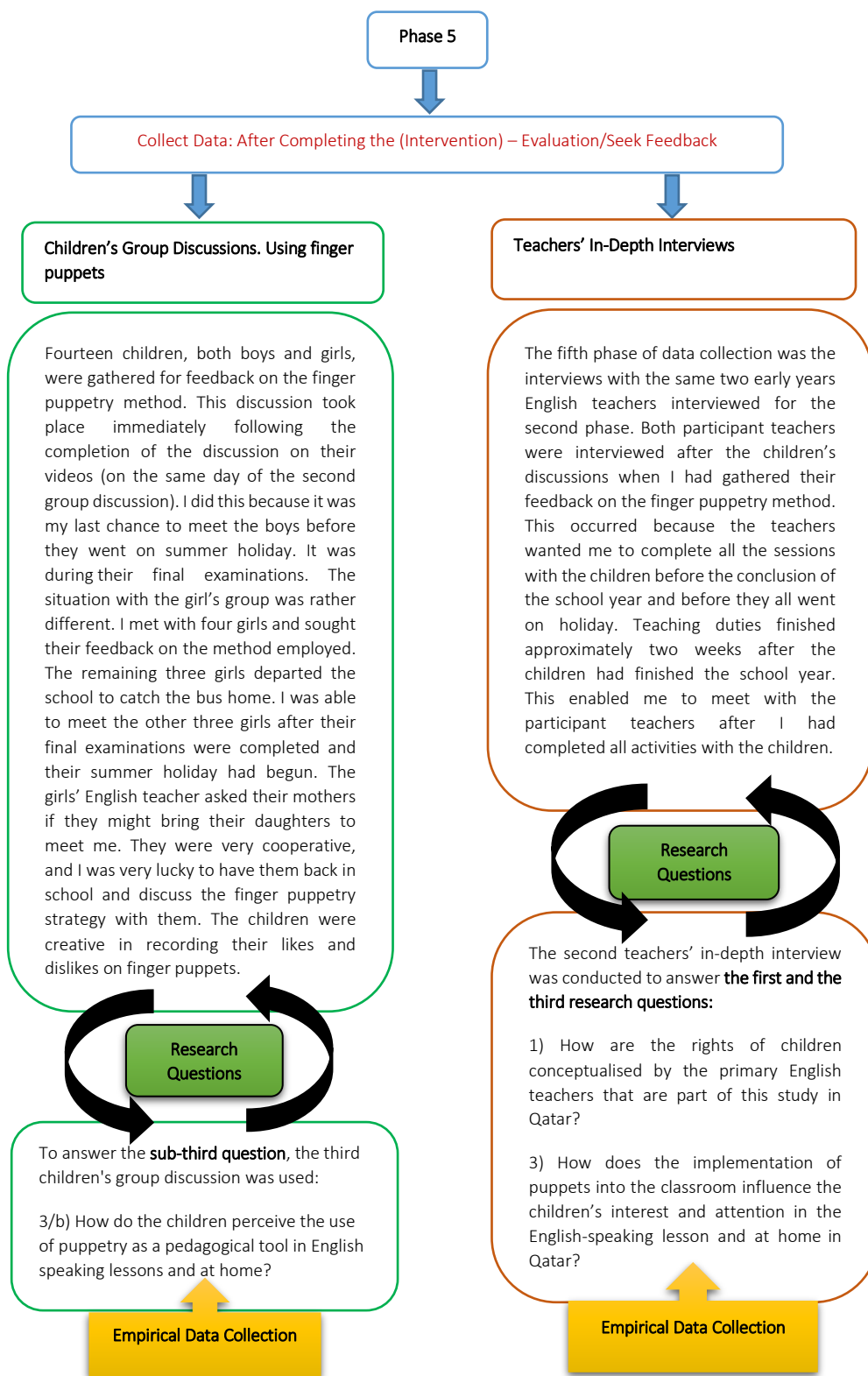
Phase 5

Collect Data: After Completing the (Intervention) – Evaluation/Seek Feedback

Children's Group Discussions. Using finger puppets

Fourteen children, both boys and girls, were gathered for feedback on the finger puppetry method. This discussion took place immediately following the completion of the discussion on their videos (on the same day of the second group discussion). I did this because it was my last chance to meet the boys before they went on summer holiday. It was during their final examinations. The situation with the girl's group was rather different. I met with four girls and sought their feedback on the method employed. The remaining three girls departed the school to catch the bus home. I was able to meet the other three girls after their final examinations were completed and their summer holiday had begun. The girls' English teacher asked their mothers if they might bring their daughters to meet me. They were very cooperative, and I was very lucky to have them back in school and discuss the finger puppetry strategy with them. The children were creative in recording their likes and dislikes on finger puppets.

Research Questions

To answer the **sub-third question**, the third children's group discussion was used:

3/b) How do the children perceive the use of puppetry as a pedagogical tool in English speaking lessons and at home?

Empirical Data Collection

Teachers' In-Depth Interviews

The fifth phase of data collection was the interviews with the same two early years English teachers interviewed for the second phase. Both participant teachers were interviewed after the children's discussions when I had gathered their feedback on the finger puppetry method. This occurred because the teachers wanted me to complete all the sessions with the children before the conclusion of the school year and before they all went on holiday. Teaching duties finished approximately two weeks after the children had finished the school year. This enabled me to meet with the participant teachers after I had completed all activities with the children.

Research Questions

The second teachers' in-depth interview was conducted to answer **the first and the third research questions:**

1) How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this study in Qatar?

3) How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence the children's interest and attention in the English-speaking lesson and at home in Qatar?

Empirical Data Collection

Diagram (5.6): A summary of phase five.

5) Phase Six

I met with the English teachers to discuss the findings of the study and provided them with the analysis to read. I asked them to point out any issues or problems that they had with it. Both teachers were satisfied with the analysis and had no issues to discuss. I asked the English teachers about meeting with the children to discuss the findings. They explained that the head teacher of the boy's school who consented for her school to take part had left the school. They added that some of the children had also left the school to go to another. I made the decision to not meet with the children.

5.6 Ethical Considerations with Early Years Children

Ethical issues are manifest in all aspects of research and are particularly prevalent when dealing with young children. Researchers must always protect their study participants and any stories that they provide (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Denzin, 1989). Denzin (1989) prefers a sharing approach to the research process with the participants and suggests that this acts as an ethical anchor for social research. Specific ethical considerations were apparent for this study, particularly in light of how the children were perceived and how context influences competence and agency (see section 2.3). For example, the participant information sheets used with adults cannot be read by early years children. Hence, a different strategy that capitalises on the children's competencies is required.

This section describes how I handled the ethical dilemmas involving power dynamics, recruiting participants, informed consent, and confidentiality.

5.6.1 Power Relationships and my Researcher Role with Young Children

My researcher role required that I interacted closely with early years children to enter their world to obtain their worldview, ideas, experiences and perspectives. To achieve this, I adopted a "least-adult participant role" (Mandell, 1988). For example, during my fieldwork with children, I tried to entirely abandon the role of "authoritative adult" who represents judgment and direction. It was a challenging situation for the children in Qatari schools because they lack experience of adults being participant non-judgmental persons. They only know adults who attend classes to assess teacher performances or to solve behavioural problems. I explained my role to the children when I first met them. I wanted them to understand that I was not a teacher who supervises and assesses performance or a formal visitor who monitors problems. I was aware of the imbalance of power between myself and the children and sought to find ways to reduce it (Dockett & Perry, 2011; Mandell, 1988). I wanted them to realise that I was in their classroom to observe their activities without influencing what took place.

In an effort to break down the formal barriers between the children and myself, I asked them to call me by my first name, 'Zainab,' and not to address me as 'Miss' as they would

normally do with their teachers or other guests (Mandell, 1988). I explained that they could provide their perspectives and opinions at any time during our meeting. Some of the children were reluctant not to call me 'Miss' and wanted to assess the power dynamics and my intentions in being with them. Others took advantage of being able to remove the barriers that separated us and wanted to benefit from me being with them. For example, some proceeded to build rapport by treating me as a 'friendly visitor' and not as a 'formal visitor,' with authority over them. They immediately used their agency to talk to me and requested to go with me to work (Qatar University).   Their interaction made it easier for me to work with them for this study. It showed that the children are at peace having me in their company (Mandell, 1988). However, a power imbalance with children always exists for any adult researcher who attends their classroom (Horgan, 2017). This was evident in some of the children who maintained distance and did not make an effort to build relationships. They responded to my questions with minimum interaction.

Power imbalance between adults and children is apparent in the children's literature (Valentine, 1999), and it is a commodity possessed and dominant by adults over children (Gallagher, 2008). Yet, it is suggested that power is reduced by "listening to children and allowing them to be heard in the research context" (Grover, 2004, p.89). With this in mind, I endeavoured to minimise the impact of the power imbalance between the

researcher and researched by encouraging the participants to voice their opinions and made it possible for their voice to be heard (Gallagher, 2008).

Callan et al. (2011, p. 19) explained that researchers working on early childhood practices need to pay attention to how their role as researcher influences the investigation. They say it can be done during daily practices until they become committed to the habit of reflection. They suggest that researchers should assess the power dynamics of the professional hierarchies that exist whilst they are working. They argue that researchers need to consider themselves as being part of a sharing community and not exclusively as research leaders (p.25).

I was aware of a potential hierarchy between the participants and myself (i.e. participants, researcher/ employee of the University). For this research, I maintained open communication at all times so then participants could freely share their thoughts and suggestions. I did not transmit my thoughts to them to influence their opinions and choices. This was clear when I met the children for a group discussion. I planned to ask the children for their views on me to help develop a comfortable setting (i.e. what I mean to them?). The question was bouncing around in my head as I began the discussion but I forgot to ask it to them. Given the fact that I did not receive any input from them towards me, I sensed that we had become closer over time. During my first meeting with the

children, they kept asking for permission from me for different tasks (i.e. going to the toilet, drinking water, moving from one place to another and whether they could ask their classmates for a point of view). The children were freely speaking to me and considered me part of their classroom. Their answers to my questions were answered whilst they were sitting comfortably with their eyes on me or somewhere else. During the meetings, they were free to move around their desks, talk to their friends, and discuss each other's drawings, colouring or videos. These behaviours are not permitted in the normal classroom setting and I sensed that they were comfortable with me being amongst them.

In my experience of classroom observations, this behaviour is considered unacceptable during lesson time. For example, children must stand up if they want to answer a teacher's question and look at her eyes. I interpreted their behaviour with me as a sign that they were comfortable working with me. Perhaps they behaved this way to see how I would I react and what my response might be. Children continually seek agency in the classroom. I was happy with the comfortable atmosphere between the children and myself but was aware of the imbalance of power between us. For example, when I asked the girls to draw what I instructed them to draw, they immediately wanted to draw something different (i.e. the park). I explained that I wanted them to draw my request first and then they could draw whatever they wanted. I did this because COVID-19 limited the amount of time I could spend completing the activity with them. When the girls

finished drawing my request, they immediately drew their favourite scene (i.e. the drawing by Daisy, Figure 7.5, p. 253).

Balancing the unequal power relation between the children and myself (my agenda, the children's agency and their voice) was challenging (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Top-down power permeated the classroom. Morrow (2008) explains that the power imbalances between researcher and children can pressure them to participate. Morrow (2008) explains that they should not be considered research victims because they have control over whether to participate or not. The girls in this study exerted an element of control during the drawing activity by choosing what to draw. They were able to maintain a level of personal agency as gatekeepers (Danby & Farrell, 2005).

Positive relationships encourage children to safely express their thoughts and opinions with control over the independent conversation (Christensen, 2004) without fear of being judged by adults. It helps them to connect to their surroundings and the individuals they encounter. In this environment, the children might initiate a conversation with its own parameters (Christensen, 2004). One girl, for example, spoke freely with me and decided that she wanted to end the discussion: *"We want to go home, we need to sleep because we got up early this morning to come to school"* (Second girl's group discussion, p. 17). She explained that it because she was tired. I appreciated her transparency in

dealing with me. I realised that she would not have said this if she was not at ease with me. If children do not feel safe and connected to me as an adult, they will not make requests in a direct manner. One boy, at the end his group discussion, said *"I want you to visit me at home to see how I think and how I play with my puppets and my Lego. Ask miss Sally about my mother's mobile number and talk to her"* (Third boy's group discussion, p.4). Another boy said, *"we want to sleep in your house"* (Second boy's group discussion, p. 10).

The boy was comfortable in expressing his thoughts and wanted me to be interested in his thoughts and feelings. The request of the boy to sleep at my house is interpreted as his acceptance of me. These were positive signs that the children had warmed to my presence in the classroom and that the boundaries between us had dissolved. I think we reached this stage quickly because at the beginning of the research process, I made it clear that their views and perspectives were important. Openly chatting with the teacher is not something that happens very often in school because of the enforced MOE discipline in the classroom (i.e. being polite, sitting properly and listening to the teacher is the expected behaviour). It is an atmosphere that is not conducive to children feeling connected to the teacher and being able to comfortably express their thoughts and opinions.

5.6.2 Relationship with the English Teachers

Two English teachers took part in my study. During our initial meeting, I assured them that my presence in their classroom was not to assess their performance or burden them with extra work. I did this to lessen the tension caused by my presence. The aim of my observation was to aid the teaching process and to improve the teaching experiences they engage in. I explained that I would not assume any authority over them and that their work on this project had no connection to my work as a teaching specialist at Qatar University. I informed the teachers that they were not the object of my study and that I would not assess their performances. I explained that I was taking notes during the observations on their interactions with the children and implementing finger puppetry in the classroom. I reassured them that there was nothing to worry about. I assured them that the data I collected would not be shared with their coordinators or their Academic Vise Principal (AVP).

I managed the professional hierarchy between the teachers and myself as researcher by maintaining a continuous dialogue with them. I asked them to share their perspectives and suggestions (Callan et al., 2011). I informed them that they could communicate with me about the research process at any time. I explained that they could suggest ways to ease the study process (Callan et al., 2011). I told them that the finger puppet intervention needs to be stress-free and comfortable to maximise its effectiveness. I

explained that it was essential to maintain a friendly environment. Having similar characteristics (relevant teaching experience, gender and age) with the participant teachers helped achieve this. Rapport between the researcher and participants influences the dynamic that exists between them and affects the potential to generate new knowledge (Creswell, 2009).

Positive interactions can help participants feel comfortable when exchanging information and help it flow (Hennink et al., 2011). My objective was to co-create meaning, so it was important that the participants felt composed when talking to me. Opportunities for the participants and myself in Qatar to speak and represent ourselves, to contribute to this research, can increase the validity of the data that is obtained (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The effective management of the dynamic relationships between the participants and researcher influences the stories told, interactions experienced, the depth of information retrieved and the quality of the research analysis (Finlay & Gough, 2003, p. 113).

5.6.3 Ethicality towards Recruiting the Participants

The two Primary Public Schools in Qatar were recruited on a voluntary basis whereby I conducted several face-to-face meetings with the primary school heads for the boys and girls to assess their willingness to take part. I discussed the research aims, and its scope

with several primary boys and girls schools in Qatar. When two schools agreed to participate in my research, I provided them with details on the criteria for selecting the participant children and teachers. For example, the children need to be in grade two, therefore they were between seven and eight years old. I selected an equal number of boys and girls (seven from each gender) from different backgrounds. It is recommended in the literature that between five and eight children are recruited to participate in group discussion (Cohen et al., 2011). To be consistent with the literature and effective in my role as qualitative researcher, I recruited seven children from each school. The single-gender school structure in Qatar ensured equal representation of both genders. A voluntary approach was followed for this study, whereby any child who wanted to take part regardless of social background was able to do so without influence from their teacher or researcher.

Within each school, recruitment was on a voluntary basis. In each school, there were five grade two classes with children aged seven and eight years. I initiated a dialogue with the head teachers to inform them that I needed, from each school, one class to take part in this study. Two female early years English teachers (grade two teachers who teach grade two students) from the two different schools (one from each school) was recruited to participate after agreeing to the conditions of the study. The two classes being observed were selected by the children themselves, the parents of children and the classroom teacher. Each English teacher initiated a discussion with her students about

the research aims and procedures. When the two teachers had secured an agreement with their students, a meeting was held with the parents of the children taking part to discuss the research process and ask for their consent. There were no children inside the classroom did not want me to observe them. In this instance, I observed the children who were in the classroom but did not take notes about any of those who no longer wanted to participate. After each classroom observation, I evaluated the notes taken and deleted any information that had been unintentionally recorded about these children as part of maintaining an ethical research approach.

Within each class, the recruitment of children for the interview groups (n=14) was on a voluntary basis as well. I invited seven children to participate in each group interview to avoid a loss of harmony and focus during the interview and to minimise distractions (Cohen et al., 2011). The recruited children (n=14) for the group interviews were also invited to participate in the home videoing activity. For this, I initiated a 'circle time' at a time that was convenient for them and their English teachers to discuss their willingness to participate in the home video activity. This happened after my meeting with the children's parents to negotiate the possibility for their children to take part in this activity. The parents and their children had the final say on whether to participate or not.

5.6.4 Constructing an Ethical Approach with Children

This study involved research 'with' children and not 'on' children. It believed in their competencies and abilities, and highly valued their views and opinions. Further particular ethical attention was required in this study to obtain consent from the children themselves to participate in this research as well as the role of parental consent. Negotiating consent with the children to participate remains to a "fuzzy" area in the literature. It highlights that there is an overlap between the rights of children presented by the UNCRC, 1989 that stresses the rights of children to have their say in all issues related to them and the ethical guidelines that view children as vulnerable (Arnott et al., 2020; Dockett & Perry, 2011). This ambiguity has caused a lack of clarity on who decides whether a child will take part in research or not (Dockett & Perry, 2011, p. 232).

Mortari and Harcourt (2012) argue that allowing children to provide consent for themselves and considering them as interlocutors in gaining the consent for themselves or whether the researcher negotiates with the persons having primary responsibility of the child, is a controversial issue. However, in this study, I referred to the regulations and guidelines of the state of Qatar that stipulate that consent from the guardians or parents should be obtained when the participants are children. I designed this study to reflect a participatory right perspective and was therefore required to seek consent from the children. To accomplish this goal and to be in ethical accordance with the research

regulations of the state of Qatar, I sought consent from the children in synchronisation with consent from their parents or guardians.

Some of the parents or guardians did not want their child to take part but the child wanted to be involved. I reassured the parents that their child could participate but their activities would not be included in the research data. For example, some of the children participated in the drawing activities but their drawing was not included. On the other hand, some parents were happy for their children to participate but the children were reluctant to take part in the research activity, the home video, for example (Robson, 2011). In this case, the children were given the option to not take part in the home video activity. By doing this, I acknowledged the rights of children to make their own decisions on whether to participate or not. I wanted to make sure that their voices were heard within the constraints of Qatari custom.

5.6.5 Participant Consent Forms

This research obtained ethical approval from the School of Education Ethical Committee of the University of Strathclyde. Ethical matters are important in research when addressing human subjects. Qualitative research often requires the researcher to be the tool for collecting the data. In-depth interviews, qualitative observations and visual techniques enable the researcher to enter the participant's lives. Consent forms,

autonomy, dignity and protecting participant anonymity is essential (Holloway & Brown, 2016).

This study required specific ethical clearance to be able to approach early years children regarding participation (the Ministry of Education, head teachers, early years English teachers, parents and children). I obtained permission from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to enter government schools (see Appendix E. 1). I obtained permission from the head teachers of the schools volunteering to take part in this study. I initiated a formal face-to-face meeting with the school heads to discuss my research, its aims, objectives and methods. The ministry's approval was given to them as a hard copy. I met with the English teachers in both of the schools who were volunteering to take part. I discussed the requirements and purpose of my research with them. I informed them that their approval to participate was sought for the individual interviews and classroom observations.

I organised a meeting with the parents of the children to provide them with details about the study. The meeting was conducted in an ethical manner. It was explained that when a researcher is accessing participants through gatekeepers (early years English teachers in this research), it raises specific ethical issues. It is argued in the literature that a researcher might be "exploiting the relationship between the gatekeeper and the person

they are introducing" (Flewitt, 2005, p. 554).   Equal consideration was given to the

parents who said 'yes' or 'no' for their children to participate. I reassured them that their

declination or acceptance of their child to participate or not would not affect the

relationship between the English teacher and their child, or influence the treatment that

their child received.   It was therefore necessary in this study to facilitate formal and

informal opportunities for parents to say 'no' in a safe and secure environment (Flewitt,

2005).

I consulted with the English teachers to arrange an initial meeting with the parents to

discuss the potentiality of their children being part in the research. I wanted it to be clear

that they could refuse to participate without negative outcomes regarding their child.   I

encouraged the parents to discuss the research with their children and to inform the

English teacher or me about their responses.   At the end of this process, I invited the

parents to sign a PIS (Participant Information Sheet) and consent form to formally agree

on their participation.   The parent's PIS and consent forms were bilingual (English and

Arabic) (see Appendix E. 3). The parents chose the Arabic version.

Reflecting on the parents' meeting, some questioned the aim of the research to listen to

children's viewpoints. They expressed doubt regarding children having a voice. I

responded by explaining that they have a voice and we must listen to it. I informed them

that we needed to work on developing a culture of listening to children. I explained that we need to provide them with opportunities to express their opinions to improve their lives. Other parents raised concerns about the home video activity and how it would be done. I reassured them that the purpose of the video was to document how a child interacts with puppets to encourage them to speak English outside the school. I explained that the children were not required to wear particular outfits, to sit in a particular place or to read out dialogue and perform (more detailed information in section 5.6.6). I clarified with the parents that they just needed to check the video after it has been recorded to make sure that they were happy with it. I said that the main thing was for the child to feel able to say what he or she wants to say.

I was aware when exchanging these ideas of how culture influences the parents. I could sense the Eastern culture influences in the dialogue of the parents. I understood their concerns about setting and their carefulness about appearance. After meeting the parents to inform them about the research aims and process, I decided to arrange a meeting with the children. I initiated a classroom visit with their English teachers to discuss the research aims, methods and processes using different creative tools that matched their age and educational level. First, I designed a 'Puppet-Book' that illustrates the research process in the form of a story to the children. This is attached in the Appendix (C.1). The book used simple and short sentences and an active voice, not passive voice. It used request language and not command language, and it had a

'question and answer' style. It used cartoon pictures to illustrate the information in the book to help the children understand (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). The 'Puppet-Book' was written in both the Arabic and English languages for the children to decide on the language they preferred. The children selected the Arabic version to be read with them. The book contained quality information that provided a thorough explanation of what was required of the children (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010).

Secondly, I designed a visual activity to help them understand the research process and the purpose of requiring consent to participate (finding parts of a puzzle that completed a storyboard of our project). I did this because young children were more interested in doing the research consent than in discussing the research in the abstract. Appendix (C.2) provides a full version of the visual activities used with the children. The puzzle was designed in the shape of a finger puppet to be in-keeping with the research theme and its play-based focus. One part of the puzzles included key words from the elements of the research process such as 'draw' and another part had a picture of the words, such as 'draw'. The children needed to match the appropriate two parts together to form a finger puppet shape to complete the puzzle. Finally, when the children had completed all parts of the puzzle, I worked with them to place the parts onto the visual storyboard. I then read the entire research story including the puzzle back to them.

This method was used to make sure that the children understood the key activities that they were involved in as part of the research process (Vindrola-Padros et al., 2016). A completed consent form was required from the children who were participating in the research process (i.e. the drawing, the group discussion, the whole class observation and the home videoing). I designed a visual consent form that was appropriate for the children's ages. This is attached in the Appendix (E.4). The consent form included direct and simple sentences for the children to understand. It contained three statements accompanied by visual illustrations (emoji's: happy, sad and confused) for the children to circle their choices (i.e. I would like to participate, I do not want to participate and I am not sure and need time to think).

To ensure that the children understood the research requirements, a space was provided at the end of the form where they were invited to draw their consent to take part (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005). I also used 'YES' and 'STOP' signs with each participant child to ensure ongoing rather than one-off consent. These signs were available for the children throughout the research process, so then they had the 'space' to choose to continue with participation or to stop. Each child had to raise up either the 'YES' or 'NO' sign throughout the research process (see Appendix E.4). I used these techniques with the children because I believe that the children's voices need to be supported in the traditional Qatari education context as described earlier in chapter 3. The children

needed time to engage with understanding the meaning of informed consent on their terms.

I was actively and thoughtfully interested in how the children responded to the visual activities I did with them. My aim was to support the children in giving their consent to guarantee that consent was informed. I paid close attention to whether the children showed awareness of the research's goals and purposes, what would happen to their data and the idea of anonymity. I regularly questioned them to check their understanding. Most answered the questions. They understood and remembered most of the information contained in the puppet book. For example, they understood the word (project) because they had used it in school. I asked them what the project was about and what it meant to them, and they immediately related it to their own lives. They said it was like the project they had completed in the English lesson. When I told them about the aim of my project to explore their opinions and voices, they did not take me seriously and behaved as if to say *"Are you kidding?"* (Reflection on the data collection phase, p.6). This was perhaps the first time they had been asked for their opinion. It was a new concept for them.

Throughout the research process, I kept reminding them to give their viewpoints openly by referring to the 'YES' and 'STOP' signs. The children were inquisitive regarding their

data. One child asked me, *''Who will listen to my recording with you?''*, I responded "Only me". He continued and asked, *"Why do you use this device?"* and pointed to the recorder that I showed them (Reflection on the data collection phase, p.8). I explained to him that I would forget what he had said about his drawing or about his video if I did not use it, and that I would play and listen to what he had said. He nodded his head, meaning that he got my idea. This dialogue indicated that the children showed an understanding of anonymity.

Anonymity is a complex concept but the children understood its meaning. I invited the children to choose a name (pseudonyms) that they would use in place of their real names to keep their identity safe and anonymous throughout the research (Holloway & Brown, 2016). It was apparent from their faces that they were excited to choose their favourite names. They were thinking and discussing with their friends which name to choose. The pseudonyms were used in every meeting and they started calling their friends using them.

The children wanted to understand the procedures involved with the research methods and activities. For example, one of the children was curious about my field notes during a classroom observation. I explained that I used a notebook when observing. The boy held up his blue notebook and said *"Is it like this one?''*. The children raised concerns regarding the video recording at home, asking *"Do I have to show my face in the video*

and can I smile during the recording?'', *"If we make mistakes while recording, what will happen?''* and *"I have a cat at my home and it might appear in the video', is it okay?''* (Reflection on the data collection phase, p.7). The children were curious about the nuanced aspects of the study because they are subject to Qatari culture and the Bedouin system that rules Qatari society. All citizens must operate within its constraints (see sections 3.2 and 3.3) and I was not surprised that the children were concerned about recording videos.

Many parents consented for their children to participate in this study but on receiving the forms, I noticed that that three of the boys' parents had not signed them correctly. For example, on one form, all levels of agreement had been ticked except the first level (I give permission for my child to record a video at home). In another completed consent form, only one box had been ticked that agreed for the researcher to present the video at international conferences and in research publications. In the third form, the disagreement for the child to record a video box had been ticked and at the same time, they had ticked the agreement for the researcher to present the video at international conferences and in research publications. Therefore, I excluded these consent forms but the children participated in the research activities. However, the girls' parents correctly completed and returned seven signed consent forms. I discussed these issues with the parents and the children participated in the research activities. One of the parents consented for her child to participate in the research activities. Her child took part in all

activities except for the home video activity. He told me, *"My mother agreed to do the home video activity but I don't want to"*. I told him, "It's okay, it's up to you but why don't you show us how you talk with a puppet?" He said, *"I don't want"*. Then he asked to get a puppet for his younger sister. I provided him with one and encouraged him to record with her. He said, *"She is very little. She can't speak"* (Sally's second classroom observation, p. 5). I respected his desire and reassured him that it was fine. The COVID-19 restrictions meant that I was not able to speak with him to find out why he had made his decision not to participate. I was careful to check with the children whether they wanted to continue participating or whether they wanted to go back to the classroom. All participants agreed to continue.

5.6.6 Special Ethical Consideration: The Home – Videoing Activity

I invited the children to film themselves at home with a person they would like to converse with using finger puppets (parents, siblings, cousins, friends or their neighbours). Careful consideration was given to the videos when the children produced them. How to use the videos was articulated to the children and families at the beginning of the research (Higgs et al., 2011). I explained to the parents and children that anyone in the video recorded by children needed to give informed consent (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Informed consent was acquired from the child and any others (siblings, parents, friends, cousins or neighbours) who appeared in the recorded videos (Phelan &

Kinsella, 2013). The videos were produced according to what the children and their parents agreed. The videos the children produced for this research did not include anyone other than the participant child him/herself. The children took the ownership of the video and created a conversation with themselves. Two of the girls decided to converse with a family member (a brother and a mother) but their faces did not appear in the video. Their voices were clear in the video.

I discussed with the parents how I would like to use the videos and invited them to give different levels of consent for me to use them in the study (see Appendix E.3). I asked for their approval to use the videos in the classroom. I explained that I will refer to them when interviewing the children and discussing their performances with finger puppetry. I explained that I will use them with the English teachers to discuss how to stimulate and encourage children to use English outside the classroom. The parents could choose whether to permit the videos to be presented at international conferences or published in professional journals. Ten consent forms (five from the boys and five from the girls) were returned that agreed to participate in the home video activity and for it to be presented in class, at conferences and in research publications. Two parents signed the consent form agreeing to participate in the video activity, for the teacher and researcher to view it and for it to be presented at conferences and in research publications. One girl returned the consent form with an agreement to make a video but did not want the teacher or researcher to view them but she did not record the video. I received all of the

consent forms but waited for the children to produce the video. I inferred from this that the parents or their children were confused about recording the video. Perhaps they had privacy issues regarding their children, were too busy or were not interested in doing the activity.

It is necessary to consider important ethical and legal implications when using video-based data collection as part of a research design (Zydney & Hooper, 2015). For example:

1. What are the goals of the video recording and how much video is necessary to meet this goal?

2. Who needs to provide permission?

3. Who needs to see the videos?

4. What level of consent is needed?

5. What level of confidentiality is wanted?

6. What level of protection is needed for storing the data?

7. Who controls how a video gets recorded and edited?

8. How long is it necessary to archive a video for and when will the video be deleted? (Zydney & Hooper, 2015, p. 42).

The goal of recording a home video was to provide the participants with an opportunity to speak English as a foreign language outside the classroom using finger puppetry, with others, using their parents' smart phones.   I asked the parents to supervise and monitor

their children during this activity to ensure that they were recorded safely (Zydney & Hooper, 2015). They were offered a safe governmental space [Learning Management System (LMS) website] to upload the videos for the English teacher and me to view them. The children and parents could choose which version of the recording they were happy with to upload to the website. I got permission to gather the required information from the children themselves and their parents as required by law (Zydney & Hooper, 2015). I also encouraged the parents to discuss the video recording options with their children to record and what they would like to record.

The children and parents had the option whether to record a video or not (see Appendix E.3 for the options). The video was viewed by the teachers of the children taking part in the study so then they could all discuss it to further encourage the children to speak English outside the school. I viewed the videos to analyse the impact that puppetry had on learning English and to assess the level of interest that the children expressed. Permission was sought from the participant children and parents to present the videos in professional journal publications and at conferences as an example of how the early years children in Qatar interact with finger puppetry outside the classroom.

Gaining consent for home videoing was concerned with establishing whether the video was restricted released or unrestricted released (Jacobs et al., 2007). Given my decision

that the videos will be published or shared at conferences outside the classroom, I

provided the parents with different levels of consent. In the consent form, it was clear

to the parents and their children that they had the choice for me to use the videos outside

the classroom or not. The consent form for the home video activity was only sent to the

parents and children who expressed interest in making it.

I decided not to blur the faces in the videos because the facial expressions of children

and their interactions are invaluable data to be used to evaluate finger puppetry as an

intervention in the classroom. Blurring the videos would make them almost unusable

(Hayes & Abowd, 2006). Clark et al. (2010, p. 86) states that "attempting to disguise such

data can remove the very point of the data." The faces of the four boys and two girls were

visible in their videos. One girl took a video of herself without revealing her face.

I assured the parents that the home videos would be stored temporarily on the Learning

Management System (LMS) website [https://lms.education.qa]. I invited the parents to

upload the recorded videos onto the LMS. The LMS is a secured governmental website

that is designed by the Ministry of Education in Qatar for parents to follow up on their

children's achievements. The parents and their children were familiar with accessing the

LMS website. The parents had electronic access by logging into their child's account.

Each child had a unique username and password to login into the website.   These

accounts cannot be accessed by anyone except the child himself/herself, their parents and the subject teacher (English, Math, Science, Arabic, IT, Sport and Art).   Each subject teacher has a different space for her and her students and their parents to make contact. The English teachers in this study created a file server on the LMS website that was protected by firewall and encrypted by a password for the participant children and their parents, and invited them to upload the home video to that folder.

I provided the children with charge over their video to empower them and give them a sense of being responsible for the process (Hayes & Abowd, 2006). I asked the children to record the videos themselves to provide an atmosphere free from being overly controlled by the researcher or their teachers (Zydney & Hooper, 2015). Reflecting on this, I considered the children to be active agents capable of making their thoughts known and acting on them.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter, I had outlined the decisions I made when designing and carrying out the study. I had provided evidence of how the research process was methodologically suitable and promoted the children's capability to provide informed consent and make decisions on their participation and learning. In the Diagram (5.7) below, I provided a timeline that summarises the research design and data collection phases, which

summarise what was presented in this chapter. The thorough presentation of the data in this chapter mirrors the interpretation of the data in the following chapter where the data was analysed in loops to make sure it complied with the aims and questions of the research, as well as the comments of the participants.
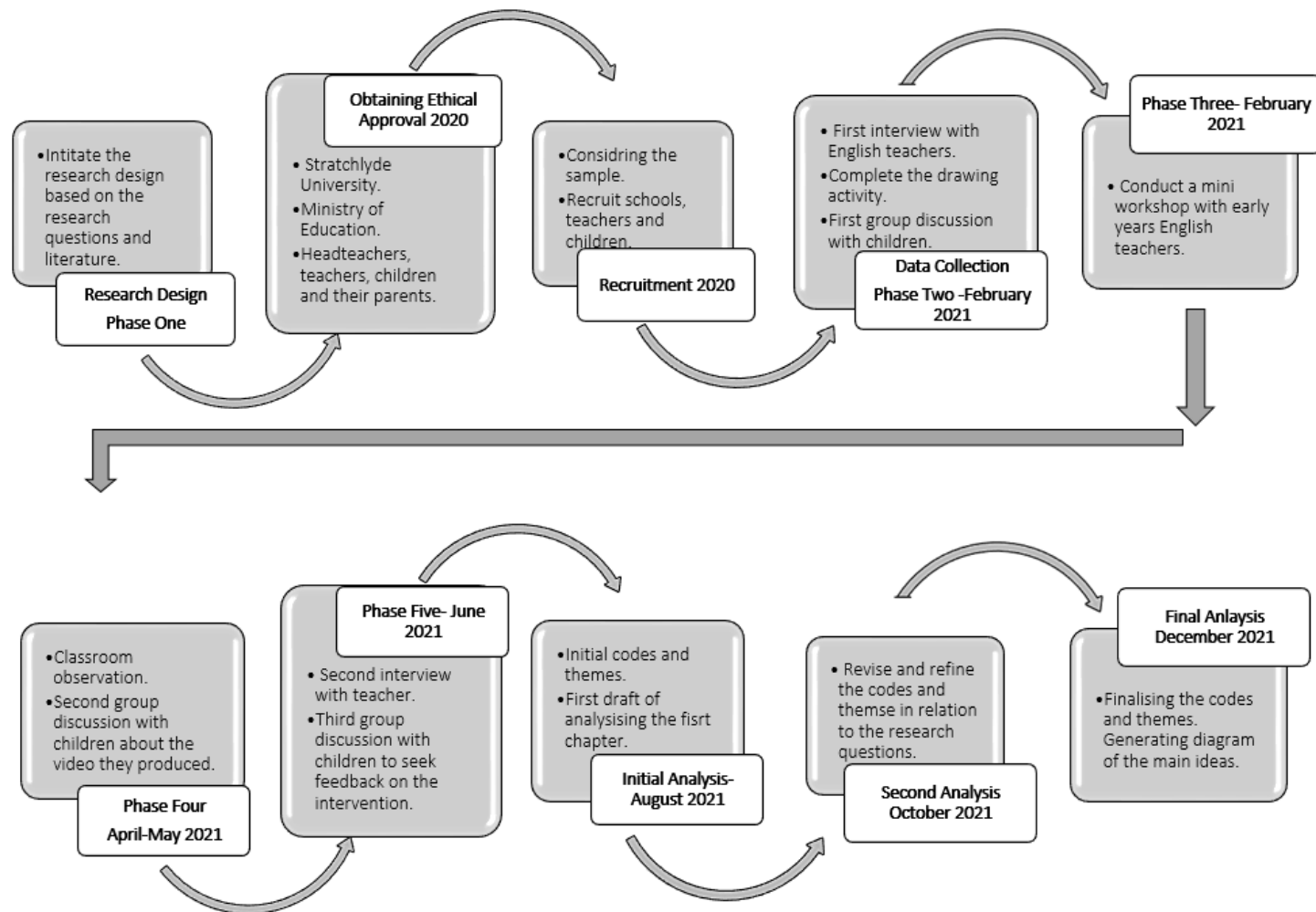
Research Design Phase One
- Intitate the research design based on the research questions and literature.

Obtaining Ethical Approval 2020
- Stratchlyde University.
- Ministry of Education.
- Headteachers, teachers, children and their parents.

Recruitment 2020
- Considring the sample.
- Recruit schools, teachers and children.

Data Collection Phase Two -February 2021
- First interview with English teachers.
- Complete the drawing activity.
- First group discussion with children.

Phase Three- February 2021
- Conduct a mini workshop with early years English teachers.

Phase Four April-May 2021
- Classroom observation.
- Second group discussion with children about the video they produced.

Phase Five- June 2021
- Second interview with teacher.
- Third group discussion with children to seek feedback on the intervention.

Initial Analysis- August 2021
- Initial codes and themes.
- First draft of analysising the fisrt chapter.

Second Analysis October 2021
- Revise and refine the codes and themse in relation to the research questions.

Final Anlaysis December 2021
- Finalising the codes and themes. Generating diagram of the main ideas.

Diagram (5.7): Research process timeline.

Chapter Six: Data Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the processes utilised to analyse the data collected over a nine-month period. It describes the 'Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)' method used and the steps taken to analyse the data collected from the young children and their English teachers (Braun & Clarke 2006). The analysis took approximately ten months to complete.

The data used in this research is derived from participatory qualitative methods that have explored children's perspectives on oral language learning (see section 5.3). The study's research questions were designed to investigate both children and teacher perceptions. It explores speaking strategies, English teacher conceptualisations of children's rights and the use of finger puppetry in the classroom and at home. An essential principle of this study was to reflect, as accurately as possible, on children and teacher views, beliefs and experiences, whilst simultaneously allowing for the reflective impact of my own interpretations on the research process.

Thematic analysis is a flexible theoretical approach to interpretive analysis that produces themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to a research question using

qualitative data. The approach generates the analysis of the data from the bottom-up. The analysis is not shaped by an existing theory but to some extent by the researcher's point of view and disciplinary knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 175). A thematic analytical research approach is influenced by the researcher's viewpoint and requires that I navigate six phases, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) (details in the next section).

Each phase leads to new interpretations of the data that require further iteration which deepens understanding and strengthens the data analysis process (Byrne, 2021). A reflexive researcher is fundamental to reflexive thematic analysis. For example, I continually interrogated what I did, why and how I did it and reflected on the impact and influence of this on my study (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 5). Utilising a reflexive thematic analytical methodology strengthens the qualitative data collected because it accurately represents the participant perspectives, opinions, and experiences, and my reflexive interpretation as a researcher (Byrne, 2021).

6.2 Phases of the Analysis Process

A reflexive thematic analysis is a one-of-a-kind qualitative analytical method of data analysis. It does not require the researcher to use a specific data collection method or to follow a particular theoretical perspective, either epistemologically or ontologically

(Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 178). It provides a flexible interpretive approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the identification of patterns or themes within a dataset. It involves searching across datasets to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Most research questions can be answered and almost all qualitative data types can be analysed using this qualitative analytical method (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Reflexive thematic analysis requires the researcher's active engagement in knowledge production. Codes are produced by identifying aspects of the data that are interesting and relevant to the research questions. The codes represent the researcher's interpretation of the dataset meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Themes do not emerge in advance of producing the codes but are generated by combining a number of codes to capture the core meanings that the researcher interprets from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the next section, the six-phase process of completing the reflexive thematic analysis is discussed and how each phase was implemented into the research data is explained.

6.3 The Six-Phase Analytical Process

Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a six-phase process that enables researchers to analyse data in a thematic manner. The phases have a logical sequence but it is not a linear process. It is a continuous recursive process that moves back and forth between

the entire dataset, the coded extracts of data, and the analysis of the data produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Differing viewpoints exist on when a researcher should engage with relevant literature on the analysis being completed. Some argue that early reading can constrain the analytic field of vision, whereby focus is limited to specific datasets, at the expense of other potentially important sets of data. Other researchers note that engaging with the literature can enhance the analysis and understanding of the data (Tuckett, 2005). I chose not to read the literature before analysing the data to inductively maintain my field of vision with what the data revealed. Avoiding bias that would influence the data analysis was essential (Tuckett, 2005). My research was on specific complexities within the education system in Qatar. For example, constraints imposed on teachers, the children's loss of agency and contradictory educational policies and practices. Interpreting the data analysis involved comparing and contrasting participant experiences with the literature. For example, connections between the participant experiences and the country's legal policies and documents.

The data analysis was interwoven with insights from the literature I read during the research process and my educational experiences to-date. Thematic analysis is a long process that develops as the researcher moves through the various stages. This can result in new interpretations of the data which may necessitate referring back to the earlier stages of the analysis process. It is important to view the six-phase method as a set of

guidelines rather than as principles to be implemented into a model to appropriately answer research questions and gather data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

6. 3.1 Phase One: Familiarisation with the Data

The familiarisation phase is regarded as the backbone for the later stages. It necessitates that the researcher is immersed in the data that was collected by reading and rereading the entire data items linked to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). I needed a thorough understanding of the data and research questions. The children's group discussions, teachers' in-depth interviews, classroom observations and my reflexive memos were prepared for transcription. I completed the manual transcription for the audio recordings (children's group discussions and teachers' in-depth interviews). This enabled me to be immersed in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

The data was transcribed orthographically, taking into account the inflections and pauses made by both the interviewer and the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). All recordings were written verbatim and typed, both verbal and nonverbal. For example, the transcriptions include the spoken words of the children, those of the English teachers and nonverbal cues (pauses, laughs, silence, and gazes to the researcher) (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Walter, 2019). The pauses and silences increased the insight into the participant understanding of the research topic being discussed. This phase seemed time-consuming

and it required patience on my part. I had to maintain close attention to the depth and breadth of the datasets that were produced to avoid "passing over" a dataset or having preference for one over another (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To familiarise myself with the data, I re-read all of the transcript datasets and listened to the original audio recordings. I did not write any notes during the initial replay of each audio interview because it required "active listening". I actively listened to have a better understanding of the topics covered in each interview or group discussion. It enabled me to recall gestures and behaviours displayed during the meeting with the participants (Byrne, 2021). When the transcription of the data was completed, I re-read the transcripts and wrote down notes. I also wrote down my thoughts and feelings regarding the data, participants and process in the transcripts. These initial notes can be the most noticeable and reflect personal experiences. For example, whilst familiarising myself with the children's first group discussion, I observed that the girl's answers regarding preferred classroom location in their drawings were imaginative (i.e. a park), whereas the boys used their actual position in the classroom for their answers (i.e. sit on the chair).

During the drawing activity, I noticed that boys were able to maintain concentration in a busy environment. They were able to learn and grasp knowledge whilst moving, playing, and conversing, whereas the girls required a calm space to concentrate. My observation

of the differences in answers according to gender, that were salient to me, is possibly because of my gender (female), background and personal experiences with gender differences. This does not imply that it is correct or incorrect but demonstrates how our own experiences influence how we interpret data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As a researcher, I am aware that my background may limit what I see in the data or enrich the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Some of my observations are discussed subsequently to developing the interpretation of the finalised reflexive thematic analysis framework. I adhered to a systematic procedure throughout the data analysis to be consistent and accurate.

6.3.2 Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes

Codes are units (words or phrases) that represent the most interesting elements of the data and serve as the bedrock for what will often become the themes (broader units). The coding procedure is used to provide concise, brief descriptive or interpretive labels for pieces of information that should be appropriate to the research question(s).

6.3.2.1 Initial Iteration of Coding

The codes should be succinct but include enough information to be self-contained, underpinning the commonality of data in connection to the research topic (Braun &

Clarke, 2006, 2013). I systemically coded and categorised the entirety of the data into three code groups (green, red and blue). Coding was completed using Microsoft Word's 'comments' function (2016). This put the codes in the right-hand margin and marked the text area assigned to each code. It was the simplest and most effective way to prevent double-codes, data overlapping or the informing of separate codes. It ensures that new codes began where previous codes end (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Byrne, 2021). An excerpt of the initial coding process of a participant's first interview is presented in Figure (6.1). All codes were developed from the initial loop. Original transcripts were regularly accessed to assess the existing codes and to investigate the interpretation of new codes as familiarity with the data developed (Byrne, 2021).

Me: Why do you think not all of the children are independent?
Interviewee: From my observations some of the characters don't care about others in the group or they don't care about participating in the games. They sit and only receive the information without wanting to take any role. They don't care about being the first to answer or being smart. I can say that eighty percent of students are independent and twenty percent are dependent. I think this relates to the culture here in Qatar. They rear their children to be like their fathers and to act as men. They hear the words, "you are a man."

Zainab Omar Attar
Individual assumptions and Judgment.

Zainab Omar Attar
Culture in Qatar plays a role in developing independency in children (boys).
Boys to men. Family hierarchal authority.

Green: a reflexive code.

Red: a code derived from the data.

Blue: a code derived from the literature.

Figure (6.1): Excerpt from Sally's (pseudonym) first interview.

I decided to manually code the entire data and did not use qualitative software (i.e. NVivo) because manual coding enabled me to immerse myself in the data and become familiar with what the participants said. It kept me closer to the data and assisted me later in interpreting it as an author of my analytical story. Analysing the data occurred at the intersection of the dataset, the context of the research and my skills as a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.11). A software package can assist but cannot interpret the exact participant meaning. For example, it is unable to apply the qualitative analytical thinking needed to contextualise data with the research questions. A risk of technologically-enabled "distancing" from the data and less "immersion" causes less insight (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 219; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Non-proficiency in technological qualitative software can produce feelings of "usability frustration, even despair and hopelessness" (Lu & Shulman, 2008, p. 108). Furthermore, using software consumes time learning how to use it (i.e. NVivo).

The comments in Figure (6.1) demonstrate my systematic approach to coding and categorising the data. I committed to categorising the codes into these three groups, while familiarising myself with the data. I coded the data as I read it according to what the participants said (i.e. the red comment above). Some of the participant responses reminded me of what I had read in the literature, like in the blue comment: "Boys to men-family hierarchal authority". Other information that was provided prompted me to think about my earlier experiences as a teacher. For example, making judgements about

children without finding out about them (assuming they are uninterested in being smart or being the first to respond). The green codes reflect my personal experiences. Thus, the initial codes were divided into three categories:

- *GREEN*: Researcher experiences and personal reflections.
- *RED:* Participant utterances.
- *BLUE:* Literature.

I kept a reflection diary during the research process which became an important source of data. I wrote short reflections after each meeting I had with the research participants. For example, after meeting the children to discuss the information sheet, following the drawing activity, at the end of group discussions with the children and after classroom observations. Reflection diaries were also written during participant interviews and when transcribing the group discussions. Reflection diaries are an important aspect of the research process (Walter, 2019).

Reflections were essential for documenting and improving the data collection, analysis and the researcher's role. For example, the interview settings, interview questions, the children's interactions with the researcher and the researched topic, my interactions with the participants and my emotional perspectives of the research (Walter, 2019). My reflections, in some instances, served as supporting data of what the participants said. In

others, they were illustrative data (see Figure 6.2). Successful thematic analysis requires reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I made active decisions when reflecting on my living environment, the values I believe in, the experiences I had during the coding process of thematic analysis and the assumptions I had when interpreting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).
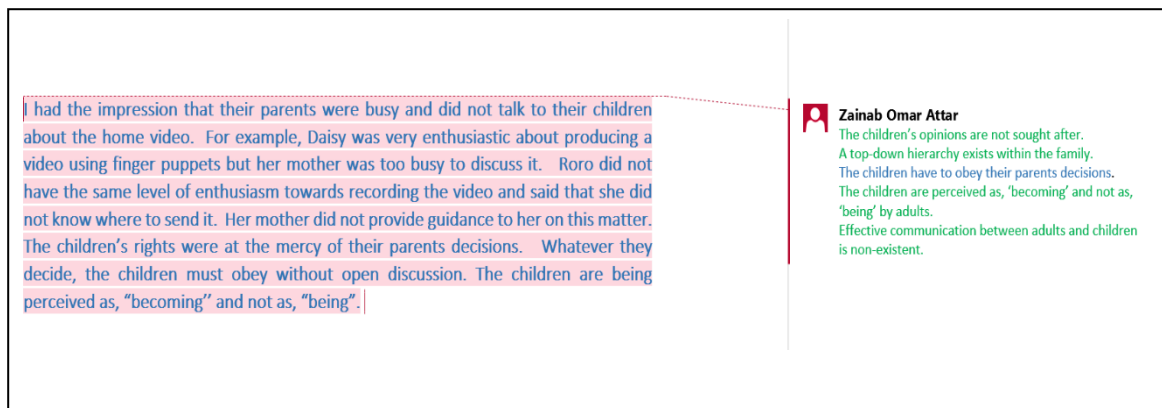

Figure (6.2): Extract from the second girl's group discussion (My reflection).

The comments in Figure (6.2) show how I coded and categorised my reflections in a systematic way. I used the same categorisations to code my reflections as part of the data familiarisation process. For example, after listening to the girls explain their reasons for not making a home video and pointing out that their mothers were responsible, I wrote this reflection. Their conversation reminded me of the literature on how children in this region are expected to follow their parents' decisions on certain issues without offering

any opinion. This prompted me to recollect my personal and professional experiences on how children are perceived by adults and the 'space' they occupy as children.

6.3.2.2 Second Iteration of Coding

The datasets were printed out to ensure that the codes were an accurate representation of the data. I examined them to see whether the codes applied to more than one dataset. For example, I highlighted in orange the codes on the excitement that the finger puppetry produced for the children when using it. This enabled me to see whether this code was in multiple data items. I recoded the data and merged similar codes into a broader one code to create a comprehensive set of codes that differentiated between distinct ideas in the data. These codes were applied systemically to all of the datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The example in Figure (6.3A) illustrates how the comprehensive codes (black text) were applied to the dataset. All of the codes, for example, that describe the children's involvement and interaction when utilising finger puppets were represented by a single broader code called: (puppets excite and engage children). This procedure reduced the number of initial codes that were generated in the first coding iteration. Comprehensive codes were also applied to the three code groups (green, red and blue) as in Figure (6.3B).
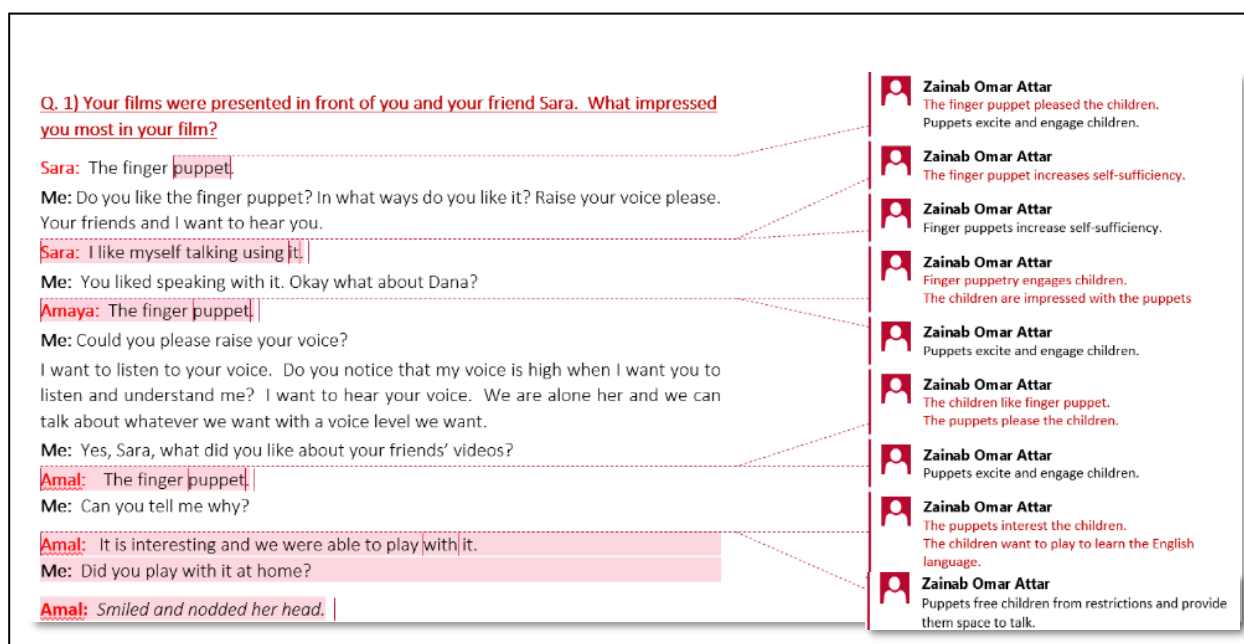
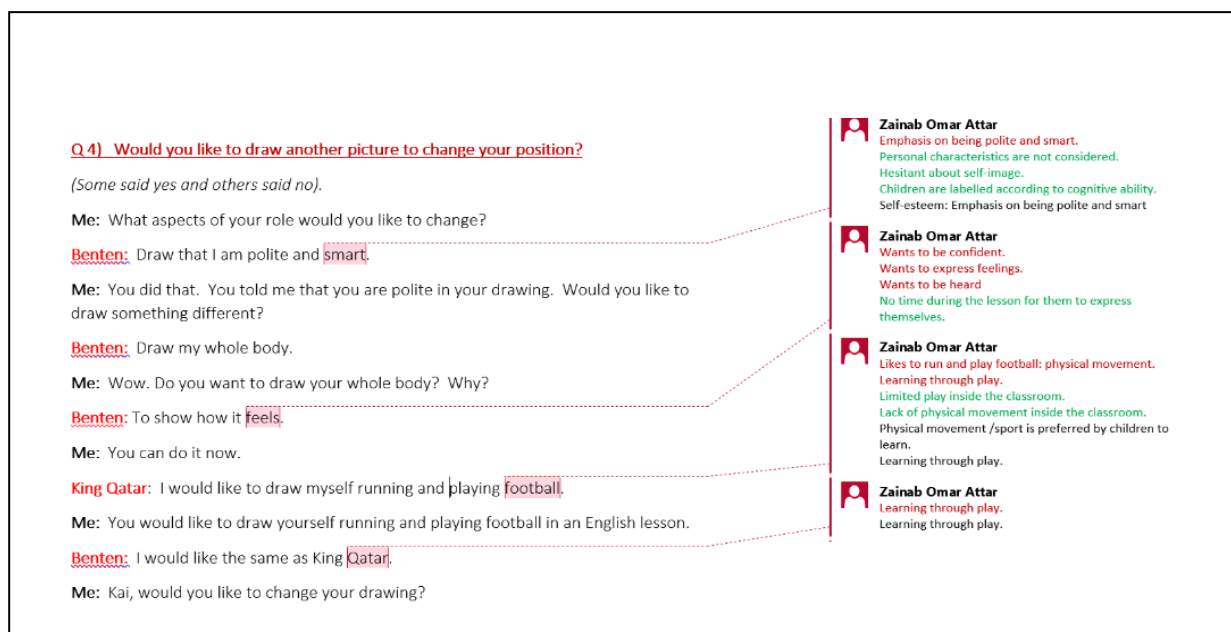Figure (6.3A): Applying comprehensive codes to the dataset.

Figure (6.3 B): Applying comprehensive codes to the three code groups (green, red and blue).

In the second iteration of coding, I chose to combine the three colour groupings into a single general code (black texts), as seen in Figure (6.3B). This procedure was carried out when I realised that the colour code groupings had codes with comparable meanings. The first set of codes in Figure (6.3B) can help to understand this. For example, in the initial coding loop, I wrote down all of the various codes that might indicate what the participants were thinking, making sense of their experiences, the assumptions they made in their discussion and how I felt in the situation (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 205). However, in the second iteration, I reduced the several codes I wrote to a single one as shown in the code "Self-esteem: emphasise on being polite and smart". Some of the data that was not coded in the first iteration of coding and my reflexive memos was coded in the second iteration. Some information was recorded differently after reading it again in relation to the research questions.

6.3.2.3 Third Iteration of Coding

To be familiar with the data at all times, the transcripts were regularly evaluated. The codes were examined to check for new interpretations and meanings. A third coding iteration was applied to the entire dataset to ensure that the comprehensive codes accurately represented the data. For this iteration, group colour coding was removed to leave the codes in their original form, as displayed in Figure (6.4). This was done to get closer to the data for analysis and to maximise the quality of the findings produced

(colour coding might overly complicate the analysis procedure). During this phase, the codes were repeatedly refined and the data coded and recoded. For example, in my second evaluation of coding, I did not code what participant "Benten" said: *"Draw my whole body"* (see Figure 6.4). In the third iteration, I coded it as "Children need attention". When "King Qatar" said, *"I would like myself running and playing football"*, I coded it using the two codes, "Physical movement/ sport-football is preferred by children to learn" and "learning through play". In the third coding evaluation, I added the code, "physical movement is limited in the classroom" because this more closely captured the meaning of what was said during our discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I eventually came to believe that interpreting the data in this way was necessary. For example, adding the code "physical movement is limited in the classroom" was a closer fit to what he was expressing.

Figure (6.4): Third coding iteration: Applying comprehensive codes to the dataset.

6.3.2.4 Inter-Related Reliability

After completing the third coding iteration, similar codes were grouped together, some were refined and some codes were removed. A codebook (see Appendix F) was produced for inter-rater reliability. Some data items were forwarded to a fellow PhD student and a PhD lecturer at Qatar University for them to assess the relevance of the codes I had produced in relation to the comprehensive codes and research questions. Sending the data items to the researcher(s) for checking the coding of data was to increase the credibility of the analysis being done for the research.   The PhD student was in agreement with the codes I had produced to great extent. The PhD lecturer was 90% percent in agreement and suggested that new codes could be added in relation to the research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). For example, in the third boy's group discussion, "Mecuri" and "MS", described the play situation in the English classroom respectively by saying *"I raised my hand to play with the gun game, but the teacher did not allow me to answer"* and *"I raised my hand too but she did not let me play with that game"* (Third boy's group discussion, p. 2).

The lecturer suggested they be coded as "teacher is not responding to children's preferences". Her rationale was that it gives an insight into how the English teachers conceptualise children's rights in the classroom. I was in agreement with her and went through the entire dataset, coding any data that I had not previously coded on this

matter. Further discussions were on interoperability and whether the codes concerning the rights of children and teachers were grouped together within the same group. Following the discussion and after further analysis, new interpretations emerged. The "conditional play code: be polite and you can go out to play, if time is available, children can go out to play and complete the book to play a game" was moved from the "Teaching English Speaking Strategies" theme to the "Rights of Children and Teachers" theme.

The final step in this phase was to compile all of the coded data. All data extracts where the codes exist in the datasets are listed under each individual code. Table (6.1) illustrates some examples of coded data for the (3) codes from the children's group discussions, teachers' interviews and classroom observations.

Codes	Physical movement /sport-football is preferred by children to learn	Hierarchy of authority	Puppets excite and engage children
	King Qatar: *Interrupted Omar saying*; I drew three boys; one is happy one is sitting politely and one is playing sport. **Benten**: This is my brother and I am playing football with him. **King Qatar:** I love doing sports. **King Qatar**: I would like to draw myself running and playing football. **Me:** You would like to draw yourself running and playing football in an English lesson. **Benten:** I would like the same as King Qatar. **(First boy's group discussion)**	**Interviewee:** Yes, the specialists. For example, you will find in all the schools that Mrs. "M." our specialist supervises have the same policies. All her schools follow the same rules. Like, "A.'' our coordinator, all of us here as teachers in this school and all teachers in the kindergarten building have to follow the same strategies and the same rules. We are following her policies. **(Sally's first interview)**	**Interviewee:** Yes, they do. I have a puppet called, "Nora". She wears a green dress. *[The teacher was smiling and feeling happy when she was talking.]* In the textbook, we have four main characters; two boys and two girls, "Nora, Aisha, Hassan and Ali". *[She flipped the book pages to show me Nora].* I must show you, "Nora". "Nora," in the textbook is wearing a green dress throughout the entire book. By chance, the, puppet I have also wears a green dress. I called her, "Nora." This is, "Nora." They love, "Nora." I change my voice when I use, "Nora" in class. I use a funny voice. They like it. It really attracts them when I embody this character in my lesson. It is fun but does it really help them learn English? It engages them. Does it help them to speak better? I don't know. Not yet. **(Maya's first interview)**
	Roro: I drew a boy playing football. **Me:** Where is he? Show me the boy please. **Roro:** Yes, and this is me. **Me:** Are you playing with a boy? Who is that boy? **Roro:** He is my brother. **(First girl's group discussion)**	**Interviewee:** No, you do not have the choice to not follow. It is not your choice. You have the curriculum, you have the guidelines and you will prepare your lesson plan according to this. The Coordinator will check your lesson plan, she will give you feedback and then the Specialist will attend your class. She will also give you comments. **(Maya's first interview)**	**XR:** I liked the characters. **Me:** *Smiled*! You liked the characters your friends created in their role-plays. **XR:** Nodded his head with a smile. **(Second boy's group discussion)**
	Me: Yes, it takes a long time until it finds where the rabbit is hiding. Benten, can you tell me what you like most in your video? **Benten:** The speech. **Me**: Which speech? **Benten:** Basketball. **Me:** Basketball? Do you like playing basketball? **Benten:** Yes. He nodded his head in agreement. **Me:** What else? **Benten:** I like basketball.	The teacher asked a boy to ask and answer a question using his finger puppet. The boy asked and answered correctly, but answered differently from the answer provided in the textbook saying, "it is sunny". He provided a real time answer based on current weather and not the weather described in the textbook. The teacher corrected him by asking him to say the answer as it was written in the textbook. The	**Sara:** It is beautiful and interesting and we were speaking English using the finger puppet. **Me:** Yes Amaya. **Amaya:** It is fun and interesting and it helps us to speak English. **Amal:** It is interesting and helps us learn English. **(Second girl's group discussion)**

(Second boy's group discussion)	textbook said that said it was cloudy and the boy said this. (First boy's classroom observation)	
	After reviewing the vocabulary, the teacher distributed the finger puppet to the six boys who were in the class. Some of the boys decided to change the puppet she had given them. "I do not have time", she said. (Second boy's Classroom Observation) Daisy: Do you know why I do not like story time? In each class, the teacher asks me to read a story with a different friend. I want to read the story with my friend 'Haya'. (Second girl's group discussion)	King Qatar: I felt that enjoyment when I use it. Me: So, when you enjoyed, you learned. MS: Yes, I enjoyed. It was nice. (Third boy's group discussion) Nora: I liked it. Me: Okay. Why did you like it? Nora: It was fun. She answered in English. Me: Okay. Nora said it was fun. Who is else wants to tell me? Sara did you like it. Sara: Yes. Me: Why did you like it? Sara: It was exciting. Me: How about Amal? Sara: It was interesting. (Third girl's group discussion)

Table (6.1): Examples of extracted data collated for three codes.

6.3.3 Phase Three: Creating the Initial Themes

This phase begins when all appropriate datasets had been coded and collated and a list of distinct codes identified. The emphasis has changed from individual data item analysis within the dataset to aggregated meaning throughout the datasets. I reviewed and analysed the coded datasets to see how the different codes could be gathered to shape meaning for themes or sub-themes. This involved combining the codes that shared the same meaning into one code and having some codes turned to represent a theme or sub-theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

Themes do not exist within the data waiting to be discovered by the researcher. The researcher must actively engage with the data to establish relationships between the various codes and prove how these relationships construct a theme or sub-theme. The development of the most salient ideas from the codes is not dependent on the quantity of codes but on the meaning that these codes generate in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Themes should be distinct from one another and in some cases, at odds with other themes, in order to create a coherent and clear image of the dataset. I was aware of the possibility of excluding codes or potential themes that did not address the research questions. I created a miscellaneous category in which to keep all of the codes that did not appear to fit into any of the potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The ongoing analysis meant that some of the codes became part of the existing themes whilst others were removed from the process. For example, under the miscellaneous theme, the code "children build rapport with the researcher" was moved to the first theme, "rigid system penetrates the education process". This code was moved to the first theme because it fits with the analysis that revealed that children's voices do not receive attention from teachers because they are overburdened by the MOE's (Ministry of Education) demands on them. In this case, the children seized every opportunity to share information about themselves, their classmates and family members. They interacted with me as if I were a close friend with whom they may discuss momentous occasions with. At the completion of this analysis phase, I developed a thematic map that illustrates the themes that emerged from the collation of related codes. Figure (6.5) represents the initial themes and sub-themes.

Figure (6.5): Thematic map showing the five initial themes and their sub-themes.

6.3.4 Phase Four: Reviewing the Initial Themes

To increase the authenticity of the data analysis process and to ensure that the themes appropriately reflected the data, I separated them into two categorises; themes generated from the research questions (deductive) and themes that emerged from within the codes produced from the data items (inductive) (Hennink, et al., 2011). Careful analysis of the participant's discussions extended beyond their detailed accounts. It developed into an interpretation of how what they said related to the research topic being investigated. This was completed to strengthen the themes that were produced

(Walter, 2019). All themes are derived from the research questions and the data was written at the centre of the paper and data items at the side (see Figure 6.6).

Figure (6.6): Initial theme review.

The children's group discussions were organised according to phases on the left-hand side of the paper. The teacher interviews and classroom observations were written on the right. Each dataset was linked to the research questions and appropriate themes. Visualising the themes (colours were used just for illustration) in relation to the research questions and datasets helped to identify links between the themes and research questions. Table (6.2) below clarifies Figure (6.6).

Key:

The black arrows point to the "Children's Rights" theme. The yellow arrows point to the "Learning English" theme and the maroon arrows point to the "Forming Teaching Strategies" theme. The dark blue arrows point to the "Finger Puppetry" theme, the orange arrows point to the "Learning System" theme, the green arrows point to the "Play-Based Pedagogy" theme and the pink arrows point to the "Experiences of Learning English Speaking" theme.

Table (6.2): Initial themes review.

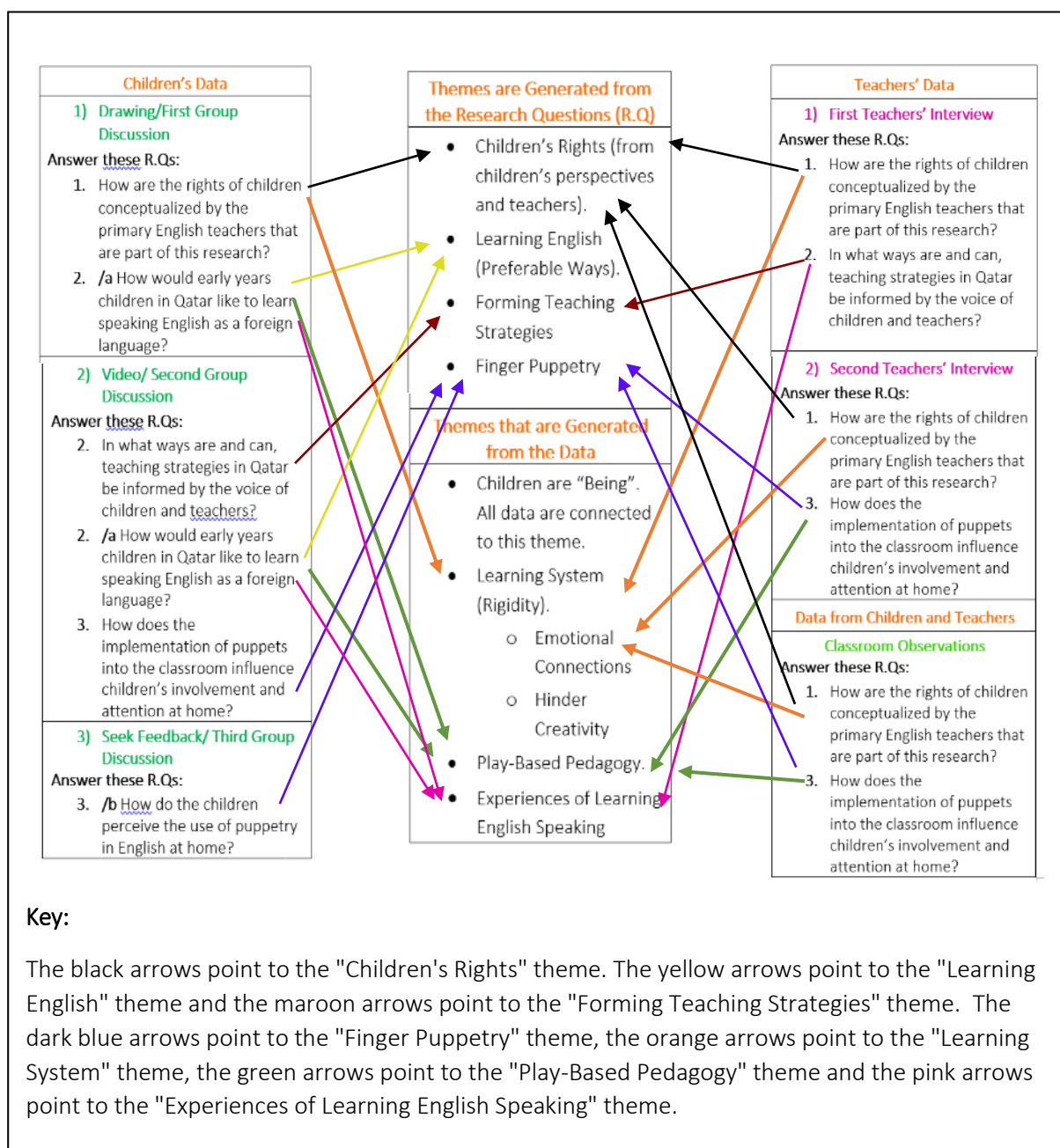Each data item (teacher interviews, children's group discussions, and classroom observations) was analysed in connection to the relevant codes and research question(s) to assess the weight and richness of the candidate themes (see Figure 6.7 - second teacher interviews).

The teacher's data was classified and placed into the initial themes (children's rights-teacher's perspectives, play-based pedagogy, finger puppetry; teacher's evaluation and teacher's struggles in teaching speaking). The codes associated with a particular theme (i.e. finger puppetry) were placed beneath the name of it. For example, the codes attributed to the teacher's viewpoints on children's rights were located under the theme name "children's rights". Some codes were put under themes "play-based pedagogy" and "teachers struggle in teaching speaking." The initial themes are marked in red text and initial codes in blue. During this phase, all identical codes in the dataset were allocated to the appropriate theme. Figure 6.7 is summarised in the table that follows.
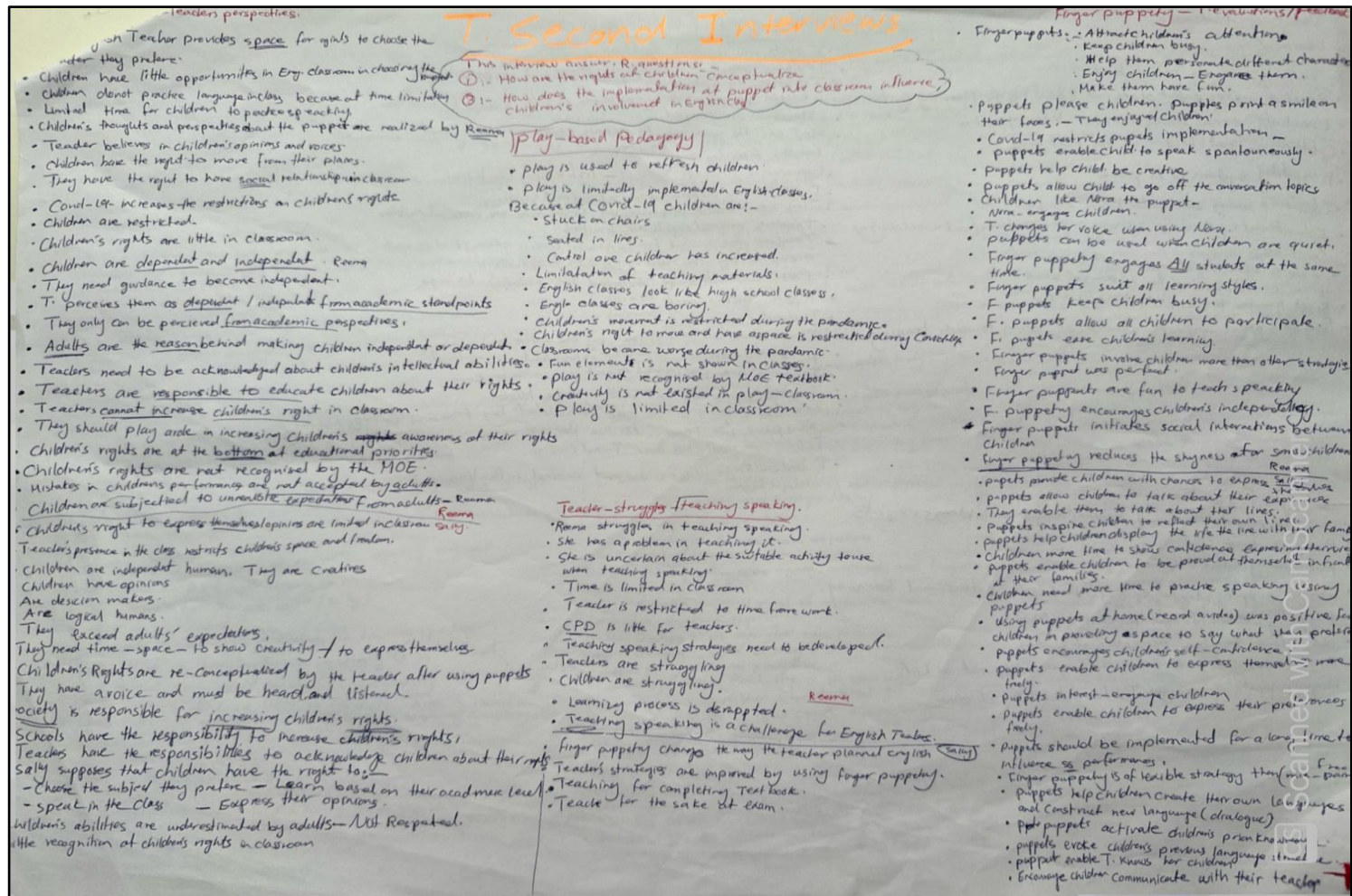
T: Second Interviews

This interview answer 2 questions:
1: How are the rights of children conceptualize
2: How does the implementation of puppet into classroom influence children's involvement in engaging?

Teacher perspectives:

- Teacher provides space for girls to choose the ... after they prefer.
- Children have little opportunities in Eng. classroom in choosing the...
- Children don't practice language in class because of time limitation
- Limited time for children to practice speaking.
- Children's thoughts and perspectives about the puppet are realized by Reema
- Teacher believes in children's opinions and voices.
- Children have the right to move from their places.
- They have the right to have social relationship in classroom.
- Covid-19 increases the restrictions on children's rights.
- Children are restricted.
- Children's rights are little in classroom.
- Children are dependent and independent. Reema
- They need guidance to become independent.
- T: perceives them as dependent / independent from academic standpoints.
- They only can be perceived from academic perspectives.
- Adults are the reason behind making children independent or dependent.
- Teachers need to be acknowledged about children's intellectual abilities.
- Teachers are responsible to educate children about their rights.
- Teachers cannot increase children's right in classroom.
- They should play a role in increasing children's awareness of their rights.
- Children's rights are at the bottom of educational priorities.
- Children's rights are not recognised by the MOE.
- Mistakes in children's performance are not accepted by adults.
- Children are subjected to unrealistic expectations from adults - Reema
- Children's right to express themselves/opinions are limited in class. Sally
- Teacher's presence in the class restricts children's space and freedom.
- Children are independent human. They are creatives
- Children have opinions
- Are decision makers
- Are logical humans.
- They exceed adults' expectations.
- They need time - space - to show creativity / to express themselves.
- Children's Rights are re-conceptualised by the teacher after using puppets
- They have a voice and must be heard and listened.
- society is responsible for increasing children's rights.
- Schools have the responsibility to increase children's rights;
- Teachers have the responsibilities to acknowledge children about their rights.
- Sally supposes that children have the right to:
  - Choose the subject they prefer - Learn based on their academic level
  - speak in the class - Express their opinions.
- children's abilities are underestimated by adults - Not Respected.
- little recognition of children's rights in classroom

Play-based Pedagogy

- play is used to refresh children
- play is limitedly implemented in English classes.
  Because of Covid-19 children are:-
  - stuck on chairs
  - seated in lines
  - Control over children has increased.
  - Limitation of teaching materials.
  - English classes look like high school classes.
  - Engls classes are boring.
  - Children's movement is restricted during the pandemic.
  - Children's right to move and have space is restricted during Covid19
  - Classroom became worse during the pandemic.
  - Fun elements is not shown in classes.
  - play is not recognised by MOE textbook.
  - Creativity is not existed in play-classroom.
  - play is limited in classroom

Teacher-struggles (Teaching speaking)

- Reema struggles in teaching speaking.
- She has a problem in teaching it.
- She is uncertain about the suitable activity to use when teaching speaking.
- Time is limited in classroom
- Teacher is restricted to time frame work.
- CPD is little for teachers.
- Teaching speaking strategies need to be developed.
- Teachers are struggling.
- Children are struggling.
- Learning process is disrupted. Reema
- Teaching speaking is a challenge for English Teachers.
- finger puppetry change the way the teacher planned English. Sally
- Teachers strategies are improved by using finger puppetry.
- Teaching for completing Textbook.
- Teach for the sake of exam.

Finger puppetry — evaluations/feedback

- Finger puppets:- Attract children's attentions
  - Keep children busy.
  - Help them personate different character
  - Enjoy children - Engage them.
  - Make them have fun.
- Puppets please children. Puppets print a smile on their faces.- They enjoyed puppets
- Covid-19 restricts puppets implementation.-
- puppets enable child to speak spontaneously.
- puppets help child be creative
- puppets allow child to go off the conversation topics
- Children like Nora the puppet-
- Nora engages children.
- T: changes her voice when using Nora
- puppets can be used when children are quiet.
- Finger puppetry engages All students at the same time.
- Finger puppets suit all learning styles.
- F. puppets keep children busy.
- F. puppets allow all children to participate.
- F. puppets ease children's learning.
- Finger puppets involve children more than other strategies
- Finger puppet was perfect
- Finger puppets are fun to teach speaking
- F. puppetry encourages children's independency.
- Finger puppets initiates social interactions between children
- finger puppetry reduces the shyness of/for shy children. Reema
- puppets provide children with chances to express themselves
- puppets allow children to talk about their experience
- They enable them to talk about their lives
- Puppets inspire children to reflect their own lives
- puppets help children display the life the line with their fam...
- Children more time to show confidence express themselves infront
- puppets enable children to be proud of themselves infront of their families.
- Children need more time to practice speaking using puppets
- Using puppets at home (record a video) was positive for children in providing a space to say what they prefer
- puppets encourages children's self-confidence
- puppets enable children to express themselves freely.
- puppets interest - engages children
- Puppets enable children to express their preferences freely.
- puppets should be implemented for a long time to influence ss performances.
- Finger puppetry is of flexible strategy then/more...
- puppets help children create their own languages and construct new language (dialogue).
- ppt puppets activate children's prior knowledge
- puppets evoke children's previous language
- puppet enable T. knows her children...
- Encourage children communicate with their teacher

Figure (6.7): Illustrates how the themes materialised from the groups of codes.

T. Second Interviews		

This interview answers these research questions:

1. How are the rights of children conceptualized by the primary English teachers that are part of this research?
3. How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence children's involvement and attention at home?

Children's Rights –teachers perspectives	Play-Based Pedagogy	Finger Puppetry- Teachers' Evaluation
• Children have little opportunities in Eng. Classes. • Children do not practice language in classes because of time limitation. • Limited time for children to practice speaking. • Reema realizes children's perspectives about puppets. • Teacher believes in children's opinions. • Children have the right to move from their places. • Children have the right to have social relationships in classes. • Children are restricted. • Children's rights are little in classroom. • Children are dependent and independent. • They need guidance to become independent. • T. perceives children as dependent/independent from academic standpoint. • Adults are the reason behind making children independent or dependent. • Teachers need to be acknowledged about children's intellectual abilities. • Teachers are responsible to educate children about their rights. • Teachers cannot increase children's right in the classroom. • Children's right at the bottom of educational proprieties. • Children are subjected to unrealistic expectations from adults. • Adults do not accept mistakes in children's performance. • Teacher's presence in class restrict children's space and freedom. • Children are independent human. They are creative.	• Play is used to refresh children. • Play is limitedly implemented in English classes. • Because of Covid-19, children are stuck on chairs, seated in lines and control over children has increased. • Limitation of teaching materials. • English classes look like high schools. • English classes are boring. • Classrooms become worse during the pandemic. • Children's rights to move and have space is restricted during Covid-19. • Fun element is not shown in classes. • The M.O.E. textbook does not recognize play. • Play is limited in classroom. **Teachers Struggle in Teaching Speaking** • Reema struggles in teaching speaking. • Reema has a problem in teaching speaking. • She is uncertain about the suitable activity to use when teaching speaking. • Teacher is restricted to time framework. • Time is limited in classroom. • CPD is little for teachers. • Teaching speaking strategies need to be developed. • Teachers are struggling. • Children are struggling. • Teaching speaking is challenging for English teachers. • Learning process is disrupted.	• Finger puppets attract children's attention, keep them busy, help them personate different characters, enjoy children and make them have fun. • Puppets please children. • Puppets print a smile on children's faces. • Puppets help children be creative. • Puppets enable children to speak spontaneously. • Puppets help children to go off the conversation topics. • Children like puppets. • Puppets can be used when children are quiet. • F. puppetry engages all children at the same time. • F. puppetry suits all learning style. • Puppets keep children busy. • F. puppets allow all children to participate. • F. puppets ease children's learning. • F. puppets involve children more than other strategies. • F. puppets are perfect. • F. puppets are perfect to teach speaking. • F. puppetry encourages children's independency. • F. puppets initiate social interactions between children. • F. puppetry reduces the shyness for some children. • Puppets allow children to talk about their experiences. • Puppets enable children to talk about their lives. • Puppets inspire children to reflect their own lives. • Puppets enable children to be proud of themselves in front of their families. • Using puppets at home was positive for children in providing space to say what they prefer.

Table (6.3): Single data set analysis with relevant codes and themes.

This phase of the thematic analysis entailed fine-tuning the themes produced. It is concerned with establishing which themes/sub-themes are appropriately authentic. Each theme was assessed to make sure that it had sufficient data to support and represent it and that it connected with the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 226) recommend that the researcher considers specific questions when refining themes:

- Is this a theme or is it just a code or sub-theme?

- What is the quality of the theme? Does the central organising concept tell me something meaningful about a pattern in the data in relation to my research question?

- Can I identify the boundaries of this theme? What does it include and exclude?

- Is there enough meaningful data to support the theme? Is the theme too 'thin'?

- Is there too much going on in the theme so that it lacks coherence?

- Is the data too diverse and wide-ranging?

- Would using sub-themes resolve this problem?

- Should it be split into two or more themes, each with their own central organising concept? (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 226).

There are two key considerations when refining potential themes. The first is the coherence of the data items and codes that form each theme or subtheme. It is assumed that themes/sub-themes add to the overall meaning of the research if the data items and codes form a logical pattern. The second requires the researcher to evaluate each themes' relevance to the dataset. The themes are evaluated according to whether they provide a proper interpretation of data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The aim of theme reviewing is to ensure that the data items and codes are effectively combined to form a theme and that the theme is appropriately contributing to the interpretation of the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can be discovered that it is necessary to restructure some of the themes or sub-themes by adding or removing codes or themes or sub-themes. Figure (6.8) shows the final thematic map that represents the themes and sub-themes.

Figure (6.8): Final thematic map showing five themes and sub-themes.

It is common practice in this phase for codes and themes to be altered or deleted to produce the most accurate interpretation of the data. Some activities previously performed during analysis may need to be repeated. It may be necessary to recode some of the data items, combine codes, and delete or promote codes as sub-themes or themes. For example, I initially used the code "children's preferences on pseudonyms vary between the boys and girls." After reviewing the codes and data items, I realised it was more accurate to recode it as "children are experts in matters related to their learning." When I re-examined the data items that explored the children's experiences of using finger puppetry, I discovered that children attributed a different value and meaning to the data than I had coded. The children's descriptions of puppets were highly nuanced,

which is indicative of a high cognitive ability. For example, they recognised the need to change their tone of voice when acting out a character using puppets. I recoded the children's experiences to reflect their thoughts. The data that was coded using "children prefer to express themselves through play" and "drama is appealing to children" were amended and became "children's cognitive abilities are higher than adult's perceptions". The codes "children's opinions are not freely expressed in the classroom" and "limited space to express opinions in classroom" under the sub-theme "children's voice is silent" were combined to become one code, "limited space to express opinions in classroom" to promote the theme "teachers neither have voice nor do they give voice to children" as they provided similar meanings. Different interpretations were apparent when the code analysis was completed.

After putting all of the codes with the appropriate themes, I grouped any codes that were similar together. Some of the same codes were initially placed with many themes but were eventually moved to the most closely related themes to produce the most accurate interpretation of the data. For example, the code "conditional play: be polite and you can go out to play, complete the book to play a game and if time is available you can go out to play" can appear under the theme "teaching English speaking strategies" and under the theme "teachers neither have voice nor do they give voice to children." I decided to attach it only to the "teachers neither have voice nor do they give voice to children" theme because it was the closest fit.   The challenge in providing free play is primarily due

to the limitation imposed on applying rights in classrooms for both teachers and children, rather than the teacher's desirability to apply conditional play.

The candidate sub-themes "hinder creativity" and "emotional disconnection with the curriculum (teacher - content- environment)" were revaluated in relation to their accuracy to form a sub-theme before they were reconsidered to be coded under the theme "rigid system penetrates the education process". The candidate sub-themes did not have sufficient meaningful codes to become sub-themes. Other sub-themes were evaluated and revised after a consultation with Braun and Clarke's (2013) questions. All sub-themes were examined in relation to the meaningful data provided by the participants. Refining the candidate themes heightened my concerns about the sub-themes. In particular, "learning English experiences", "strategies are not formulated by teachers and children voices", "teachers struggle in teaching speaking" and "children sense bored".

It was challenging to define the boundaries for the sub theme, in relation to Braun and Clarke's (2013) refining themes questions. For example, I discovered varying meanings within the theme "teaching English-speaking strategies" and its sub-themes, and it therefore lacked coherence. Its sub-themes were extremely thin and topical, rather than thematic aspects of the data. The sub-themes did not accurately represent the dataset

which prompted me to revisit my analysis to generate new data interpretations. The sub-themes of the theme were deleted because the informative codes used were unable to effectively form sub-themes. The redefined sub-themes became "limited play-based pedagogy" and "children's preferable way of learning".

It is important to document the modifications made during the thematic analysis. For significant modifications (for example, removing a sub-theme), an explanation why it was necessary can be provided. To ensure that the most relevant interpretation of the data is captured, a revised thematic map can highlight the key aspects of the data in relation to the research question(s). Finally, the theme, "rights are identified but not applied" was amended and refined, as were its sub-themes "children's voice is silent" and "teachers neither have voice nor give voice to children". I came to the conclusion that this theme did not provide a meaningful depiction of the data. Its sub-theme, "teachers neither have a voice nor give children a voice," was more informative to replace the theme because it demonstrated a thorough comprehension of the data represented by the participants and answered the relevant research questions (s).

6.3.5 Phase Five: Defining and Naming the Themes

This phase begins when the thematic map is completed and finalised. It is the researcher's responsibility to "define and refine" the themes by identifying the essence of each theme

and determining what data aspects each theme captures. This is accomplished by referring to the collected data extracts for each theme and organising them into a cohesive account (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). Each theme and sub-theme is analysed with respect to the dataset and research questions.

The goal begins to determine the story that each theme tells. All themes should work together to build the overall story of the research in connection to the research questions. It is essential that the theme names be concise, snappy, memorable, and give the reader a feeling of what the theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

I categorised the codes into five primary themes (Figure 6.8):

1) Rigid system penetrates the education process.

2) Teachers neither have voice nor do they give voice to children.

3) Teaching English-speaking strategies.

4) Finger puppetry inspires learning but is tedious.

5) Children are, 'Being' in their world in their way.

The themes were named based on the most prominent information provided by the participants (the codes). Each theme has a distinct set of codes that make it unique. The next section discusses the scope and boundaries of each theme.

Themes: Scopes and Boundaries

1) Rigid system penetrates the education process

This theme provides answers to the first research question. This central theme highlights the lack of control that participants have because of the rigid education system in which they live. This rigidity pervades every part of the educational process. It limits the 'space' that the participants (children and teachers) have and strengthens the hierarchical authority. The rigidity of the system requires both teachers and children to follow a prescribed plan with little room for them to apply their ideas in the classroom. It reduces and, in some cases, eliminates opportunities for learning to occur and makes school a place that does not meet participant expectations. This theme significantly influences the other themes.

2) Teachers neither have voice nor do they give voice to children

This theme provides answers to the first research question. It highlights the extent to which the voices of both children and teachers exist in the school environment due to its rigorous structure. The theme "teachers neither have voice nor do they give voice to children" encompasses two facets of voice. The first being the teacher's voice in the school system and ability to communicate their opinions. The second is the teacher's awareness of the children's rights and voices and the extent to which they are recognised by teachers. This is a dichotomic theme. On one hand, there is the teacher's lack of

recognition of the children's rights and on the other, the teacher affords some rights to children who perform well academically.

3) Teaching English-speaking strategies

This theme provides the answers to the second research question. It captures the scope of stereotyped speaking strategies used by English teachers and their consequences on children's feelings that vary between positive and bored. It highlights the way children would like to learn English speaking and how teachers struggle to teach it. It explains how the teaching strategies used limit the use of play-based pedagogy in English-language classrooms.

4) Finger puppetry inspires learning but is tedious

This theme provides answers to the third research question. It reflects the participant perspectives of finger puppets. They varied from positive to negative, where everyone was excited, overjoyed, and a little bored. It reveals that finger puppetry is an effective teaching speaking technique that can captivate the majority of children and be modified to suit particular preferences.

5) Children are 'being' in their world in their way.

This theme emphasises the children's status as a distinguishing feature (being). It reflects the school community perception of children as 'becoming' and the children demonstrating who they are by 'being' in their world in their own unique way.

6.3.6 Phase Six: Producing the Report

The thematic analysis is concerned with demonstrating the scope of each theme produced in the research process. It was completed to convince the reader of the complicated story about the data, and of the worth and validity of the study findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). Writing the analysis report is part of the analysis process as a whole and necessitates a recursive approach as with the previous phases (Braun & Clarke 2012). For example, the codes and themes were refined and evolved throughout the analysis phase. The datasets were revisited and re-evaluated and changes were documented and updated in the report to reflect the evolution of the findings.

The meaningful themes, logically related to one another, create a compelling story from the data. When appropriate, the themes expand on previously published themes. Internal coherence is maintained to be able to tell a stand-alone story when separated from other themes (Braun & Clarke 2012). I chose to present the "rigid system penetrates

the education process" theme first because it provides context for the research findings. It serves as the basis for each participant account and highlights participant practices and attitudes in the school system. It draws attention to 'space' within the classroom and the influence of hierarchical authority. It provides an insight into the learning environment and includes the teacher reflections on their teaching practices in a rigid and inflexible system.

The theme shows how children experience learning English speaking in a Qatari classroom. It highlights Qatar's educational system and provides a background on how the children's right to participate (voicing their thoughts and perspectives) in matters related to their learning is conceptualised by both their teachers and the education system. The theme reveals that teachers within the rigid system are under a controlled top-down hierarchy. The children are at the bottom of it and are aware of its authoritative structure. The theme serves as guiding post for the next three themes, "teachers and children's right", "teaching English-speaking strategies" and "implementing finger puppets in classroom". The "teachers and children's rights" theme was the first to be reported on because it explains how constraints affect teaching English speaking and the implementation of finger puppetry. The final theme, "children are 'being' in their world in their way," was intended to be introduced as closing commentary on how children are perceived by society, schools and the children themselves. I felt that it was better to report on this theme as part of the other themes where it was necessary to draw

attention to the status of children and their real self-perception. This was particularly significant because the themes were revised to reflect the rights and perspectives of children in the environment in which they belong.

6.4 Summary

This chapter had detailed the approach taken to analyse the data. My point of view was included throughout the research process. A reflexive thematic analysis approach was used to analyse and interpret the participant's viewpoints, beliefs and experiences. A systematic procedure identified the emerging themes that were refined across the dataset.

Exploring and reflecting on the practical considerations on the children and English teacher's voices in this study strengthened the interpretative process. It provided insight into the use of finger puppetry as a teaching strategy and the rights of children and teachers in the classroom. I examined the choices I made during the analysis and the influence they would have on the findings of this study. Linking with the previous chapter, I kept a record of all decisions made to maintain qualitative rigor. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that the analysis process continues while the research is being written up. The study findings drew on the thematic analytical framework and are presented in the following three findings chapters.

Chapter Seven: A "bottom-up" Analysis to Understand the Experiences of Young Children in Learning English-Speaking

7.1 Introduction

The findings are divided into three chapters to maximise understanding. Chapter seven is the first chapter and it analyses the education system in Qatar that operates in schools. It evaluates the authority, flexibility, stability and space that the teachers and children have in the classroom to run the teaching and learning process. Beginning the findings with this chapter provides the reader with the holistic context where the children are learning. It gives an insight into an environment where the teachers reflect on the teaching instructions used with the children in the classroom in relation to the system in which they are operating.

The second chapter analyses the teaching speaking strategies that the English teachers implement to teach children in relation to play-based pedagogy and the children's voices. It discusses the children's interactions with the strategies and their proposed strategies to learn English in a more enjoyable way. The third chapter facilitates the understanding of the influence of finger puppetry on the children's involvement and interest in English speaking lessons. The findings provide 'bottom-up' analytical perspectives from the children and teachers on the use of finger puppetry as an intervention. Diagram (7.1) depicts the three chapters in sequence.

The Education System in Qatar that Operates Schools: Teachers and Children's Standpoint.

Speaking Strategies used by English Teachers- Play-Based Pedagogy and Children's Voices.

Puppetry's Creative Potential does not have Place: Children's and Teachers' Evaluation of the Finger Puppetry Intervention.

Diagram (7.1): The three findings chapters.

This chapter addresses research question one, "How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this research?" It provides an insight into how the children experience learning English speaking in the Qatari classroom. It unpacks the background on how the children's rights to participate in matters related to their learning and voice their opinions is conceptualised by their teachers and the education system. The chapter reveals how the system influences the

practices that teachers maintain within school, the classroom and the impact it has on the children. This chapter contains two sections to address the first research question. The first section addresses the 'education system in Qatar' and the second section addresses the 'rights and voice of teachers and children within this system.'

1) Part One

7.2 The Education System in Qatar that Operates Schools: Teachers and Children's Standpoint

This section draws on the data collected from the participants on their day-to-day experiences in the classroom. The participants articulated their opinions and points of view regarding the educational system. To strengthen the understanding, I connected the data to pertinent literature, my own experiences as an ex- early childhood school teacher in this system, and my current role as a Senior Professional Development Specialist for teachers. This section discusses specific features of the educational system that governs government schools (authority, inflexibility and instability). This section also reveals how it affects the teacher's teaching practices, the children's involvement and how it shapes the experiences of learning English speaking.

7.2.1 System's Authority, Inflexibility and Instability: Top-Down Approach

"I'm restricted by the framework. […] you do not have the choice to not follow. It is not your choice. You have the curriculum, you have the guidelines and you will prepare your lesson plan according to this" (Maya's first interview, p.7 & 8).

The data collected from the English teachers, Maya and Sally, shows that they are subjected to a tight and regimented system. The majority of the teaching practices they engage in with the children in the classroom are determined and approved by those in charge of them in the educational system (the coordinator, who works at the school and supervises teachers, who mediates their duties and tasks and participates in assessing their performance. The Ministry of Education (MOE) Specialist, who works for the Ministry, visits the schools periodically to monitor the teachers' and coordinator's performance and competences, and evaluates them). The quote from Maya reveals that she feels unable to decide what to do to teach English because it is out of her hands. She is only able to do what is required of her by following the instructions in the guidelines. This indicates that a teacher's personal ideas and experiences are not valued in the teaching design. Similarly, the analysis of Sally's transcript reveals how authority is passed from the top-down through the Ministry Specialist and Coordinator to reach her:

Sally: *"[...] you will find in all the schools that [...] our specialist supervises have the same policies. All her schools follow the same rules. Like, [...] our coordinator, all of us here as teachers in this school and all teachers in the kindergarten building have to follow the same strategies and the same rules. We are following her policies"* (Sally's first interview, p.7).

This excerpt sheds light on Sally's limited options when choosing how to teach children English as a second language within the educational system she works in. Authority within the rigid system is transferred from the top to the bottom by the MOE Specialist to those who teach the children. The Ministry of Education appoints a specialist to each school to supervise curriculum implementation and the teacher's competences. The MOE Specialist ensures adherence to the curriculum and makes sure that all teachers follow the guidelines when teaching. The Coordinator follows this up with her teachers. Both the Coordinator and MOE Specialist must regularly refer to the MOE policies and strictly adhere to them. The teacher's experiences align with Akkary's (2014, p.184) investigation into the challenges of the Arabic reform. She explains that the educational system in Gulf countries involves top-down strategic policies that govern the national schools. The authorities that implement top-down educational policies disregard practitioner opinions regarding viability, responsiveness to the policies and the requirements of both the schools and children. The authorities force practitioners to implement the policies (Akkary, 2014).

Qatar follows this approach but hopes to decentralise the system by empowering school-level practitioners with increased decision-making authority (Brewer & Goldman 2010). Romanowski and Du (2020) argue that Qatar, until now, has followed top-down polices to improve the teaching practices and the children's achievements. Teachers have to

follow and implement the top-down practices into their classrooms. Maya echoed this idea:

Maya: "This is their belief.   Even though, regardless of your objectives, you are going to follow the textbook and you are going to follow the guidelines.   Regardless of your objectives and the way you write them, you are going to introduce the new words. You are going to introduce the new texts, either reading texts or listening texts, you are going to have closure at the end of the lesson. [...]" (Maya's first interview, p.18).

An analysis of Maya's transcript highlights that it is mandatory for teachers to follow the practices and policies the Ministry imposes. The teacher's voices are not listened to and they are not able to utilise their own plans and objectives in the classroom. This means that teachers are restricted to following predetermined teaching practices, textbooks and guidelines. It is an inflexible environment where specific teaching techniques are enforced.   Maya's excerpt reveals that there is no space for her to use teaching techniques that she believes are appropriate in the classroom. Maya's experiences solidify the literature findings (see Chapter 3) that show teachers have limited time to use their initiative because they are busy following the pre-set textbooks. I asked Maya whether she had explained her view to the Ministry Specialist to negotiate the policies with them. She said:

Maya: […] We told them […]. They did not accept it. They do not have a choice.

Researcher: Even the specialists?

Maya: Yes, even them. They don't have a choice I think.

Researcher: Who has the choice then?

Maya: I don't know. Their boss probably. The boss of the specialists.

Researcher: The boss of the specialists?

Maya: Yes, the head of the specialists I think. I am not sure (Maya's first interview, p.9).

Maya's frustration reflects how authority operates, dictates and impacts all educators within the system in a hierarchical manner. Maya is unclear about who is in charge of this power. The ambiguity of the top-down approach puts all educators, MOE Specialists, teachers and children in the same challenging situation because they must all adhere to the rigidity it creates. Maya's experience concurs with the conceptual analysis findings of Romanowski and Du (2020). They examined the current situation of Qatar's educational reform, which incorporated Project-based Learning (PBL), to boost the Qatar National Vision 2030. Qatar's national vision is to equip students with the skills they need for the 21st century.

All government schools must include creative and innovative teaching strategies. Romanowski and Du note that teachers have low autonomy because they have to follow the instructions disseminated by the Ministry and utilise specific lesson plan templates while planning. They explain that a limited number of options from the current textbook are available to teachers when selecting project topics (Romanowski & Du, 2020, p. 8). The children in this study realise that their teacher must function within a hierarchical authoritative structure and must do what is asked of her. Everyone within the institution must do what is required of them without questioning it. I asked the children about their role during the English class and whether they can give classroom activity suggestions to their teacher. Nastiya said, "*There is someone watching the screen and listening to it. We cannot change or suggest anything*" (First girl's group discussion, p. 5). I asked her to explain what she meant, she said:

Nastiya: […] the Miss cannot change it.

Researcher: Why? Have you ever asked her?

Nastiya: There are girls listening to her presentation from home. She cannot change.

Researcher: She cannot even change it for the girls who are studying from home. What do you think?

Nastiya: No, she cannot do that.

Researcher: Who told you that she could not change?

Nastiya: Me. I know that (First girl's group discussion, p.5).

Nastiya's quotes suggest that she is aware of the top-down restrictions placed on her teacher. During the COVID -19 pandemic, the children were rotated, with some learning from school and other from home. She explained that the teacher cannot alter her lesson presentation (the PowerPoint presentation used to teach the children) without justification. Nastiya exhibited strength in her belief but was perhaps nervous about this matter in front of me, as the researcher.

The lack of control over the materials resonates with Al-Obaidli (2010), who surveyed the opinions of female English teachers regarding their assigned tasks when carrying out the reform initiatives of 2002 in Qatar. Her findings parallel with the findings of this study. Her research shows that the teachers disliked the top-down approach of delivering the reform. Mustafawi and Shaaban (2019) argue that the education system in Qatar can only succeed if the policies are shared with all stakeholders and not in a top-down manner (p.211). Maya asserted her desire to be included in the forging of policies that impact her teaching: *"[…] they need to discuss the overview with us that we receive before every semester. […] I want something in the overview called "it is left with the teacher's choice".*

[…] There is nothing for teacher's choice and teacher's preference!" (Maya's second interview, p.8).

The conditions of the education system that operates through top-down authority forces teachers to follow a highly structured plan with no space for flexibility for new ideas. Implementing a pre-set MOE plan with the children enforces a school philosophy whereby teachers do not have the flexibility and space needed to contribute their own thoughts and practices. Maya explained that she cannot choose to not follow the guidelines and textbook. In this system, she is perhaps reduced to being a means of disseminating information to children. In contrast, despite the necessity of adhering to the MOE's mandated plan, Sally explained that she has some latitude in designing her lessons because of an element of flexibility that her school's MOE Specialist has:

Sally: "Their focus is on whether children understand or not. Have they engaged or not. That is all. They suggest for us to use strategies that increase engagement but what these strategies are our specialist did not mention" (Sally's first interview, p. 8).

Sally's transcript indicates that the standards for creating a lesson plan in her school are different from those in Maya's. For example, in the school that Sally is teaching, the children's comprehension and engagement are the main considerations. For Maya, the

focus is on adhering to the guidelines and the textbook without taking into account student understanding or involvement. The disparity in Maya's and Sally's experiences suggests that there is some flexibility with which schools can interpret the MOE's regulations and instructions. It seems that the policies are applied differently depending on the Ministry's Specialist administering them.

7.2.1.1 Children's Experiences of the Education System

The data collected from the children suggests that the authoritative and inflexible system affects them during the lesson in different ways. Classrooms are highly disciplined and the children conform to the restricted guidelines. For example, I asked them about their role during the English lesson. The majority said it is to sit politely, to pay attention to the teacher, and to respond to her questions. The children were eager to answer.

MS: I am sitting properly and listening to the teacher. We are sitting properly and quietly and when the teacher asks us a question we answer (First boy's group discussion, p.3).

King Qatar: I am at school and write what the teacher tells us to write (First boy's group discussion, p.12).

Daisy: I am just sitting and answering her questions.

Roro: I am sitting and listening to the teacher. I am answering her questions (First girl's group discussion, p.6).

Nastiya: I am sitting and writing. I do what she asks me to do.

Amaya: I follow and write the correct answer on the board. I read and listen to my teacher (First girl's group discussion, p.7).

The analysis of the children's excerpts reveals that they are being held to specific rules inside the classroom. For example, sitting properly, paying attention and following the teaching instructions. The excerpts establish that there is a consensus amongst the children that they must rigorously comply with the prescribed patterns of behaviour in the classroom. The children conform to the expected classroom behaviours without having space for a more flexible learning environment. It is almost as if there is no other way to behave during the English class. Two of the girls were eager to tell me about their assigned seats in the classroom during our conversation on their positions. I asked Nora where she positions herself in the class, and she replied, *"at the front of the classroom"* (First girl's group discussion, p.7). I asked whether she liked her current location and she responded "yes". Sara voiced her dissatisfaction with her choice of seating and said:

Sara: *I imagined myself here sat at the front.*

Researcher: *Where is your place now in the classroom?*

Sara: *I am sitting at the back now.*

Researcher: *Do you like it at the back or do you want to change it?*

Sara: *I want to change to the front* (First girl's group discussion, p.5).

Sara, who was seated at the back, stated that she would prefer to be at the front of the classroom. Government classrooms are laid out in rows with individual desks and chairs. The children sit behind one another at a desk and a chair. Consequently, some are positioned at the front of the row while others are at the back. The teachers assign children to seats according to specific criteria (placing low achievers with high achievers, putting active children with quiet children, and other factors depending on the teacher's goals). Figure (7.1) illustrates the classroom layout that almost all classrooms in the government schools in Qatar have. A few of the children expressed through their drawings their adherence to the rules by being polite in class and paying attention to the teacher. The children's drawings are represented in Figures (7.2), (7.3) and (7.4). The drawings represent their dedication to politely sitting in the chair, raising their hands to respond and listening attentively to their teacher. Their drawings of following regulations remind me of how much a system like this shapes their learning experiences. It implies

that the children place high value on conforming to the rules and expected behaviour during the class.

Figure (7.1): Layout of the seats in a government classroom in Qatar.

I am a polite student.

Figure (7.2): King Qatar's drawing (aged 7).

I raise my hand to answer.

I sit politely in the classroom.

Figure (7.3): Mecuri's drawing (aged 8).

Listen to the teacher.

Listen

Figure (7.4): Amal's drawing (aged 8).

The experiences of the children in this study corroborate what the literature discloses. It is proven in the literature that schools in Qatar continue to be operated by centralised state authorities regardless of Qatar's efforts to transform its educational system from a hierarchical bureaucratic and top-down system to a more decentralised and independent approach (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017; Akkary, 2014; Romanowski & Du, 2020). The experiences of children in the classroom are not dissimilar to those of their teachers. It can be argued that schools that have a top-down line of authority and rigid system hinder everyone from engaging in the teaching and learning process more freely.

7.2.1.2 Instability that Dominates the Education System

The data collected from the teachers indicates that the Ministry of Education frequently modifies the guidelines and policies it gives them. The teachers explained that the policies are unstable and susceptible to the MOE Specialist's subjective judgment. This leaves them confused and unsure of what to do (Mustafawi & Shaaban 2019). Maya described the situation with the MOE Specialist at her school: *"They don't have one policy. You have to follow their individual recommendations* (Maya's first interview, p.13). *[…] They contradict themselves all the time"* (p13). She went on to describe the erratic nature of the regulations she must abide by and referred to the specialist assigned to her school:

Maya: *"Two years ago there was a specialist believing that the best lesson is one that integrates the four skills, (listening, speaking, reading and writing). [...] but now they have made the main focus as the separation of the skills. Focus on one main skill, like today, the focus was on listening only. Tomorrow it will be reading, the day after it will be writing and then speaking"* (Maya's first interview, p.12). Sally reiterated the idea:

Sally: *"Each specialist has her own policy in her mind. [...] Even the lesson plan is different for different specialists. Some of them say that they want us to integrate structure and the target language together into the lesson plan. The new specialist, [...] said, "I want you to use the target language from the pre-reading phase of the lesson". For example, yesterday, the main structure of the lesson was, "there is a ..., there are..." She asked us to start using this structure to introduce the new words. We used to ask, "what can you see in this picture?" to introduce any new words. With our current specialist, we have to present new words using the new structure. For example, "there are hotels in my city." Hotel is the new word. [...] the previous specialist did not mention this before"* (Sally's first interview, p.7).

Maya's and Sally's comments indicate that the specialists have not unified their views on teaching approaches. Each has a unique way of interpreting the MOE regulations and different specialist ideas are implemented into the schools she supervises. Specialists are

rotated through schools. When one leaves a school to go to another and a new one arrives, it presents significant challenges for the teachers.   It means that everything they used to do must be updated to accommodate the new specialist which is both demanding and puzzling to them. An inconsistent process can mean that the teachers become apathetic about the standard of their own teaching. This finding is consistent with the finding of Al-Obaidili (2010) who found that the teachers in her study did not understand the demands of the *Education for a New Era* (*EFNE)* initiative reform and what they entailed in practice. They sought clarity from those in charge and requested additional visits to ensure that they were correctly putting such policies into practice. The apparent lack of clarity was a significant issue for teachers during the *EFNE* initiative implementation stages in Qatar's schools (p.244).

Teachers in this study were resigned to only completing the textbook with the children and to following the specialist's advice to appease them to prevent a dissatisfied assessment. As Maya described, *"She assesses you. She writes a report. She assesses the Coordinator and then she goes and sits with the Academic Vice Principal (AVP) to give her input about everything"* (Maya' first interview, p.13). Lack of agency can lower a teacher's confidence in having the ability to establish the best strategy for their children. I questioned Maya as to whether she had the ability to choose strategies from outside the educational framework despite of all the changes to the teaching instructions she was

exposed to. She explained, *"I have the ability but I am not sure it will suit my students"* (Maya's first interview, p.7).

As this quote illustrates, Maya was hesitant to introduce a new activity to her students. Perhaps she was concerned about it being appropriate for her children's educational level and receiving approval from the MOE Specialist. The restrictions placed on her teaching might be influencing her decision-making. The arguments presented by Maya and Sally correspond with the findings of Zellman et al.'s (2009) study which concentrates on the *EFNE* reform. They found an absence of guidelines for teachers to follow, which bewildered them. Gremm et al. (2018) argues that teachers do not have enough time to familiarise themselves with the teaching instructions and materials due to the rapid implementation of policies with no time for practice. This indicates that not much has changed since the reform in 2002.

The teachers in my study continue to believe that the policies are too rigid, not clear and ineffectively implemented in the classroom. They are not given enough time to put the activities into practice. Akkary (2014) argues that education is an interconnected system with initiatives being communicated throughout the school at classroom level. It involves stakeholders from the Ministry of Education and school practitioners. Mclaughlin (1990) points to the essentiality of communication between stakeholders and educators at the

school level. He suggests that policymakers support reform models that emphasis organisational structure and process regularities as sources of system stability. Mclaughlin (1990) argues that in a stable system, an educator who sees issues with the daily operations will call for organisational action. The system is responsive and encourages independent initiatives by individual practitioners. Maya and Sally were critical of instability and regular changes to the polices which aligns with Campbell and Rolls' (2017) findings. They discovered the Qatari students' unpreparedness for learning because of rapid changes to policies during the student's school life which negatively impacted their learning. One could claim that the instability and constant changes in policy interrupts the performance of teachers and students and affects the conceptualisation of children's rights in the classroom.

7.2.1.3 Authoritative System Impedes Creativity

The complex circumstances that teachers encounter can stifle creativity in the classroom. As Maya said, *"We are not given space to really innovate"* (Maya's first interview, p.4). This was evident in the teaching classes I observed with both teachers using direct teaching methods with no room for creativity. They presented the speaking lesson using a question and answer style. No illustration aids were used to help the students understand what the questions meant and how to utilise the information in their everyday life (Maya's first classroom observation, p. 1; Sally's second classroom

observation, p. 4). Maya commented, *"[…] I do not use that many of the strategies whilst teaching, speaking. […] I use […], only one or two of the strategies"* (Maya' first interview, p. 2). This observation corresponds with Gremm et al.'s (2018) investigation. They highlighted a lack of innovative teaching approaches in Qatari classrooms. They suggest that this is due to the teachers lacking the time needed to master new teaching methods. Gremm et al. (2018) explains that this leads to inadequate preparation and an inability to properly teach the children (p.163). This reflects Maya's recognition and dissatisfaction with the time available to teach properly:

Maya: "Forty-five minutes is a disaster. Each lesson needs at least one hour and a half. If you remember before like ten years ago, we had a block. We need more time to practise listening, reading, writing and speaking. Children need more time but we are jumping. We are really racing" (Maya's first interview, p. 18).

Maya draws attention to the instability of the policies they are required to follow when teaching. She is frustrated because the time permitted for the English class has changed from a block, which meant having sixty minutes, to the present situation of forty-five minutes. Despite the challenging circumstances and ongoing changes, she is focused on improving her teaching quality. For example, she recommends flexibility in the teaching schedule so then her lesson can be adequately delivered and the children have the time

needed to practise. This finding is in contrast with Akkary's (2014) discovery. She argues that teachers are expected to spend all of their time at school performing teaching activities because that is how their official roles are defined. She suggests that on an individual level, teachers lack the skills needed to analyse, think critically, generate unique ideas, or take initiative to improve their classrooms.

In my study, the teachers perform an official role and spend their time instructing but they are not able to discuss their opinions with those at the top of the hierarchy. Nonetheless, they have the capacity to generate innovative ideas to improve the teaching strategies and student learning but the rigid educational system, the constant change and the restricted space for them in which to negotiate their challenges or success experiences for improvement hampers their ability to behave critically and innovatively in the workplace. Teaching becomes bureaucratic and not a profession (Akkary, 2014).

The analysis of the results indicates that the rigidity and inflexibility of the education system in Qatar obstructs initiating a meaningful dialogue between the teachers and children in relation to language learning. For example, teachers are preoccupied with teaching and children are expected to follow the instructions. It is difficult to build meaningful relationships or communicate outside the textbook tasks. Consequently, teachers do not venture beyond the textbook activities and the students do not openly

express themselves and their ideas, or personal experiences in the classroom. In response to my question about whether Maya could enhance the educational experience in her classroom to benefit the children, she said:

Maya: "I don't think I can. I am not an octopus. Not everything is in my hands. I have so many responsibilities. I have duties and there are lines I can't cross. […] We don't have enough time. We only have forty minutes every day" (Maya's first interview, p. 21).

The data obtained from Maya shows that the MOE policies have overburdened her with duties. Her time in school is entirely taken up with teaching activities. She, therefore, does not have time to develop enriching child-focused conversations in the English lesson. Maya's children were in alignment with this idea and confirmed:

Nastiya, Daisy and Roro: *We raise our hands but she did not see us.*

Researcher: Why she did that?

Nastiya and Daisy: *Because she was teaching* (Second girl's group discussion, p. 14).

According to the children's transcripts, Maya is too busy teaching the lesson to 'see' or 'hear' their responses. Perhaps finishing the content of the scheduled lesson is more

important than talking and listening to the children. Through this lens, there is no room for two-way communication in the classroom because the authoritative tone and hierarchical power structure that flows from adult to child (Arnott & Wall, 2022). The teachers in this study adhere to a predetermined MOE plan which means that their interactions in the classroom are few. It is an atmosphere of completing educational system tasks and accomplishing assigned duties. According to Arnott and Wall (2022), children need a core belief that their learning environment is compassionate to facilitate confidence and security. Thus, barriers that limit the expression of opinions between adults and children must be overcome.

Arnott and Wall (2022) argue that both parties are developing a shared understanding and ways to communicate. Their viewpoint is consistent with the findings of my study. For example, the children were willing to share their personal experiences and form a relationship with me when they realised that I valued them, cared for them and gave them space to communicate and express themselves. In doing so, they shared a sense of belonging and safety when we met to talk about data collection process. They seized every opportunity to enthusiastically share information about themselves, their classmates and their family members. They interacted with me as if I were a close friend with whom they may discuss momentous occasions with.

When I met the children to discuss the information sheet (puppet book), they talked honestly about their daily lives and told family stories in an attempt to develop rapport. They spoke with me when I introduced myself and told them where I worked and went to university. Ninja contributed, *"My aunt works at Qatar University". "My uncles are from Kuwait"*, stated MS. King Qatar said, *"We will travel to Saudi Arabia"* (Reflection on meeting the children to discuss the information sheet, p. 2). The children incorporated me into their personal lives to develop a sense of closeness. They won't share their personal experiences unless they feel secure and safe in their surroundings.

It is worth noting that not all of the children were open with me about their aspirations and shared their personal stories, perhaps because they had decided I was a researcher and therefore an 'outsider'. James (2007) explains that the recognition of an adult as a group member, as an adult and not as a child, is a key factor in the relationship between the child and the researcher. It is a role that brings with it a range of inherent research process concerns. Being viewed as an 'outsider' might indicate that the child needs more time to feel secure in my presence. It might be that a different setting is needed, the child is not interested in the subject being researched or it could be that the child does not feel comfortable talking to an adult (me). It is evident in the literature that general cultural conceptions of power and control in generational relationships between children and adults can serve to reinforce the inherent power relationships, between researcher and researched in child research (Alanen & Mayall, 2003).

Every qualitative or quantitative conversation with a child, whether using task-oriented methods or not, runs the risk of failing to provide the context necessary for them to react in accordance with their own opinions. This is because, despite the fact that they may have provided informed consent, the children will have been given little opportunity to engage in a critical manner with the study aims and research process (Christensen, 2004). This could clarify why some of the children in my study were hesitant to share personal stories like their classmates did.

Children have distinct personalities which can explain why some were shy in my presence, as 'no one research approach fits all.' For example, most children felt comfortable around me but a few did not feel the same way. I maintained a comfortable atmosphere between the children and myself but the imbalance of power must be acknowledged. For example, some of the children were perhaps sensitive to the physical factors (i.e. body size) and social factors (i.e. power and control) which discouraged them from seeing the researcher as an "atypical adult" (Corsaro, 2005). In contrast, Daisy asked me to end the conversation prematurely so she could go home. I asked if she could wait a few minutes to finish the conversation properly so I could listen to her opinion, which was important to me. She understood and accepted my request. *"She nodded her head in agreement"* (Second girl's group discussion, p. 17). She respected the role I presented to all children when I first met them. I was a 'friend' and someone who wanted to listen to their perspectives to understand their learning experiences. It is critical for researchers who

work with children to spend time with them to alter their role as adults, otherwise the children will view them as "intimidating and overpowering" (Christensen, 2004, p.169). I altered my behaviour with Daisy to empower her, so then she could decide whether to complete the conversation for the study. This is not something she is accustomed to in school but was necessary to lessen the power disparity between the two of us.

7.3 Summary

This section had provided an insight into the education system in Qatar from the perspective of two early childhood English teachers and fourteen young children from two different primary schools (boys and girls). The peculiarities of the Qatari educational system were highlighted (authority, inflexibility, and instability) and how the teachers and children function within the system was explained.

The data revealed that the system places teachers within a controlled top-down hierarchical line of authority with the children at the bottom. From the top, teachers were given classroom-based teaching strategies to administer. The children were aware of the top-down approach that pervades all of their classroom sittings. They must sit politely, pay attention to the teacher and follow her instructions in the classroom. Nevertheless, there was a modicum of flexibility within the system. For

example, Sally explained that she can employ methods other than those found in textbooks if she is sure that children will understand and are engaged. The ambiguous manner in which each school interprets the MOE policies was a cause of erratic behaviour amongst the teachers, who maintain a sense of uncertainty. An authoritative system dominates, with traditional teaching methods in place where creativity was not encouraged.

Despite using a top-down approach, the method aimed to provide teachers with more autonomy and decision-making power. The goal of the system and the current practices were clearly at odds with one another. For example, when the MOE opted to employ new teaching strategies in the classroom, it mandated that teachers used pre-established lesson plan templates. The textbook was the only option for delivering the lesson. The teachers had a low level of authority and were unable to rectify the situation. Adherence to the strict top-down curriculum and rising rhetoric in support of teacher empowerment generated division within the system. Teachers had the ability to think creatively and offer ideas to enhance both their performance and the learning of their students. Teacher and child compliance with the system prevented them from talking to one another to share thoughts and feelings. They strictly followed a pre-designed plan and put it into action. There was no space for the teachers during the class to give feedback or reflect on what has been learnt because they did not have that room themselves.

2) Part Two

7.2.2 *"What Rights Do We Have!"*- The Rights and Voice of Teachers and Children: A Critical Analysis

This section analyses the teachers' perspectives and current classroom practices on the rights of children in Qatari schools in reference to the UNCRC (UNCRC 1989). It specifically sheds light on how the children's right to play, to have fun and to have the space to voice their opinions are interpreted according to the teachers' beliefs and practices, and are seen from the children's viewpoints. It helps to clarify the autonomy and space that the teachers possess within the teaching profession. It identifies the teacher's awareness on their behaviour and their attitudes toward the children.

The participant teachers expressed their thoughts on the rights they have in the education system. Maya stated, *"The teacher's opinion does not exist. How about the children's opinions?"* (Maya's first interview, p.12). Sally noted, *"[…] What are my rights? They are lost. They are totally lost"* (Sally's first interview, p.12).

The quotes from Maya and Sally illustrate that the teachers' rights and opinions are overlooked within the system they are working in. It appears that their voices are not valued by the Ministry of Education. Working within a highly structured framework (as

detailed in the previous section) means that one's autonomy, space and viewpoints are influenced by constraints. The teachers' voices in the educational system are limited. In the absence of her voice, Maya questions what happens to the voice of her children. In her quote, she indicates that having her own right to voice her point of view is essential for the children to have their opinion too. Similarly, Sally doubts the existence of her rights (autonomy and space). The teacher's ability to exercise their agency is hampered by a lack of space for doing so. Menken (2008) views teachers as arbiters or gatekeepers in implementation teaching guidelines. Menken's perspective is at odds with what Maya experiences. She remarked:

Maya: [...] last year we had a workshop with the Specialists on how to write objectives because they consider it a main issue. When Specialists attend schools they notice common problems. They say that teachers do not know how to write objectives. If we don't write objectives properly, we are not able to deliver the lesson sufficiently.

Researcher: You don't know how to write objectives so you are unable to teach children probably? This is what they believe?

Maya: Yes.   This is their belief (Maya's first interview, p.18).

A close reading of Maya's transcripts reveals that she has concerns about the specialist's belief in her ability to craft proper objectives and deliver effective lessons, as well as

understand the relationship between the writing objectives and delivering the lesson. It seems that teachers are not seen of as gatekeepers in their workplace. Maya highlights that whatever the specialist predicts or depicts ought to occur. The MOE arrange workshops for teachers to review the most recent edition of the textbook, which is always being updated, and to discuss important topics. For example, the writing objectives, which are continuously discussed. Being under the expectations of others can causes self-doubt, a decline in self-efficacy, and a loss of self-confidence. This corresponds with Wermke and Höstfält's (2014) comments. They argue that teacher autonomy is an essential component of the teaching profession and is positively correlated with perceived self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and a supportive work environment (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007; Wermke et al., 2019). These elements are essential in teacher motivation and the dedication to providing children with opportunities for effective learning (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007). Sally voiced her dissatisfaction with the work environment she is in. Her comment mirrors Cribb and Gewirtz's (2007) exhortations:

Sally: "*I have learnt new things, new theories and practices but I can't carry them out in my teaching. No one can support me in implementing what I have learnt. I feel I am studying something and school reality is something different*" (Sally's first interview, p.13).

Sally was completing her Master's degree in Education in the United States of America when conducting this research. Sally's quote demonstrates that she has the inner potential and motivation to make decisions regarding content and teaching issues, regardless of the unsupportive work environment, but feels constrained. Individual autonomy, according to Frostenson (2015, p. 24), is the capacity of the individual to influence the content, frameworks and controls of the teaching practice. Maya tries to create space to exercise autonomy within her teaching practices. For example, using agency to provide children with activities in spite of specialist disagreement. She wants to independently increase her sense of autonomy:

Maya: "[…] you give them (learning activities) as homework and you have to hide that from the specialist because she will be upset if you do not focus on the same main skill/s. […]. We need to be given freedom" (Maya's second interview, p.8).

The experiences of Maya and Sally with individual autonomy run counter to the study findings of Lennert da Silva and Mølstad (2020). They worked with two teachers in Brazil and Norway to find out about accountability in the education system. They discovered that the teachers had to adapt to a predetermined curriculum but both were satisfied with their autonomy and freedom. For example, they were allowed to choose their own teaching practices and methods of implementation. The data retrieved in this study in Qatar shows that the teachers want the freedom to practise their profession, which

indicates that they are not autonomous in their workplace. I questioned Maya as to whether she can increase her autonomy by discussing it with the MOE Specialists, and she replied:

Maya: [...] There is no point in discussing or sharing your thoughts with them because they will do what they want in the end.

Researcher: So, you need to follow what they have said?

Maya: Yes, you have to follow. You can express your opinions, but no one will take them seriously. It is just an opinion. Who cares whether you express it or not? Who cares? (Maya's first interview, p.9).

The analysis of Maya's remarks reveals that there is scope for teachers to voice their opinions and space to express their thoughts but Maya believes that there is no point because her voice is weightless for those in the MOE. She believes it will not constructively impact the learning process. She voiced her frustration on her inability to creatively impact the content she is teaching by saying:

Maya: "[...] At the end of the year they give us a questionnaire. We write down our opinions about the curriculum, we give it to the Coordinator and the Coordinator gives it

to the Specialist. This happens across all the schools and nothing changes. The year after, all the comments that the teachers provided are still there. Nobody takes these recommendations seriously" (Maya's first interview, p.16).

As this quote illustrates, Maya is capable of making decisions about the textbook she teaches but her decisions have little bearing on the content. She is indirectly controlled by the system, where influencing her own teaching practices and content is virtually impossible. For example, her right to share decision-making in the classroom with the children is not carried out. Instead, she is shaped by the restrictions placed on her. Her experience aligns with Cheng and Wei's (2021) insights into the top-down structure where power is unequally distributed among people, which stratifies them. I questioned Maya about whether her coordinator had attempted to bring up this matter with people in the MOE who had received comments on the textbooks. She replied:

Maya: "She does not know. It is wasting our time.   If you don't want to take my opinion seriously, then why do you waste my time asking me to complete a questionnaire? Do what you want to do but don't waste my time" (Maya's first interview, p.16).

A closer analysis of Maya's excerpt reveals that she is disappointed with how people 'treat' and 'listen' to her voice. Not appreciating the teacher's input can discourage them

from being productive and cause them to lose faith in being gatekeepers. Examining Maya's agency in being able to express her opinions on top-down policy implementation highlights how the teachers "claim authority to re-claim, re-envision and re-enact their realms" in the power system by examining the practice of authority in such a situation (Ramanathan, 2005, p. 99). The teachers' experiences are consistent with Liu et al.'s (2020) findings. They examined teacher agency in the context of changes to the Chinese policy related to English education. They discovered that the policy restricted the teachers but they were able to exercise agency in contexts where policy dominates (p.555). The teachers were able to interpret the policy and used it as a guide for their teaching practices. Liu et al. (2020) explained that once the policy had become routine for the teachers and part of their teaching, it felt natural to put it into practice. This finding contradicts Maya's viewpoint. It is suggested in the literature that policy imposes boundaries on the teacher's teaching techniques (Liu et al., 2020).

The Ministry of Education hosts discussions and workshops on educational processes for the teaching and administrative staff of government primary schools. The goal is to resolve any differences of opinion regarding the organisation of daily studies with a focus on the analysis of their content, questions, and teaching methods (United Nations Digital Library System, 2001, p.27). According to Maya, the Ministry does not regard her opinions in such a way. Her voice is not listened to or heard. For example, she submitted feedback on the curriculum but the Ministry did not act upon it. Maya self-

implements the MOE's top-down policy but she does not feel comfortable with its limitations. Perhaps she is expressing her discontent at the agency's lack of acknowledgement.

7.2.2.1 Children's Voices in the Classroom

The data collected from the seven- and eight-year old children shows that children have little space to exercise their rights. They do not have time to discuss any of the issues related to their learning in the classroom. I asked the children whether they are able to speak during the English class and discuss ideas around the taught material. All of the participant boys said "No" (Second boy's group discussion, p.13). The girls said:

Nastiya: No.

Roro: Very little.

Daisy: Half. Half.

Nora: When we want to talk. She said no.

Researcher: […] Why? […].

All girls asked me, "Why"?

Researcher: I don't know! […] Can you tell me?

Roro: *Because she was explaining and the final examinations had become close, so there was no time* (Second girl's group discussion, p.15).

The quotes from the children suggest their awareness of the limited space available to share their thoughts about the learning in the classroom. They understand that teaching and learning for examination is more important than discussing and contributing to the lesson. The children agree with the idea that the teacher is too busy teaching and completing the required tasks to provide 'space' 'time' and 'listen' to them. The children regularly communicated that the space to express themselves in the class was very limited and nearly lacking. I asked them whether the teacher listened to them if they spoke to her. They replied:

MS: *No.*

Mecuri: *No, she does not. We do not suggest anything to her at all.*

Researcher: *[…] Why not?*

Mecuri: *I do not have the mood to suggest to her.*

Researcher: *[…] Why not?*

MS: (Interrupted the dialogue [...]), if we talk to her she will not listen to us. She will continue teaching and explaining without paying attention to us (Second boy's group discussion, p.14).

The children, like their teachers, realise that there is no place for their thoughts in the educational system. They claimed unequivocally that if they spoke to their teacher, she might not listen because she had to finish the textbook on time. The data reveals a dilemma. Both the children and teachers do not feel as though they are being heard. Instead of attempting to interrupt the pattern, the teachers replicate the Ministry's approach with the children. The children have realised that their voices did not carry weight. For example, Mecuri is resigned to the situation: "*I am not in the mood to suggest her*". These children possess decision-making skills, cognitive ability and are aware of their place in the system. They have adjusted themselves to accommodate it. Sara voiced her opinion: *"I do not say anything to my teacher. I do not suggest"* (Second girl's group discussion, p.6). Daisy noted, *"She did not ask us to suggest her any activity."* Nastiya reiterated Daisy's comment and said, "S*he did not"*. Nora affirmed by, "*Shook[ing] her head"* (Second girl's group discussion, p.15).

The analysis of the children's excerpts indicates that the children's right to express their views on issues related to their learning is ignored and not heard. They are passive recipients and follow the predefined adult agendas. According to Sommer et al. (2010),

the children's views cannot be considered by adults in the absence of them. Yet, the children have to express themselves and adults need to comprehend their perspectives as being their unique development of meaning. In Qatar, educators opt to make decisions on children's education without consulting them. The children's experiences do not reflect Article 12 of the UNCRC because children have to be recognised as experts who are competent in their own lives and active agents who can voice their opinions and influence their surroundings.

Lansdown (2005) asserts that all children, regardless of their age and communication language, are capable of expressing views. She emphasises the necessity of listening and considering children's perspectives. There is a discrepancy between what is indicated in the literature and the children's experiences in my study. Qatar mentioned in the report submitted by state parties in (1997) under Article 44 of the Convention that the Ministry of Education is to "give students an opportunity to express their views and concerns regarding education, school curricula and teaching methods" (United Nations Digital Library System, 2001, p.27). Perhaps educators take on the responsibility of the children's issues and drive their own interests in children's educational settings, despite the state of Qatar's declaration that children have the right to voice and participate in issues pertaining to their education.

Maya and Sally have explained that the children's educational experiences omit their right to express views on their learning matters. I asked Sally whether she seeks her children's opinion on the teaching strategies she uses in English speaking lesson, and she openly declared:

Sally: No, I did not try to ask them, but they say.

Researcher: For themselves?

Sally: Yes. I told you that today they did that. They said, "Miss we want to play". I said, "okay". They said, "yesterday's game". I said, "okay, I have a new one, wait".

Researcher: Have you ever asked them how they feel about this game or if they like it or not?

Sally: No, I feel it from their level of engagement [...] (Sally's first interview, p.10).

Maya echoed Sally's experience:

Maya: "Honestly, no I haven't and I know what they are going to say. [...] I know what they want. They want something fun. They want videos and songs. They like visual prompts. They like games, dolls and puppets. Yes, they like that. You can see it in their

faces. They want more of that and we don't use much of that. We have to catch up all the time" (Maya's first interview, p. 17).

Maya and Sally's extracts highlight that the teacher's understanding of the need for the children's voices to be heard is very limited. They are not exposed to this practice in their teaching profession. Seeking the children's opinions about their learning is non-existent in the classroom. Višnjić-Jevtić et al. (2021) recommends that educational institutions should encourage children to take an active role in their own education. They argue that the limited children's participation that occurs in education is due to the hierarchical structure of educational institutions where adults impart knowledge to children, who are viewed as passive receivers (p. 12). The teachers assume the children's preferred learning style without seeking their voice on the matter. They surmise what motivates and engages children. The two participant teachers emphasise the sense of knowledge and concern for the children. The children and teacher's declarations on the limitation of the children's participation and inability to express their views freely is reflected in the field notes taken whilst observing the classes. The classes were designed to examine how finger puppetry influences the children's interest and how the children's rights are conceptualised in classrooms. The children's cognitive abilities are frequently not trusted by educators. Consequently, their voices are ignored and not sought. They are considered as 'becoming' and not as 'being' in the world (see section 3.3).

During the teaching of English speaking to the children using finger puppets, Sally requested a boy ask and answer a question about the weather using his finger puppet. The boy asked and answered correctly but answered differently from the answer provided in the textbook, saying "It is sunny". He provided a real-time answer based on the current weather and not the weather described in the textbook. She corrected him by asking him to say the answer written in the textbook. The textbook said that said it was cloudy and the boy said this (Sally's first classroom observation, p2).

The children are restricted to following the information detailed in the textbook. It was not possible for him to refer to the real life setting to answer his question in this instance. It is evident that the children do not need to utilise their intellectual ability since they only need to repeat the existing content. Being in these classroom environments forces the children to transition from being children with choices, voices, and opinions (being) to robotic children (becoming), who must follow the textbook without any input from their side. It means that their cognitive talents are not recognised and trusted by adults, preventing the children from saying what was appropriate in the circumstances.

With this in mind, the message being transmitted to the children is that we do not care as much about you as we do about following and completing the textbook. The observation corresponds with Al-Hassan's (2022) research setting experiences. She

investigated the children's experiences of nursery activities in Jordan. She contends that nursery children are capable of expressing their preferred activities but adults usually view them as incompetent and rarely listen to them. The lack of children's right to participate in their learning resonates with the idea that Jordan, like other Middle Eastern and North Africa (MENA) countries, lack work on children's voices. The children's voice is limited and rarely appears in their settings (Al-Hassan, 2022) and the same is true in Qatar.

The transcript provided by Sally shows that the children actively pursued their right to participate in their education (seeking to play a game from yesterday) despite the limited space for them to do so.   The children in this study demonstrate that they are 'being' in their world in their own unique way. They have the capacity to 'be' and 'seek' their rights when the opportunity presents itself. Their responses to my question as to whether they would like to do another drawing, to change their position in their English class, were strong indications of this.

Roro: I want to go out to the board and answer questions.

Nora: I want to read.

Nastiya: I would like to answer questions.

Amaya: *Read and go out to the board.*

Sara: *Read and participate in answering the questions"* (First girl's group discussion, p.8).

The children's quotes reveal their awareness of their right to participate in the learning process (go to the board, answer questions and read). They need to be involved in the classroom. They do not appear to uphold their fundamental rights as something necessary to engage in class because their rights are not acknowledged in the classroom. Accordingly, they are not heard or listened to. Educators are required by Article 12 to listen to children and provide a safe space for them to voice their opinions (Lansdown, 2005). The insufficient time that the teachers have to properly teach (Gremm et al., 2018) and listen to their children results in the basic right to move to the board or answer questions being overlooked. Perhaps there are no grounds for such a requirement in these schools. Some of the children provided suggestions regarding changing their position drawn in the English class. They voiced their opinions in an emotional, humorous and enjoyable manner:

Benten: *Draw my whole body.*

Researcher: *[…] Why?*

Benten: *To show how it feels.*

King Qatar: *I would like to draw myself running and playing football.*

Kai: *[...] I would like [...] to be with you going on a rocket to the moon.*

Researcher: *[...] That is interesting but we are in the English lesson.*

Kai: *Yes, shall we take the whole school and fly away.*

Researcher: *Why you would like to go to the moon?*

Kai: *To have fun there* (First boy's group discussion, p.5).

These quotes show that children want to play and have fun because they need to express themselves, use their competences and be heard. For example, Benten wanted to depict his entire body and not just his face to creatively convey how he was feeling. This suggests that Benten needs to be visible in the classroom, as well as heard and given attention. King Qatar yearned to exercise and play football because he missed doing so in school. Kai's offer to take a trip to the moon and have fun there suggests that he was looking for a pleasurable atmosphere. He intended to take the entire school and for them to have fun together. He seems to subscribe to the proverb, "the more the merrier."

The children created fascinating drawings to communicate their need to play during the English class. Figures (7.6), (7.7) and (7.8) are examples. The drawings are a stark reminder of how their rights are currently restricted by the limited time and space. It

hinders their ability to learn. The children have an innate need to enjoy themselves in a stimulating and creative learning environment. Educational systems need to pay attention to this so then the children can experience their rights. Višnjić-Jevtić et al. (2021) acknowledges that today's children face many threats and challenges and lack their essential rights but are capable of realising and expressing them. Lansdown (2005) notes that children, regardless of age, are "experts" in what interests them and suits their everyday lives. She explains that they are "skilful communicators", who are capable of articulating their needs and experiences (p.1).

Figure (7.5): Daisy's drawing (aged 7).

Figure (7.6): XR's drawing (aged 7).   Figure (7.7): Roro's drawing (aged 7).

The participant teachers agree that children have a right to be in an enjoyable environment and have space in it to express themselves. I asked Maya and Sally about their interpretation of children's rights in the classroom. They both perceived the need for play in the classroom as essential and the children's absolute right to learn in a joyful setting. Maya explained, *"They have the right to learn, they have the right to be happy to be at school, they have the right to be happy in an English class. Everything is forced on them. It is forced on me"* (Maya's first interview, p. 20). Sally discussed the rights her children have in the classroom and referred to the equal opportunity to learn. She explained that we need to respect children as human beings who talk and express

themselves. She mentioned that we must offer them a chance to learn what interests them. She said:

Sally: "He has a right as a child to learn. If he is a low achiever student, he has the right to learn and I need to do my best to teach him and respect him. […] So his right as a human being is to be respected and for me to teach him" (Sally's first interview, p. 12). *They have the right to speak, to express themselves, to give them a chance to learn whatever they want to learn. […] Why all students have to learn this particular English book? Why? […] 'MS' […]. I think he has the right to learn according to his level, according to his interest"* (Sally's second interview, p. 8).

The comments from the teachers show that they understand that their children have rights. They both agreed that there should be a sense of having rights, regardless of the fact that they each interpret the rights differently. Maya emphasised the importance of being happy at school to produce positive learning experiences. Children are delighted and joyful when their demands are granted (i.e. play and participating in their favourite things). King Qatar explained that happiness is connected to practicing sports. He voiced, *"I am standing […] happily […] I am doing sports"* (First boy's group discussion, p.4). Sally focused on how important it is for children to have human rights (to be respected) and to be given the freedom to learn what interests them and suits their abilities. This discovery differs from Theobald's (2019) argument. She contends that the knowledge and

individual position held by adults is intertwined with children's rights, giving children the ability to exercise their rights.

The teachers in my study, have an adult perspective on children's rights in their classrooms but are unable to put it into practice because of their status within the hierarchy. Maya acknowledged the rights of her children but declared that she was powerless to do anything about. The data suggests that teachers tend to overlook the children's right to play and focus on their responsibility to teach and complete the textbook. This suggests that teachers have become reticent in questioning the limitations imposed upon them and that teaching is the only thing they can do to help their children.

Maya's experience can be 'unpacked' by contextually understanding the situation of children's rights in Qatar. For example, in a report submitted by Qatar, under article 44 of the UNCRC, it explains that the Qatari National Committee for Education, Culture and Science urges school principals to provide students the freedom to voice their viewpoints. This enables children to use their rights in a way that is in line with their developing abilities (United Nations Digital Library System, 2001, p.10).

Despite the country's awareness of children's rights, there have been challenges in putting the regulations into practice. Mr. Filali, the Country's Rapporteur, comments that

whilst the legislation is improving, there is minimal experience with putting the law into practice (NGO Group for the Convention on the rights of the Child, 2009, p. 2). Attar (2022) highlights that school children are unable to voice their rights in classrooms because the schools follow a rigid framework that the children have to adhere to. This finding is consistent with Theobald's (2019, p. 254) recommendation for a closer relationship between policy initiatives and the implementation of early childhood rights. Višnjić-Jevtić et al. (2021, p.12) argue that the majority of children who are vulnerable (live in conflict zone or poverty) do not even get the chance to exercise their right to an education. They conclude that although policy guarantees that every child has the right to education, this entitlement is not always upheld in practice.

The data gathered from Sally and her children shows that children's rights can be observed in the classroom only in certain conditions. I asked Sally what she does when she knows her children's preferred activity. She said, *"I try to encourage them to finish the lesson. [...] I tell them if you would like to play a game, let us finish our lesson quickly. Let us finish the main activity in the textbook to move to the game. [...]"* (Sally's first interview, p. 9).

If rights are to be given, certain conditions must be met and implemented. Children in the classroom are not entitled to any free rights. Rights are versus duty and responsibility

requirements. I asked the children if they had a preference and if so, did they tell the teacher about it? Two of the children concurred with Sally's point of view. Benten noted, *"If we sit politely, we can ask her to take us out to play in the playground"* and Mecuri added, *"[...] She said if there is time, we can go out to play"* (First boy's group discussion, p. 8). The children's lives are intertwined with those of adults but their rights should not be conditional on adult obligations or duties. Exercising agency and conducting duties with responsibility should be promoted in the classroom (Theobald, 2019).

The analysis of the results shows that increasing the children's right to voice their opinions on matters relevant to them in classroom is the Ministry's duty. Regulations and instructions flow from it, down to educators, to be applied to children. It is a 'top-down' authority. Teachers, for example, cannot provide 'time' and 'space' for children unless the Ministry allows them to do so. They have to get permission if they want to attempt something different with them. In response to my question about whether Maya could help increase the voice of children in the classroom, she said:

Maya: I think it has to do [...] from the Early Years Learning Department, from the Ministry of Education not from the teachers. I mean teachers are trying to do their best but teachers are restricted and their freedom is limited in a way you cannot imagine.

Researcher: So, you believe it is the Ministry's responsibility to raise the voices of children?

Maya: Yes, because teachers are just a small part from this whole big picture.

Researcher: Okay. What do you think can be done?

Maya: […] I think teachers should spend more time with students. The […] way of teaching should be a little bit different. Students should not be stuffed with information and new structure, new vocabulary every day. They need to practise more. They need to be given time to practise with what already had studied. They do not have enough time to practise anything either in Arabic, in English or even in Math. Every day there is new material to present across all subjects. […] There was nothing called activities in English where teacher just walk in the class and has different activities with students. Activities on social lives, activities on the English language, or whatever, we do not have time for that. Every day we walk into the class with a new reading or writing lesson. […] (Maya's second interview, p. 7 & 8).

The quotes from Maya highlight the teacher's reduced status within the Ministry and their impact on raising the voices of children. They only represent a 'small part' of the educational system. Maya is an advocate for introducing new facets into the educational system to enable and strengthen the children's potential to have a voice. For example, teachers spend quality time communicating and practicing newly learned skills with their children. Children should not be overloaded with information; instead, they should be given a variety of activities that develop their competency. She states that children are

inundated with information every day without giving them opportunity to put what they have learnt into practice. This infers that a child's duty in a school is to memorise and repeat the material from the textbook. It is reminiscent of the educational system in the 1990s when learning was centred on knowledge transfer. It required the students to memorise concepts and subject matter (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017).

Maya argues in favour of providing extra activities that go beyond what is covered in the textbook, with children encouraged to express their ideas and points of view. Sally has a similar vision of going beyond the textbook by providing the children with learning activities that cater to their skill level and needs. She wants autonomy over the time restrictions the Ministry places on her. Sally hopes that by doing this, both her right to try out new things with children and the children's right to express their preferences and interests will increase. She explained:

Sally: *"We should not stick with the curriculum timeline they drew for us. If I stick with the curriculum timeline, children could not speak. It is more logical, than all students learning the same textbook at the same time. […] If we took […] children and put them in a group that suits them, they will learn better, have opportunity to play the activity that suite their interests and they have more options to express their choices and to practise what they prefer to practise. […] Also, if they did that, I can increase my rights in the classroom not*

only increasing children's rights in the classrooms. I can get the right to try such an activity with this group or with that group. I can try different activities and strategies with different students' level" (Sally's second interview, p. 9 &10).

Maya and Sally draw attention to the idea that Wall and Arnott both (2022) endorse. They state that "voice work is cumulative" (p. 154). It means that teachers and children engage in continuous discussions, exchange and communicate ideas and partake in the creation of meaning. Continuous engagement happens when teachers have the time and space to provide their children with the space to express themselves. Voice work can begin at the Ministry level by them reducing the restrictions on teachers so then they can initiate voice work with children. Maya and Sally expressed a need to closely interact with the class content and their children. Wall and Arnott (2022) encourage voice work as a way to make participation natural for everyone in the community. The teachers' comments highlight how busy their schedule is during the school day. The crowded schedules of both teachers and students can prevent voice work from happening and lessen the chance of meaningful interaction. The discoveries of this study are consistent with Blaisdell's (2022) findings. She ensures that by taking a flexible approach to time, the space for voice work can be increased. A hectic schedule at school prevents children from creating intentional spaces where they can communicate with others or express opinions (Blaisdell, 2022).

According to the data collected, teachers are responsible for educating children about their rights in order to reinforce those rights. I asked Maya and Sally if they felt responsible for promoting children's rights in the classroom. They responded:

Maya: "[…] I think it is the teacher's responsibility to make them aware of their rights. Not only increase them. Just make them aware of their rights. What they can do and what they cannot do. What they are entitled to do. […] I think the teacher must play a role […]" (Maya's second interview, p. 7).

Sally: […] it is the society's responsibility, the school, the teacher.

Researcher: […] So you are part of that responsibility. What is your responsibility?

Sally: […] if I discover that my students like to learn by using finger puppetry, I have to give them more chances to do that (Sally's second interview, p. 8).

The transcripts show that teachers share accountability for upholding the children's rights in the classroom. Maya mentioned that her responsibility is to raise the children's understanding of their rights. For example, what they are allowed and not allowed to do, rather than increasing them. She might concentrate on the rules and guidelines of the classroom that the students are expected to follow as a form of classroom management.

Sally pointed out that everyone has a responsibility to protect the children's rights (society, the school and herself). She stressed the importance of her side's rights in the education system. She explained that she would like to use a teaching technique that the children enjoy. Teachers want the Ministry to guarantee and uphold their rights and voices so the they can help their children understand and exercise their rights and voices in the classroom, which is aligned with Wall and Arnott's (2022) argument. They say that an adults' voice might make the children's voice practice a successful activity.

7.4 Summary

This section of chapter seven had addressed the first research question. It discussed teacher autonomy and the extent they can exercise their rights in the classroom. It covered, time, space, and subject matter. It analysed the influence of teacher rights on the children's right to participate and voice their thoughts. It explained how challenging it can be for teachers and children alike to comprehend, apply and uphold rights in the classroom. It established that teacher autonomy in determining academic content and the teaching environment is overlooked by the MOE. Ropo and Valijarvi (2010) explain that Finnish teachers are awarded autonomy because their professionalism is trusted. According to them, this practice is inconsistent with the context in Qatar since it suggests that the MOE does not trust the teachers' techniques and experiences, which is why the control is based on such practices.

Autonomy is essential in the teaching profession as it correlates with fluidity and self-confidence. Brown et al. (2021) argues that agentic teachers who receive the trust and support of their institutions will pick up on innovative approaches. In this study, the teachers exhibited dissatisfaction with the deactivation of their agency. Nevertheless, they made every effort to exert influence over the material they teach and the teaching methods they use. They passionately advocated for the raising of standards for both their teaching and the children's learning. They followed the guidelines but have issues with them. Lack of teacher agency and autonomy had a negative impact on the rights of children in the classroom. For example, the children were unable to effectively express their views on topics important to them because the teachers were too busy teaching for the exam.

The English teachers recognised that children have the right to play and learn in an interesting atmosphere but the practice of completing the imposed textbook prevents this from happening. Children were not considered 'experts' of their own lives and consequently, adults make decisions on their behalf. Teachers were currently unable to facilitate the children's rights to learn, be happy, talk and choose their preferred learning strategy. It sounds that it is challenging for Article 12 of the UNCRC to be effectively embedded into Qatar's school education setting. The main obstacles to activating Article 12 of the UNCRC for effective rights delivery for children have been identified as inconsistent policies, lack of coordination, and the "joined-up working" (Byrne & Lundy,

2015) of MOE Specialists. The failure of the MOE Specialists to work together effectively has exceptionally tragic consequences for the children and can contribute to poor education (Byrne & Lundy, 2015, p.270).

Chapter Eight: Speaking Strategies Used by English Teachers- Play-Based Pedagogy and Children's Voices

8.1 Introduction

This chapter extends the discussion on the children's right to play, participate and interact with English teaching strategies. It addresses the second research question: "In what ways are teaching strategies in Qatar informed by the voice of children and teachers and how would young children in Qatar like to learn to speak English as a foreign language?" It explores how children want to learn English and whether their preferred way of learning is currently provided in their English lessons. The question is answered contextually according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, this chapter analyses Article (31) on the children's right to play and the extent to which play-based pedagogy is incorporated into Qatari English classrooms. This chapter is comprised of two parts.

The first part gives data about the children's suggested method of learning English and the opportunities offered for them in the existing classrooms. Since listening to children is the primary aim of this study, I presented part one first to make sure that readers are aware of the findings of part two of the chapter (9.6), "Existing Teaching Practices: Children's and Teachers' Voices". The second part investigates including the children's voices and teachers' when forming speaking techniques.

The second part discusses the features of the current teaching strategies and how play-based pedagogy might act in a strict learning context. It discusses the lack of children's perspectives when creating English speaking strategies.

Each section is an analysis of the data gathered from the children and teachers. The analysis reveals that children prefer to learn English through different modes of play but play is not a common practice in government schools in Qatar. It establishes that teachers rarely use play-based pedagogy when teaching speaking in English and that they experience significant challenges. This chapter adds to the literature on children in Qatari classrooms and highlights that they cannot learn English speaking without including play as a technique. It documents the children's desire for play and their feelings regarding the lack of play. This study is designed to identify potential English-learning strategies for early years children through discussions and activities with the children and teacher participants.

1) Part One

8.2 What Can We Learn from Children as Being Learners of English?

This section explores the potential opinions and perspectives that children have on learning English as a second language in Qatari classrooms. My classroom observations were not to understand how children learn English in both schools but to see how their voices were perceived and how finger puppetry was used in the classrooms. I state this as a preface to say that the data provided in this part comes from the children's ideas and how they communicate their desires of learning. That said, research shows that children need space and freedom with a less structured approach to express their thoughts (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2021; Jamison, 2004), so the children were given space to express their views on their own learning.

All the children in this research indicated that to be an English learner, it is essential to have fun and engage in playful activities in the English lessons and it is a preferable way to learn it. They recommended the types of play found in the literature on play (King & Howard, 2014; Van Gils, 2007; Whitebread et al., 2012) (hands-on activities, drawings, colouring, using playdough, doing slime, playing with blocks, puzzles and Legos). The types of play recommended by the children to learn English are ineffective in the Qatari context (see section 8.4). The children voiced their opinions:

Kai: I love to play with the teacher.

Mecuri: Learn through playing [...] (First boy's group discussion, p.7 & 9).

Sara: Puzzles, I like to do puzzles every day because I do not have them at home.

Amaya: Educational games like, cardboard.

Researcher: [...] What would you do with cardboard?

Amaya: Draw on it, then play with it.

Amal: Construct words and a word game (Second girl's group discussion, p. 5 & 7).

The children's comments seem to support that they are mindful of their own learning and want to learn in a unique playful way. Amaya, for example, explained that educational games help her learn. Visual activities, such as drawing on cardboard and then playing with it, would benefit her learning. Sara is interested in solving puzzles as an activity to aid her learning about a topic. Perhaps she views it as her right for the school to provide her with unique playful experiences that are not accessible at home. She might expect her classroom learning environment to facilitate vibrant learning experiences that nurture her mind and develop her problem-solving skills (such as puzzles). This finding supports King and Howard's (2014) finding, who discovered that the children in their research requested more activity types at school than in the home environment.

Doing puzzles in the classroom suggests that play is not enough on its own for Sara, and that more important to consider are the learning environment and her interactions with her classmates in play situations. The children consider the school as a place where they learn and want the learning to be an enjoyable experience. They consider the home as separate from learning and not a place to learn.

Other groups of children explained that learning through engagement with hands-on activities is preferred. They said:

Daisy: *[...] make things using hot glue.*

Nastiya: *I can suggest that Miss Maya asks us to do a kite or a paper fan [...].*

Roro: *We can enjoy the English lesson by using playdough. Teacher can ask us to do different things, [...]* (Second girl's group discussion, p. 7 & 12).

The analysis of the children's perspectives suggests that they want to learn English by doing and constructing things. They expressed a desire to use their own initiative to incorporate interesting activities in the classroom such as making models, kites or paper fans or constructing objects out of playdough or hot glue. Their discussion suggests that having different modes of doing and constructing in the classroom with a less restricted

pedagogy is critical for them to learn. This kind of learning does not exist in their typical classroom setting (see section 8.6). This data suggests teachers need to be ready and aware of letting the children have a say in initiating how their learning experiences might be prepared, performed and developed, with them following the lead of their students (Sylva et al. 2004; Walsh et al., 2011). This raises a critical question as to what extent do children have choice and autonomy over their play.

The children's advocacy to include their involvement and voicing their preferences in such activities with support from their teacher reinforces the Vygotskian understanding that children learn in a social context with adults as scaffolders to their learning (Walsh et al., 2011, p. 108), as Roro noted: *"We can enjoy the English lesson by using playdough. Teacher can ask us to do different things"* (Second girl's group discussion, p. 12). The children understand the importance of choosing activities in the classroom and that the teacher has a supporting role in the process. This finding supports the finding of Sylva et al. (2004) which shows that the best learning methods might include expanding child-initiated play while also offering teacher-initiated activities. These children's suggestions might mean that they want to contribute to their learning and be an active actor rather than passive. They organise their own learning desires based on their social and cultural lives (Van Gils, 2007).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31 (1), explains: "States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (UN General Assembly, 1989). Building on this right, the format and type of play are not specified. Play can take many forms in a variety of contexts across a diverse range of abilities (Davey & Lundy, 2011; Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

The variety of play forms is reflected in the children's thoughts on it. They envisioned it as participation in leisure activities appropriate for their age and learning context. Kai, for example, explained, *"I love to play with the teacher"* and Mecuri stated, *"learn through playing".* Both mention play and leisure as detailed in the article but do not request anything specific to learning English. This might reflect their insight about the limited level of play-based pedagogy that their English classes currently have. Their comments suggest recognition of how they would like to learn English and the kind of learning environment they would like. This finding resonates with Van Gils's (2007) assertions. He argues in favour of including children in the UNCRC's interpretation of play from their perspective. He conducted qualitative research with children aged 8 to 13 to investigate how they expressed play and concluded that children focus on the facets of play that are different from what adults focus on (Van Gils, 2007).

Perhaps the children in my study are requesting a playful atmosphere in English to challenge how their teachers currently teach them. They might want to replace the rigid formal style of teaching with a more playful informal approach (Sylva et al. 2004) (see section 8.6 about the children's perspectives on the current teaching methods).

Some of the children were better able to explicitly discuss their awareness of the specific classroom learning activities that help them understand English as a foreign language. These were learning activities relevant to their daily lives. The children made reasoned decisions on their preferences and ways to learn. Kai, for example, recommended creative play activities that were relevant to his real-life playing scenario. He exhibited thoughtfulness when suggesting learning exercises that he enjoys:

Kai: *I want to suggest […] when we learn subjects like Arabic or Computer, Lego should be available in the class.*

Researcher: *Did you suggest that to Miss Sally?*

Kai: *No, I did not but if we have dictation, each one of us should have a big box of Lego on his table and at the end he takes it home with him.*

Researcher: *Nice.*

Kai: *Inside the box, there are characters. We can construct words, buildings and cars* (Second boy's group discussion, p. 12).

Kai is suggesting an idea with a lot of potential for playful pedagogy, developing his English skill using Lego with dictation and other subjects, (Arabic or Computer science). He seeks to realise his need to engage in a playful context outside of the classroom in an innovative, joyful and challenging manner. It is likely that he provides a comprehensive and complete plan for learning that is more closely related to his interests. For example, activities that can be extended for use in the home to learn through playing (constructing words, buildings and cars). Kai's suggestion to have Lego at school and at home can be interpreted as him asserting his right to participate in recreational activities throughout the day. It can also represent his understanding of the voice and autonomy he can have with playful activities in the classroom. Additionally, his comment might emphasise that he wants challenging learning activities because the ones being used now fall short of his capability. Kai's recommendation possibly originates from his knowledge and experience of using Legos outside the school. By using Lego, he may want to have additional chances to return to the same play and learning activity to achieve different outcomes for the same concept. His suggestion echoes the findings of Mehisto et al.'s (2008) study. They recommend that learning in the classroom should connect to the children's lives to produce interesting and appropriate knowledge that builds on their capacity for self-choice and independence.

This study's findings support the idea that the learning context in English classes needs to be interrelated with the children's real-life contexts to incorporate their interests and choice over play rather than learning through topics that are irrelevant to them (Filice, 2011). Filice (2011) argues that language teachers should create a stimulating learning atmosphere that gives the children a sense of relevance because the classroom is a reflection of the society we live in. Perhaps Kai might be more motivated and engaged when he understands how the things he is learning are applied to his personal life, the community he lives in and the actual world (Filice, 2011). In doing so, learning could become more relevant when a strong connection emerges between learning and Kai's own life, his interests and abilities, his society and the wider world. An exploration of whether English teachers in Qatar provide their learners with engaging learning experiences is further discussed in the section (8.4).

Such studies facilitated me understanding the choices that Kai and Nastiya made about suggesting activities to learn English. Nastiya said:

Nastiya: […] we can make ice cream. […] make ice juice with colours.

Researcher: […] Does this help you learn and speak English?

Nastiya: Yes, I can make it and the teacher asks me how did I do it and what did I do?

(Second girl's group discussion, p. 12 & 16).

The studies emphasise why the children concentrate on learning English as part of their everyday lives to develop learning that is tailored and relevant to their own contexts. Such learning can strengthen their sense of self-expression and enrich their experiences in daily life. In my experience, in the teaching in Qatari schools, the topics in the textbooks used to teach English to children are not connected to the children's choices, interests and real-life. Teachers often teach the textbook as they intend without relating it to the context of the children's real-life experiences because of the rigidity and predesigned curriculum (see section 7.2.1).

The children's ideas increase my understanding of the findings in the literature on acquiring a second language and how to teach one. Their quotes suggest that learning English as a second language requires topics and situations that are related to their real lives, their Qatari culture, their interests and from their own choice. In the view of the children's comments, they are able to drive their own learning and select the methods to learn English in stimulating play contexts (simply, joyfully, individually and autonomy). It is evident from the data that these children are autonomous and not reliant on adults to construct playing opportunities for them and to increase the exhilarating play- based pedagogy, whilst needing them as scaffolders for their learning.

8.3 Other Forms of Play Children Recommend for Learning English

In the previous section, the children seemed to be playful in their awareness of the learning activities that should inspire and connect them with many facets of their life. A major difference that emerges in the preferences of learning in this section is that the children from the boys' school have developed a physical view of play when learning English. Their preferences were influenced by their specific needs and perceptions of learning English. For example, the children recommended playing with balls (basketball and football), jumping, and running. This kind of play benefits performance (intellectual, physical and social ability) (King & Howard, 2014; Whitebread et al., 2012). The children expressed their favourite English language learning activities:

Mecuri, Ninja and BM: *play, run, jump.*

MS: *Play hide and seek.*

King Qatar: *Play move and freeze.*

XR: *Play football.*

BM: *Play basketball.*

Ninja: *Play football.*

Researcher: *[…] Can you tell me how these games help you learn English speaking?*

No one replied (Second boy's group discussion, p. 11 &13).

The children were able to identify their individual needs and were aware of a variety of activities that they could engage in. They did not go into detail about how sport can help them learn English but their suggestions all had physical movement and fun in common with each other. Whether participating in sports or other games, they want to be preoccupied with moving their bodies and nurturing their minds for the sake of learning English. This suggests that learning is beyond English language learning for them. Their focus is on maintaining wellbeing, which embodies the proverb, "A healthy mind in a healthy body". These findings intimate that children want to learn English through play with emphasis on the social context of learning, perhaps because of the limited interpersonal connections and communication in their actual learning context.

The children seem to emphasise the importance of socialisation and informal learning activities that increased their movement to learn English. This is indicative of their desire to be free and unrestricted to challenge the restricted education system in which they learn. The playing activities that the children suggest tend to have particular social value for them (Van Gils, 2007; Walsh et al., 2011). The children tended to say that sitting on the chair (as they receive their usual learning) to learn English is not appropriate for them, but that moving is part of their play and their way of learning.

Beyond the results of this study, it is argued in the literature that when a child has choice over the play they participate in, they develop array of abilities (Barnett, 2013; King & Howard, 2014). How children being educated in a centralised and rigid system can choose their play in a school context is unclear. Play literature acknowledges general agreements on what constitutes play in relation to Article 31 of the UNCRC, regardless of play style and length (King & Howard, 2014). It is evident from the children's transcripts that play happens when it is actively selected, socially formed, personally led and informally performed. Children being self-directed and free to choose their preferred form of play is essential for them to consider it enjoyable (Barnett, 2013). Howard (2002), in his research with children between the ages of 3 and 6, discovered that deciding to engage in an activity was used to characterise play more frequently than determining if it was enjoyable. The children's transcripts do not explicitly state this conclusion. When the children were offered a diverse range of activities to be implemented in the English lessons based on their own choices and preferences, they acknowledged having choice over their play. Each child suggested a distinct type of play activity, and therefore the need to play in accordance with their choices and preferences.

Wiltz and Klein (2001) found in their study conducted in America with year four children that having choice was a significant reason for their engagement. They argue that the more choices children have over their activities, the more they engage in the activity. This finding differs slightly from my research finding which is perhaps due to the different

educational environment and system, and the children's exposure to choose their activities. For example, when I observed the children using finger puppets, despite the fact the children had little choice about the activity, they were energetic when given the chance to speak and interact with others using the puppets. Each child displayed enthusiasm for using the puppets for speaking dialogue. The same speaking dialogue was completed by all children with similar performance levels (Maya's first classroom observation, p. 3; Sally's first classroom observation, p. 2 & 3).

Perhaps the children in this study were using the finger puppets with enjoyment, despite the lack of choice, because opportunities to play in class are so rare. Instead of seeing the children's engagement behaviour as incongruent with that observed in Wiltz and Klein's (2001) study, I saw it as a possible indicator of their important decision to take advantage of the play opportunity with happy sentiments. I believe it might be proof that children are motivated to use finger puppets because they are entertaining (further discussed in Chapter 9). In this case, children are aware of the choices they make for enjoyment. It is not quite apparent though whether their interactions and engagements with the finger puppets will affect whether they have the option to use the puppets and the speaking structures at their choice.

8.4 Playing Opportunities in English Classes and its Effect on Children

Maya, like the children, who indicated that they do not have a choice over their play, said that she is the only one who can use the hand puppet 'Nora' in her English class. Maya used the hand puppet 'Nora' as a classroom mascot with her students. For example, she used it to greet the children and to attract their attention when they were sleepy (see Figure 8.1). No child is allowed to use it. Play is a one-sided interaction from the teacher to the learners, which restricts their choices and play opportunities. She said:

Maya: *I only use it because it is only one. I am only using it. […]*

Researcher: Ah, so it is only from your side.

Maya: Yes, only from my side. They love her. They can't wait to see her.

Maya: […] They really love her. I can't keep it away from them. I keep using, "Nora." I keep showing them, "Nora" whenever I see that they are sleepy and not really engaged or not in a good mood. When I speak and they just sit and listen they become sleepy. […] I introduce, "Nora" and everyone wakes up, everyone has a smile on their face and everyone wants to model with me to have a chance to look at, "Nora" (Maya's first interview, p. 14 & 15).

Figure (8.1): 'Nora', Maya's hand puppet.

The excerpt highlights the limited playing choices and opportunities that are available to the children and the barriers that prevent the children from being able to choose their play activities, even within potentially creative activities like puppetry. One sided play and interactions is not a play experience. Play is a shared social action (Barnett, 2013). Barnett (2013) explains that play happens, based on the children's perspectives, when they can choose what to play, with whom, interact socially, plan the activity and be involved in the physical activity that they want. Maya's excerpt reveals that impediments on the

children's choices over their play creates stress amongst them and explains that authoritative power can have a positive effect on engaging them in the lesson: "*Whenever I see that they are sleepy and not really engaged or not in a good mood. [...] I introduce, "Nora" and everyone wakes up"*. The children get an opportunity to play with the puppet as a last resort but are still not able to choose how to play with it. Maya's excerpt aligns with Smith (2010) who discovered that adults who provide out of school activities are restricted to minimising the children's choices as a safety measure imposed by government policies.

In my study, the root cause of adult anxiety surrounding the implementation of the MOE polices is the limited space and time within the educational context (Al-Thani et al., 2016) (see section 7.2). Maya's justification for utilising 'Nora', "*When I speak and they just sit and listen they become sleepy,*" highlights the routine and formal teaching methods employed to teach children in addition to the level of play-based pedagogy that is used in English lessons. For example, MS explains that the opportunities to play depend on specific conditions. MS wants his teacher to use games and activities to enliven the classroom when he gets bored. He said, "*When we get bored, we want Miss Sally to use games and activities*" (Second boy's group discussion, p. 10).

Looking back at section 7.2.1.3, and the children's comments, it is clear that the children's opportunity to play in Sally's class is constrained by their completion of the textbook activities and then by the free time that follows. It is obvious that the classroom lacks stimulating activities and games. MS wants his teacher to include them to break up the monotonous atmosphere. Play can make it an enjoyable and engaging learning environment, which corresponds with Barnett's (2013) findings. Allee-Herndon et al. (2022) argue that when play strategies are used, language acquisition can be improved. Play can help MS learn languages because it gives him the opportunity to engage with others and exchange vocabulary.

Unpacking MS's quote helps to explore play in English classes in greater depth. For example, how it can help the children express themselves to have fun and learn at the same time, which are two components that do not work independently of each other. MS shared how he felt when play was lacking in the English class and expressed his desire for games and activities to be added. Whitebread et al. (2012) explains that ample research exists on the importance of children's play and its impact on their development socially, intellectually and physically. In contrast, Whitebread et al. (2012) notes that there is no research on the impact of no play for children. In my research, the emotions that the children felt in the classroom environment when unable to play are documented. Restriction likely resulted in the children being bored, not interested, less motivated and

wanting to leave school. King Qatar expressed his feelings towards being in school using his native Qatari language, "أنحش من المدرسة", which means (run away from the school):

King Qatar: أنحش من المدرسة

Researcher: Why do you want to run away from the school [...]?

King Qatar: I mean go out to play (First boy's group discussion, p. 8).

His comment is a consequence of there being a lack of play at school for him to enjoy and engage in his learning. He expressed a desire to quit school so then he could play and have fun somewhere. He is searching for an environment more favourable to his needs. I asked the children about their feelings during English class. Nastiya, quickly and spontaneously, responded in her native Qatari:

Nastiya: "طفش", which means, "it is boring".

Researcher: Why do you feel bored? [...].

Nastiya: I want to play (First girl's group discussion, p. 7).

The children make it clear that playful pedagogy is not a luxury but a necessity (Jamison, 2004) for optimal learning, although rare in their classes. This result concurs with those of Howe (2016). She investigated the viewpoints of children who transition from the reception stage to first grade in the UK. The children in her research showed uncertain feelings about being in year one, since they missed learning through play. One child expressed his dislike of going to school because he just follows the teacher's instructions.

In 2013, Qatar recorded its combined third and fourth periodic reports by state parties in accordance with Article 44 of the Convention. Qatar submitted a report that took into account Article 31 on children's right to play and engage in leisure activities: "The Supreme Education Council seeks to strengthen the student's right to regularly engage in hobbies to realise his or her potential. For the purpose, the Council implements an integrated, comprehensive plan for extracurricular activities. The plan has clearly defined goals and times and does not infringe on planned classroom activities approved by the Supreme Education Council. The Council monitors independent schools' compliance with the rules and guidelines on extracurricular activities issued by the Office of Independent Schools to ensure that designated school hours are not infringed" (UN Digital Library, 2016, p.91).

The periodic report excerpt makes it clear that the Supreme Education Council has planned extracurricular and classroom activities that children can participate in. The Council regulates and monitors the execution of these activities. UNCRC Article (31) specifies that children can freely participate in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and interests. The Qatari report states that the Council decides which extracurricular and classroom activities are appropriate for children to ensure that they realise their interests and learning potential. This is evidence that children can have some influence over play yet, in my study findings, they continue to have no decision-making authority and are not free to choose their play activities in school. Wood and Chesworth (2021, p. 13) explain that a policy-driven mode of play is not appreciated for its own sake but rather for the results it yields and the way it prepares children for formal learning.

This chapter has contributed to the UNCRC Article (31) concept from a global perspective (Qatar) as every UNCRC Article should be included into a global convention to be applied in a specific context (Van Gils, 2007). As what is thought to be the first study of its kind in Qatar, this was accomplished through listening to children's voices in order to understand how they approach learning English.

8.5 Summary

In this part, I analysed the children's opinions on being English learners and the ways to learn English speaking whilst exercising their right to play and engage in learning activities. It answered the second research question: "How would young children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language"? A playful pedagogy is the children's preferred way to learn English speaking. The children justified their choices and suggested various play activities to support their English learning. Their suggestion on forms of play that engage them in the learning process during the lesson is in keeping with the literature on the kinds of play with "open-ended materials" (Nicholson et al., 2014, p.146). The children, through their play suggestions, wanted to convey specific messages to the adults (me). They tended to say that play is their brain's favourite way of learning (Ackerman, 1999), which was absent in the English classes, and so a range of skills and contexts were lacking which impacts their learning, development and lives.

The children's opinions and suggestions pointed out that the lack of play in the Qatari educational setting caused a lack of social interaction, challenge, nurturing learning experiences, support and the right to take part in enjoyable activities. In spite of play being incredibly scarce in the English classes, it is interestingly to note that the strong desire for play by all children persists and that their opinions on play are not influenced by its lack of use by the teachers in the classroom.

Play is a significant part of children's school lives and children understand that it is. It is free, enjoyable, sociable, positive and an important aspect of children's lives, both inside and outside the classroom (Wiltz & Klein, 2001, p.222). Play encompasses more than just engaging in playful activities and doing childish things. Rather, the children's right to play is a right to belong to a community that values the children's approach as a very typical contribution to social life and to the children's own development, even if this has characteristics (playfulness) that are unusual to adults (Van Gils, 2007, p. 361). I realised that children worldwide, including the children in this study, share a common perception of play as fun, regardless of their educational contexts, level of agency or whether we heard their voices (Nicholson et al., 2014). It can be said that play is a crucial component of children's lives and to play is to be a child and to be a child is to play (Van Gils, 2007).

2) Part Two

8.6 Existing Teaching Practices: Children and Teachers' Voices

This part explores whether the techniques are designed and implemented with the children's voices in mind (are their viewpoints seriously considered by the teachers?). It answers the first part of the second research question: "In what ways are teaching strategies in Qatar informed by the voice of the children and teachers?" The children's experiences provide insights into how learning and teaching are conducted in tightly regulated contexts in the Qatari English classes. This part discusses the extent to which play-based pedagogy might operate in a closed and regulated educational setting.

8.6.1 Stereotypical, Traditional and Boring Strategies

The data obtained from the children's discussions on how they view the practices used in the classroom to teach English indicate that these strategies are stereotypical, traditional and boring. The practices struggle to capture the children's attention and hold their interest and are unable to offer them a place to effectively position themselves within. Different children explained various learning experiences:

Daisy: Reading made me bored.

Researcher: Why?

Daisy: Because it is too long, I cannot cope with that.

Roro: When the teacher taught us for a long time and did not allow us to go to the board, we became bored (Second girl's group discussion, p.13 & 14).

The seven-year-old children are aware of how a particular teaching method affects how much they enjoy learning. For example, Daisy openly confirms that reading is a boring pedagogy because the amount of time spent on this activity is not appropriate for her attention span. She gets bored and becomes blase after reading for a long time. Roro explains that it is boring to learn a topic for a long period without moving in the classroom (i.e. go to the board). Daisy and Roro make it clear that when developing and implementing pedagogical techniques, their abilities and interest are not considered by the teacher. Reading appears to be taught in the classroom in a traditional one-sided manner, which results in Daisy being uninvolved and apathetic. Kai and MS express their views on another teaching pedagogy, dictation (i.e. a spelling test):

Kai: Dictation is boring. I got bored by it. It is very boring.

Researcher: [...] Why? Can you clarify please?

Kai: I spend too many hours just writing and writing all day.

MS: Dictation is boring. When we train on it at home and come to school we sometimes forget. [...]. It is so boring. I do not like it (Second boy's group discussion, p.11 & 12).

The children clearly missed the enjoyable aspect of learning and find all-day dictation boring. Kai finds dictation tedious because it requires constant practice and memory to get it right. MS is so uninterested in dictation that he eventually forgets it. According to the children, more dynamic and engaging approaches to teaching and learning are needed in the English classroom if they are to be engaged and successful. Daisy and Nastiya talk about another strategy in a negative light:

Daisy: If there is a story time, it is boring. Because it takes a long time.

Researcher: Why do you feel bored in a story time? […].

Daisy: Because we have to follow the teacher with our fingers, and then we read together.

Nastiya: But she did not give us time. Only five minutes.

Researcher: […]. If she gives you more time, does this help you learn English and like it?

Daisy: Do you know why I do not like story time? In each class, the teacher asks me to read a story with a different friend. I want to read the story with my friend "Haya" (Second girl's group discussion, p.16 & 17).

Daisy and Nastiya mentioned some 'story time' elements that they find tiresome which affects their enjoyment in class. Daisy's quotes illustrate how rigidly, traditionally and routine story time is used in English classes. The children adhere to specific procedures

during story time (using fingers to follow the teacher and reading together but not with a close friend). Daisy was clear that there is no time for play during story time because strict procedures are in place. Daisy is powerless in being able to alter the amount of time spent on story time. Nastiya also recognised the importance of setting aside an appropriate amount of time to read a book joyously.

As previously discussed in section 7.2.1, the timing issue that Nastiya raised emphasises that both students and teachers are nested in a rigid and hierarchical system that does not recognise individual needs. Daisy, on the other hand, had a specific desire to read with a friend of her choice. She might be trying to make friends by reading and talking to someone she knows. This finding concurs with Howe (2016) who discovered that children's interest in school revolves around forming and growing friendships. Howe (2016) explains that if children are unable to play and have fun in school, their ability to explore new interests and socialise is hampered. This finding supports the need to increase interactions and the social environment to learn stories. It is consistent with Allee-Herndon et al.'s (2022), whose report stated that when play-based learning is present in classrooms, the literacy gains are stronger because literacy grasping occurs not only during direct whole-group teaching and small guided reading groups but also during more intimate storytelling and in play settings (p.127).

The two girls chose not to respond to my question on the extension of 'story time.' Perhaps this is because they were more concerned with the challenges they face in the English class in making their voice heard. It might also be that they need to judge for themselves whether having extra time will help them learn English and enjoy it by investing extra time with friends discussing the story and having free time on their own. The children's comments show evidence of using their agency to speak openly for those they believe can improve their environment. This finding is consistent with the literature that reveals that when children are immersed in an experience, they use more than their everyday cognition and capacities (Moyles, 1989).

The children's concerns about uninspiring teaching and learning strategies are supported by the observations I made in the classroom. New vocabularies were taught in a class by Maya who was assigned to teach a speaking lesson. The children are expected to utilise the new vocabulary when speaking new structure. Before introducing the speaking structure, which involved making suggestions, Maya spent fifteen minutes introducing new vocabulary using images. The new vocabularies were introduced by the teacher using a PowerPoint presentation. On a slide, she wrote each of the new words. She started by displaying the associated image before moving to the slide to discover its name. There were no in-depth inquiries concerning the newly learned vocabularies to help the children relate the new words to their daily lives, communicate with them in social context and express themselves using these recently learnt words (Stern, 1983).

There were there no games (play aspect) for children to enjoy and master whilst learning the vocabularies to use them in the speaking activity (Allee-Herndon et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there was a lecturer-style of teaching going on (a teacher asks and a child answers) (teacher-centred) (Maya's first classroom observation, p. 2). The same technique was used with Sally when revising previous learnt vocabularies to teach a new speaking structure (Sally's second classroom observation, p. 3).

8.6.2 Teacher-Centred Teaching Approach

The data obtained reveals that the teaching pedagogy in English classes is teacher-centred. The children receive a linear form of teaching and learning. Filice (2011) argues that language cannot be taught in a traditional, one-dimensional, teacher-centred manner; alternatively, teaching strategies must place emphasis on the learners to encourage them to actively participate in the classroom activities. She contends that language teaching is about meaningful learning that is relevant to the child's learning and context and not merely for the sake of teaching a language. The focus of learning should be on the learners (Filice, 2011, p.34). Maya, in her quote, undoubtedly contradicts the views of the children and Filice (2011) on the strategies to be used in English classes. She pointed out that teaching English speaking is done traditionally and linearly. She said, "*If it is a speaking lesson I must use drilling. You say something and they repeat it. For modelling you, model and they repeat, watch or observe it*" (Maya's first interview, p.5).

This quote illustrates that Maya is the backbone of the English class and the children are marginalised as active characters. For example, when she speaks, the children echo her and watch as she performs. The children seem to take the stage as secondary performers who are instructed to repeat, notice and watch. Hedges and Cooper (2016) argue that teachers can make decisions about the children's learning and curriculum but their autonomy to act on these decisions might restrict knowing how play exists in the curriculum. Their declaration is at odds with Maya's situation in two ways. Initially, Maya is compelled to employ drilling and is not able to change the curriculum or the teaching methods she uses. She is following rather than judging or identifying what is best for her children. Alternately, Maya would be able to express her autonomous understanding and recognition of how play-based approaches can be understood by the curriculum if she is given the space and place to interpret the curriculum and her children's learning. Her independent understanding about creative strategies is likely to appear by showing how she views innovative teaching strategies based on her recognition when she had the space to interpret and judge the strategies. I asked her what creative teaching strategies meant to her away from the restrictions in the school. She said:

Maya: "It means something that will have my students engaged in the learning process […] it is something you try to do. Something you make that will engage your students and have them excited about the learning process. It will have them engaged" (Maya's first interview, p.4 & 5).

Maya's comment explains her ability to interpret what creative teaching techniques mean to children from her viewpoint. Her autonomous decision shows recognition of the value of engagement in the classroom. She understands that it can include *play* and other inventive learning activities. Hedges and Cooper (2016) argue that teachers might be restricted by deliberating how play exists in the curriculum, which contrasts with Maya's viewpoint. In a similar vein, Sally has a nearly similar viewpoint on creative engagement in the classroom:

Sally: *"Creativity means to me using strategies that provide a chance for students to engage […]. To be simple, do something and engage. As I described for you the game we did today. It was simple so all students engaged and I was able to achieve my lesson objectives"* (Sally's first interview, p.3).

According to Sally, simple games produce engagement in the classroom as part of creativity, which indicates that she has used play techniques with her learners. Based on the complex teaching context Sally works in in Qatar, choosing 'simple' games that do not need too much time to teach and to implement is essential. Simple games can be used that do not impede on completing the textbook within a specific time frame (see section 7.2.1). Opriş et al. (2021) conducted research into the views of Hungarian primary school teachers in Romania on ways to gamify classes. The teachers concluded that the

time required to plan and implement games in classrooms limits their use. Sally is too preoccupied with following the strict MOE class time restrictions to be able to properly prepare games for the children. Sally recognises the advantages that games have for her children's learning:

Sally: "For speaking I mostly use games. […] We have tried […], 'Mix, Freeze and Pair' and the, 'Dice'. We used, 'Dice' today as closure and I am going to use the board game, 'Snakes and Ladders'. They are very good and the students engaged today during the lesson. […]" (Sally's first interview, p.1).

I asked Sally why she used these techniques (games) with her children, she said, "*They help or encourage students to engage, to achieve the targets and the students learn from each other*" (Sally's first interview, p.3).

Using games to teach English speaking is a usual practice in Sally's class. She is aware that playing games with children helps them learn and develop critical abilities and skills in a cooperative, social setting. Sally explained:

Sally: "Benten told me that King Qatar did not know how to answer. I told him, 'it is okay you can teach him'. After that, King Qatar knew how to make the question and answer

it. It was amazing. I spent the whole lesson teaching them. In only three minutes with his classmate, he achieved the lesson objective. He understood the target language. I was really excited that this boy and his friend were engaged and learnt. The game was wonderful" (Sally's first interview, p.2).

Sally acknowledges the positive impact games have on engaging and learning, and their benefits on skill acquisition in the classroom (Allee-Herndon et al., 2022). She recognised that learning through play enables children to examine their own needs, objectives and goals. Games help children develop their skills and abilities. They can be used to develop a communicative and cooperative atmosphere amongst the children. Moreover, Sally emphasised that using games in her teaching helps her achieve the lesson objectives, which is the primary goal of the educational system (see section 7.2.1).

The use of games in Sally's class were an exception to the rule and enabled Benten to present his knowledge and interact with his classmate, King Qatar. Such a game enables the children to voice and share their experiences in the classroom. It is clear that games help the children to relax and learn from each other in a novel and social way as an alternative to receiving a forma lecture (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2021). The games elevate the children's voices in the learning context but they are not heard in the broader context of the strict and closed education system.

The data collected from Maya affirms that there are few English-speaking teaching techniques used in classrooms with children:

Maya: Usually I do not use that many of the strategies whilst teaching speaking. I use properly, only one or two of the strategies. I use drilling. […]. I use modelling usually. Drilling, modelling, this goes in all of my speaking lessons […]. Sometimes, I use some puppets. Sometimes, I use some visual Prompts.

Researcher: Prompts like what.

Maya: Like sticks with some pictures.

Maya: For example, if I give a girl a stick with a picture on it, she will look at it, point with the stick and speak about the picture (Maya's first interview, p. 2 & 4).

The excerpts from Maya attest to the finiteness of the methods she uses in her classroom to teach children to speak English. In all of her English classes, drilling and modelling are virtually always used and visual aids and puppets are infrequently used. Drilling requires learners to repeat language structures after the teacher (Maya's first interviews, p. 3). Modelling occurs when a teacher invites a student to the front of the class to model the language structure with her (Maya's first interviews, p.2). The techniques utilised to teach English speaking appear to be quite archaic and outdated but the use of visuals is a more

current practice. Her techniques are rudimentary and lack originality and creativity. Drilling and repetition are old methods that date back to the early days of education in Qatar (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017). Minimal play-based teaching methods are used during English-speaking class. The children are not given an appropriate amount of time to practice the speaking structures Maya teaches. Maya explains, "*[…]. The problem is that they do not have enough time to practice. They only have ten minutes in my class to practice. That is not enough"* (Maya's first interviews, p. 7).

My observations in the English classrooms corroborate with Maya's perspective on the need to give children time to practice speaking. For example, in one observation, near the end of the English lesson, Sally introduced the speaking exercise from the textbook to her children. They practised using the puppets for approximately five minutes only whereas the remainder of the lesson was used to engage in activities other than speaking (Sally's first classroom observation, p. 2 & 3). Similarly, for Maya in her class, the girls practised asking questions, responding to them and making suggestions to their friends for only five minutes (Maya's first classroom observation, p. 2).

Maya's limited teaching methods in the classroom are an obstacle to practicing English speaking. Her students, Sara and Daisy explained that, *"sometimes there is no time to do what we want".* Daisy states, "*[…] in the class, time run and we did not answer any*

question" (Second girl's group discussion, p. 7 & 14). Giving the children ample time to put their new knowledge into practice helps improve their learning skills and provides them with a comfortable setting. It also provides them with the space to express and share their thoughts and ideas. In the section that follows, I will examine whether teaching strategies are devised with the voice of children in mind and the criteria the teachers use to design their teaching practices.

8.6.3 Do Children's Voices Impact the Teaching Strategies Used in the Classroom?

A closer analysis of the teaching strategies employed in English classes by Maya and Sally revealed that the voices of children are not considered when developing them. The teachers show a desire to apply appropriate pedagogical strategies to accomplish lesson objectives and guarantee their students comprehend the language's structures. Nonetheless, it appears that without their input, children must learn with whatever techniques the teacher, and ultimately the MOE, decide are to be used to teach English speaking. I questioned Maya and Sally about the decision they made to prepare their speaking lesson. They noted:

Sally: I want them to understand how to answer the question. […] I like all of them to engage, I like all of them to achieve the class objectives, to understand and not to just memorise the answers.

Researcher: So, your main consideration when choosing a strategy is student understanding.

Sally: Yes, I want them to understand what they are answering. For example, why do we say, "is" and "are" in our answers? (Sally's first interviews, p. 8).

Maya: "If I am planning a speaking lesson, all the activities should be speaking-related. If I am planning a reading lesson, all the activities should be reading-related. […] We did this today. I showed them a map of a city, including, a museum, a park and a school. I began by asking them questions just to remind them of the vocabulary and then I displayed the speech bubbles (speaking task). We read them and started to make some sentences, according the language structure" (Maya's first interviews, p. 2 & 10).

Sally is 'careful' to make sure that her students are attentive and understand the lesson. In addition to achieving the lesson's objectives, Sally places emphasis on giving her children meaningful learning experiences. In her class, knowledge retention is the desired pedagogy and has priority over memorisation. Sally assumes responsibility for coming up

with instructional strategies and speaks as if she is only in charge of selecting and creating teaching methods. She is perhaps unaware to the fact that the children are an essential part of the process. Maya, in contrast, strictly adheres to the guidelines provided by the MOE Specialist.   Analysis of her transcript revealed that she follows the MOE's requirements when formulating her speaking strategies. The children are not involved in this process.

Maya's teaching appears to consist of checking off boxes and completing steps (asking questions to revise previously learnt vocabulary, presenting the new language structure, reading it and making sentences using it). It seems that the consideration of the children's voices is lacking from the formulation of the teaching strategies in Qatari English-speaking lessons. The children are not involved with developing or constructing the teaching strategies. As was already established in section 7.2.1.3, the teachers unintentionally, without knowing, exclude children from this process. Maya and Sally point out that they do not verbally ask their students for their input on the teaching methods but instead extrapolate information from their body language (facial expressions).

The analysis of the data obtained from the children's discussions, teacher interviews and classroom observations indicates that the early years English teachers have difficulty teaching speaking, and that their teaching instructions require improvement.   For example, in Qatari textbooks, speaking is taught through grammatical structure with

"Let's Play" being the title of every speaking lesson. The children in second grade (age seven and eight) need to understand and form the structure of "making suggestions" in response to a statement. For example, the statement: "It's Sunday. Suggestion: Let's shop" (Student's Book, 2nd grade, p. 106). Strictly following the textbook to teach structure in a way that is appropriate for this age group is challenging. The children need meaningfully daily lived experience examples relevant to them to be included in the teaching methods to facilitate learning. Maya expresses her point of view regarding teaching English speaking:

Maya: "*I struggle with the speaking lesson. I do struggle with speaking lessons. I prefer, reading lessons even though, reading is a hard skill for my students to grasp or to absorb but speaking lessons. Yes, I do face problems with speaking lessons*" (Maya's first interviews, p.6).

"*[…] I am not really creative with the speaking lesson. I do face a problem with speaking lessons. No teacher likes to prepare a speaking lesson even before the Coronavirus and the restrictions. I remember my colleague. We used to hate, "Let's Play Lessons." It is, "Let's Play" but what can we do with it. It's not because it is a speaking lesson but because the language structure is a bit complicated for Grade Two students. You need to teach the complicated language structure*" (Maya's first interviews, p.16).

Teaching speaking is particularly challenging for Maya and the English teachers in her school because they are teaching non-native second grade children complex grammatical structures. Her extract reveals that the language structures in the textbook are too complex for young children to understand. Maya highlights the challenge she encountered when designing and delivering the speaking lessons to her children. It appears that teaching speaking is a collective concern in her department and teachers do not like to teach it.

Observational data of the two participant teachers suggests that children are currently being taught with strategies that need to be altered to become more child-related and pertinent to their context. For example, typically, teachers present the grammar-speaking lesson on the board, read it aloud to the students and then invite a student (usually a high achiever) to perform with her/him in front of the class. Later, a few students are asked to rehearse in front of the class. Maya used the finger puppets to teach her students how to make suggestions. She took the elephant and rabbit from the finger puppet set and performed a suggestion. She modelled in front of the girls once and then asked them to voluntarily come to the front of the classroom to practise with her (Maya's first classroom observation, p. 2). Maya explained the structure (making suggestions) in an explicit direct and traditional manner. She stood in front of the children and presented the structure to them wearing the finger puppets but without implementing a meaningful scenario.

Enhancing the learning (making suggestions) might need to be accompanied by a short story, dialogue or a scenario that is related to the children's lived experience (Filice, 2011). Language structures, like any other early years curriculum content, need to be taught using child-led activities rather than teacher-led activities. The children need to make sense of new learning experiences to establish meaningful connections with the context (Al-Thani et al., 2016; Howe, 2016). Even when using the finger puppets, Maya defaulted to a teacher-directed method that was not particularly playful. The puppets alone are not a 'quick fix.'

The literature reveals that including play in language classes aids in the development of language learning since play is thought to be innately language-rich (Hassinger-Das et al., 2016). According to Al-Thani et al. (2016), this research finding contradicts the Early Years Education Good Practice Guide (GPG) in Qatar, which views play as an important factor in shaping early childhood education. The GPG ensures that children get learning opportunities that are proper for their age and context (Education Queensland International, 2009). It seems that it is not possible that Maya has been trained for the GPG as she does not carry out its content, especially since she receives regular supervision from the MOE specialist (see section 7.2.1). As Maya acknowledged her struggle, she might find it difficult to translate the GPG's ideas into actual practices.

Allee-Herndon and Roberts (2021) argue that meaningful learning occurs when "teachers have an understanding of both content and play pedagogy to design learning spaces that are interactive, intentional, investigative, personalised to interests and needs, scaffolded to support discovery and connections to prior learning and aligned to academic goals and standards" (p. 55–56). In this study, the teachers are knowledgeable about meaningful learning but the MOE restrictions (i.e., space, time and a requirement to follow guidelines) constrain their ability to apply it in the classroom. Any meaningful learning that happens is quickly quashed by the restrictions. The learning that occurs is task-based learning to complete the textbook (see sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.1.3).

We could argue that knowing and understanding such a concept does not always lead to a meaningful practice (learning). Sally, on the other hand, does not find teaching speaking as challenging as Maya but acknowledges that there are strategies required to teach children in an engaging manner. She said, *"Gaming is number one for them" […], "it is all gaming strategies"* (Sally's first interview, p.8 & 9). Sally continues by expressing her satisfaction with her English-speaking instruction and her ongoing personal efforts to advance her teaching strategies: *"I am always looking for new ones (games) to try out and check whether the children like them or not"* (Sally's first interview, p.9).

The data gathered from Sally's classroom observations varied slightly from what was discovered in her transcripts. During an observation of a new speaking lesson, she put an elephant finger puppet on her left-hand index finger and a rabbit on her right-hand index finger. She began the lesson by asking and answering the question herself. She played both finger puppet roles and did this many times. Each time, she used different vocabularies. For example, one puppet would ask the other, "Do you brush your teeth every day"? The other would reply, "Yes, I do." "Do you do your homework every day"? the finger puppet would ask. "No, I do not", the other puppet would reply. The boys sat and listened but did not communicate (Sally's second classroom observation, p. 4). Sally's presentation of the language structure was explicitly completed but questions to the students need to be presented in a meaningful manner. The children appeared confused as to what was being presented and what was expected of them. The teachers did not apply real-life situations to facilitate understanding.

Sally is clear about the function games play in facilitating the teaching of the English lesson, motivating the students and involving them in the learning process (Opriș et al., 2021).   To build on this, she can involve the children in eliciting the new structure that she presents by asking them questions about the puppetry dialogue and getting their feedback. She can ask them how this can be applied to their own daily routines. Involving the children in meaningful dialogues, in a context relevant to their lives, is essential in teaching them a language. Finger puppets can be used to effectively introduce language

structure and to improve the teaching instruction. The puppets draw attention to the communication of speaking structure (see Chapter 9 for further details). The teacher observations reveal that the children need to be involved in the learning process so then they are interested in what is being taught. Sally used the finger puppets to model but the children sat without expressing interest in what was being discussed. They only began to communicate when they had their own puppets to work with. Sally used the finger puppets but not in a particularly playful manner. There needs to be frequent opportunities for the children to interact with the puppets to generate meaningful learning experiences in a playful atmosphere.

The comments made by the children regarding the pedagogies used in the English classroom suggest that they are uninterested and bored. *"When we get bored, we want Miss Sally to use games and activities"* (Second boy's group discussion, p. 10). MS's assertion forces us to acknowledge that the games Sally uses do not seem to satisfy him. MS's statement makes us question the degree to which the games Sally utilised both thrilled and engaged the children and in a playfully manner. Perhaps Maya's 'challenges' are not because of the complexity of the structures being taught but are the result of ineffective teaching methods related to the children's speaking structures.

This finding fits with the findings of Opriș et al. (2021), who concluded that some teachers lack the methodological expertise needed to incorporate games into their lessons. Opriş et al. (2021) remarked that most teachers in their study found that using a "paper-pencil based" (p. 112) method to teach their students and to complete tasks was simpler than playing games. This corresponds with Maya's assertions on the drilling and modelling method for teaching speaking to some extent. Both methods prevent children from participating in class, which opposes the UNCRC Articles 12 and 31 that uphold children's right to express their opinions, to take part, to play and to engage in creating an interesting learning experiences that relate to them. Children have a unique opportunity to recreate their own understanding of issues that interest them by interacting with others when they express their opinions, participating in such activities and reflecting on their participation.

Play is one way that these issues of interest come up in early childhood settings (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2021; Hedges &Cooper, 2016). Therefore, it is not intended to advocate that children have free control over what they learn and how they learn it but rather to consider the benefits of giving children the chance to participate and pursue their own learning through play and teaching pedagogy (Howe, 2016).

8.7 Summary

This section answered the first part of the second research question: "In what ways are teaching strategies in Qatar informed by the voice of children and teachers?" It discussed the extent to which children exercise their right to engage in play and interact with English-speaking strategies during the English lessons. The section examined the speaking techniques currently used by English teachers and the degree to which they are connected to play-based pedagogy, including the children's voice. It seemed that the children lacked control over the play used in the English class because of the considerable constraints (i.e. lack of time). Yet, they were committed to the activities provided by their teachers. The situation resulted in children who were not enjoying the classroom environment wanting to leave school to play outside in a less constrained atmosphere.

Teachers appeared to be at the centre of the learning process. They acted as upbeat authoritarians who decided when and how much play is appropriate. Teachers were aware of the advantages of play-based pedagogy for children's learning but did not have appropriate guidelines on how to use it effectively. English classroom activities in Qatar had included a variety of instructional methodologies. Both Maya and Sally had used the traditional methods of teaching English, with the teacher serving as the knowledge provider and the child as the knowledge receiver. This one-sided linear approach to teaching negatively impacted children's involvement in the learning process. To counter

the imbalance, Sally had developed a 'room' for hosting play pedagogy. Analysing the teacher extracts revealed that they find teaching children to speak English a difficult part of their job. It is an issue mostly caused by the complexity and quantity of the language structures that must be taught to the children and the lack of appropriate teaching methods that must be used. In this rigid system, it feels that the children's voices do not have a chance to stand out and they are no longer free to contribute to the development of the pedagogies that are taught in classrooms.

In the following chapter (9), I elaborate on this chapter's bottom-up study to examine whether finger puppetry is regarded as a fun, interesting and play-based pedagogy that is associated with children's learning. I analyse the experiences of children and teachers with the finger puppets in English-speaking classes. The discussion in this chapter regarding the use of play pedagogy in English speaking lessons and the children's preferred methods of learning the language formed the basis for the upcoming chapter as I elaborate on the relationship between finger puppetry and the children's preferred forms of play. For example, whether it enhances their enjoyment of and increases their engagement in the English-speaking lessons.

Chapter Nine: Puppetry's Creative Potential does not have Place: Children's and Teachers' Evaluation of the Finger Puppetry Intervention

9.1 Introduction

This chapter expands and deepens the preceding chapter as part of a bottom-up study to examine whether finger puppetry is considered to be a pleasant, interesting and play-based pedagogy associated with children learning. It analyses how the finger puppets are used in the classroom by the children and how the teachers feel about how they affect their learners as a teaching tool. The relationship between employing finger puppets in English- speaking lessons and the children's interest in class is touched upon in this chapter. The chapter addresses the third research question: "How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence the children's interest and attention at home? How do the children perceive the use of puppetry in English at home?" This question calls for in-depth knowledge to understand the influence that the finger puppets have on the children's involvement in English-speaking lessons.

The central idea of this chapter is that children are excited using the puppets to practise English speaking as it involves and provides them with a sense of meaning-making. Finger puppetry enables them to voice their own ways to learn and to suggest its improvement to meet their learning preferences. The English teachers acknowledged the influence of finger puppetry on the children's involvement and interest but did not provide any

recommendations, unlike their students. Using finger puppetry in this study as a teaching method to teach children speaking is an attempt to assess its impact on the children's engagement in English lessons because the teaching strategies currently in place result in unengaged and unconnected learning experiences (see section 8.6.1). The opinions and feedback of the children and teachers on this method have been sought to better understand its impact on children's engagement.

9.2 *"Finger Puppets are Fun and Interesting"*: Children's and Teachers' Perspectives on the Use of Finger Puppetry to Learn English-Speaking

The data collected from the participants (children and teachers) suggests, at least initially, that including finger puppetry in English-speaking lessons has a positive impact on all of the participant children in a variety of ways. It, for example, thrilled many of the children during the English lessons, assisted them in learning English-speaking in a fun way, freed them from restrictions and gave them space to communicate and to voice their opinions, generated a cooperative learning atmosphere, increased self-confidence and encouraged them to imagine situations that were relevant to their daily lives. In this study, the children used finger puppets in English speaking lessons to practise speaking dialogues from Qatari textbooks. Then they brought the puppets home to continue practicing what they had learnt in class and added their own contributions. This is a more effective way to stimulate children's attention and involve them in learning and practice (Salmon & Sainato, 2005). I asked the children to provide their feedback to me on their

experiences when they used finger puppets in the classroom and had finished filming themselves. They remarked:

Sara: *It is beautiful and interesting and we were speaking English using the finger puppets.*

Amaya: *It is fun and interesting and it helps us to speak English.*

Amal: *It is interesting and helps us learn.*

Roro: *[...] I enjoyed playing with it* (Second girl's group discussion, p. 4 & 5).

Benten: *We had fun* (Second boy's group discussion, p. 8).

King Qatar: *I felt that enjoyment when I use it.*

MS: *Yes, I enjoyed. It was nice* (Third boy's group discussion, p. 2).

As evidenced in the exchange above, the children explained that the puppets interested them when being implemented into the speaking lessons. It helped them learn English. The attraction and engagement that the finger puppets generated made it easier for the children to involve themselves in the lesson, to have fun and to learn English. This finding aligns with and supports the other findings. For example, Potgieter and van der Walt

(2021) found that puppetry as a pedagogy of play has positive impact on children's engagement. In their study, learners found puppetry to be "fun and enjoyable" as they were "more part of the lesson" (p.130). In Çağanağa's and Kalmış's (2015) research, they found that puppets cause the children to concentrate and become more engaged, which is helpful for teachers. Korošec (2012, p.33) notes that puppets attract the children's attention and easily involve them in the work. The children in her research did not need their teacher to stimulate them but rather, they used their own initiative.

The puppets captivated the children's attention and they were willing to work attentively for the puppets. According to Korošec's (2012) research, the involvement and excitement that puppets generate help children comprehend the material being taught. Kroflin (2012) also explains that puppets are ideal for teaching all languages, including their mother tongue and improving children's speech, encouraging them to employ novel structures, dialogues, vocabulary, and grammar structures. The English teachers in this study confirmed the previous studies and their students' viewpoints, and stated how beneficial the finger puppets were to their students' learning:

Maya: "It attracts the students' attention. It gets them busy. It helps them personate different characters. It makes them enjoy their time. It gets them engaged more. They had

fun because for them it is a game. It is a little doll […] they play with. So, they think it is a game. […]. So yes, it is enjoyable" (Maya's second interview, p. 1).

Sally: "Yes, the kids liked it so much. […] finger puppet provided children a chance to practise at home, in the break time, even if I am not there. I also have noticed something that the students were asking about the puppets until their final exams. They did not ask me to play "Mix, Freeze and Pair" any more" (Sally's second interview, p. 5).

The teacher knowledge of and interest in the finger puppets was evident during the analysis of their transcripts. They discussed how this method affected their students in the classroom. Finger puppetry is a useful teaching-learning method because children are eager playing with it. For example, Maya stated that puppets keep children busy and engaged throughout the lesson, which is unusual in a normal English class. "*It is not really a lesson that they are having in the class",* Maya said (Maya's second interview, p. 1). This implies that children like the puppets and enjoy them because they can practise speaking by touching and playing with them.

The puppets create a comfortable and exciting classroom atmosphere that keeps the children busy and helps them learn. This mirrors Korošec's (2012) study, which found that

puppets generate a unique experience in the classroom by relaxing the pupils and involving everyone. Sally found that finger puppetry provided the children with an uninterrupted play opportunity away from her during the school day and at home. This means that puppets provide children with greater room and space to play than normal games like 'Mix, Freeze, and Pair' (it is a cooperative game whereby children walk around the classroom and mix whilst music plays. When the music stops the children have to stop, freeze and pair with the first person they make eye contact with. The pairs share information and then ask and answer teacher questions). The joy that finger puppets produce seems to surpass that of the other games that children have used to play in their usual classrooms. Finger puppetry in the classroom produces joy but needs to be introduced as a child-centred method and not as a teacher-directed method that is not particularly playful (see section 8.6.3).

Using the finger puppets as a teaching technique can be considered a more flexible technique to implement amongst children rather than other techniques because of their mobility. Such a tool can move everywhere and anywhere a child wants. Playing with them does not require a teacher to be with the children. The finger puppets drew the children's attention and they kept asking Sally about them. This finding parallels with Korošec's (2012, p.33) findings. In her research, a teacher describes how her students handled the puppets: "Whenever we met, they kept asking me where my friend Luka, the puppet, was". This type of question from children concerning the puppet facilitates

communication between the children and Sally (their teacher) as well as knowledge transfer (Korošec, 2012). When Maya used the finger puppets, she observed that the children could personify characters. This was echoed by Sara, one of her students: *"The most thing I like when I wear it and talk wearing it"* (Third girl's group discussion, p. 2).

Kai filmed himself and created three characters using the finger puppets: Hummus the, 'parrot', Farfor the, 'elephant' and Fluffy the, mouse.' He said, *"I liked the characters of Hummus, Farfor and Fluffy"* (Second boy's group discussion, p. 3) (see Figure 9.1). He acted out the conversation between the three finger puppets, altering his voice tone to match the different role-plays. He sought to employ a childish voice in one of the roles, a high voice in another and a deep one in the third. Soord (2008, p. iv) argues that puppets allow individuals to take on multiple identities and act as a shield that they can hide behind. Using finger puppets, the children can take on an identity they prefer and say what they cannot say in normal lessons to deliver their thoughts and express feelings.

Figure (9.1): Kai while using three finger puppets – A snapshot from his home video.

Finger puppetry has an invaluable effect on children because it enables them to have a voice, which is highly unusual in schools or in the culture of Qatari society. Children typically are unable to express their thoughts because they must abide by the adult authority (see section 3.3). Puppet expressivity can be produced by the puppeteer's ability to communicate a message through manipulating the puppet and adjusting the voice, as well as their expressions (Bujoreanu-Huțanu, 2020). This was recognised by King Qatar, who showed his admiration for the voice of his friend, Kai:

King Qatar: *I liked Kai's voice.*

Researcher: […] Why? What did you like about his voice?

King Qatar: I liked his voice when he talked to the puppets.

Researcher: Do you mean when he changed the tone of his voice for each puppet he used?

King Qatar: Yes, I liked that (Second boy's group discussion, p. 4).

Children watching each other participating in finger puppetry activities on videos, led to some interesting group discussing in the classroom. The practice carried out in the videos had real meaning for the children that generated genuine emotions and feelings on English language learning through finger puppetry (Denzin, 1989). King Qatar felt the puppets' expressiveness through the use of his friend's voice manipulation. King Qatar realised Kai's soul and his capacity to share his practical experiences. King Qatar surprised me with his answer and his understanding of how puppets function because they are not used in his class. For example, he was aware of the need to change tone of voice when acting out a character when using them. He meant that if a speaker uses the same tone of voice throughout a conversation, the meaning might not be understood by the listener. He was asserting that the speaker (teachers) must vary their tone of voice to effectively deliver the message.

Daisy and Roro echoed the sentiments raised by Soord (2008), *"[…] I took two puppets and they speak, no one knows who is the rabbit or the turtle."* Roro, *"I liked how we*

changed our voices as we spoke and how, if we recorded a video, no one would know who was speaking" (Third girl's group discussion, p. 5). The girls' emphasis on modifying and changing the voice while playing the roles of the rabbit or the turtle was the prominent feature when using the puppets. Daisy and Roro realised the advantages of utilising puppets while they were hiding behind them since they allowed them to converse more effectively and freely than when they were not using the puppets. Adopting a persona enables children to disguise their identity whilst using a fictitious one (Soord, 2008).

The children explained that finger puppets inspire them to develop real-life scenarios and link them to their daily lives. Daisy, for example, had the puppet but did not get the opportunity to video herself at home. Instead, the finger puppets actively prompted her to imagine a scenario relevant to the puppets she had:

Daisy: I like to make a video.

Researcher: But you did not make a video.

Daisy: I will make one and I like to play with my brothers.

Researcher: Did you play with your brothers?

Daisy: Played as we are in the zoo.

Researcher: […] What puppets did you take?

Daisy: I took the panda (Third girl's group discussion, p. 4).

Daisy demonstrated significant knowledge, both in terms of her ability to create a context that is relevant to the puppet she had and the need to create a context in order to play with her brothers and communicate with them. The presence of the panda (the puppet) often stimulated her to create a scenario relevant to a real-life setting for the panda (zoo). She linked the scenario to the zoo because she only sees the panda in the zoo and not in its original habitat. This reflects what Bennett et al. (1997) stated. They said that play is a vital experience activity for the young children's learning process. Play's framework creates a perfect environment for improving the quality of learning and knowledge acquisition.

Learning through play is easily performed, free of fear or impediments and the information obtained is digested and maintained for a long time. From Daisy's conversation, it can be concluded that children need to have access to a variety of resources in their learning environment to inspire them to create play situations that apply to their lives or to stimulate their imagination toward a particular desired life situation. In Daisy's case, play with the puppet might provoke and activate her knowledge about the panda and helps her learn more information about pandas. The "Panda" puppet often brought back memories of her visits to the zoo or watching videos about

pandas. BM showed how the use of finger puppets in making a home video connected him to a real-life scenario. He had the turtle and ibex finger puppets, and recorded himself at home playing hide and seek with them (see Figures 9. 2A and 9.2B). When I questioned him what in his video impressed him, he said:

BM: *I liked the turtle.*

Researcher: […] why?

BM: *It is a very slow animal.*

Researcher: *Yes, it is a slow animal.*

BM: *I had one but it died* (Second boy's group discussion, p. 3).

Figure (9.2A): BM dialoguing the turtle and the ibex to start playing a 'hide and seek' game. A snapshot from his home video.

Figure (9.2B): BM showing how the turtle is hiding from the ibex. A snapshot from his home video.

The turtle puppet invited BM to play a 'hide and seek' game. Yet, instead of a 'rabbit,' he played the character, 'ibex.' This scenario demonstrates how imaginative children are and how they can build numerous scenarios with the tools they have. Children like pretending and the use of puppets in educational settings allows them to do so (Synovitz, 1999). BM is aware of the most effective way to learn a language, which is to connect it to real-life scenarios (social context - children usually play a hide and seek game in and outside the school) that are relevant to his surroundings.

The presence of a turtle puppet also reminded him of a previous experience with a live turtle (a pet) that had died at home. BM's experience is congruent with what Korošec (2012, p. 35) explains, in that preparing a scene to be used with puppets is a great way to educate children on a certain subject whilst they are playing. BM, through his play, decided to give the "dead turtle" life and brought it back to life (Scheel, 2012). Puppets can speak, move and act, even if they are not alive (Bujoreanu-Huțanu, 2020; Linn, 2020, p. 104). It is clear that using puppets enables children to incorporate their own experiences and lives into their learning. Since the turtle in BM's scenario seems to emotionally connect with him and reactivate an emotional situation, he incorporates its tale into his role-play. Scheel (2012, p.98) argues that an individual's emotions are activated when they have the possibility to try out their emotions with the help of puppets because the objects can only communicate what is in our heart, mind, and soul. She believes that the most diverse tool for expressing emotion is puppetry.

The results show that both the children and teachers believe that using finger puppets at home boosts the children's self-esteem and confidence. The children enjoyed role-playing themselves and delivering the speech for the video. Benten was aware of his ability to be self-sufficient and play both roles, as well as his ability to manage his own learning, *"I played with myself. I used them and my mom filmed me using iPad"* (Second boy's group discussion, p. 5). Sara clarified that her self-confidence had improved through using the puppets:

Sara: *I like myself talking using it. When I was talking, I felt confident.*

Researcher: *Can you explain for me how you felt confident?*

Sara: *No, I cannot* (Second girl's group discussion, p. 2 & 3).

Sara was able to reflect on her emotional experience and what it meant to her. Using the finger puppets enhanced her confidence. She was impressed with her role-playing skills with the puppets. She was conscious of a distinct emotion separate from her other feelings but she did not want to explain this emotion to me. She explained, *"I can use it to role-play myself. I do not need anyone with me"* (Third girl's group discussion, p. 2). I was not able to establish why she felt confident. There was no language barrier because

the interview was in the Arabic language but I respected her choice and moved to the next question.

An analysis of Benten and Sara's transcripts reveals that they are aware of being self-sufficient and independent learners. They were happy to take responsibility for themselves to learn without the help of adults. This discovery aligns with Korošec (2012) and Korošec (2013) who have explained that when children use puppets, they gain confidence in themselves and overcome any fears. Sally echoed this idea:

Sally: "I think 'MS' does not have confidence to speak in English. When he used the puppet, he was better. […] They were so proud to do it in front of their families. It gave them self-confidence to practise […]" (Sally's second interview, p. 3&4).

Sally noticed that the finger puppets enhanced the children's proudness of themselves and encouraged them to practice in front of their families (adults). This often indicates that puppets liberate children from their constraints and break down the boundaries between them and their environment. It provides them with space to express their feelings and give their opinions. Similarly, Roro exhibits awareness toward the space and the freedom that the puppets provided her, *"It was different. Because we used finger*

puppets and talked to our friends in English" (Second girl's group discussion, p.8). Puppets provide Roro with the freedom to express herself fearlessly (Aronoff, 2005).

Puppetry has the benefit of being an effective 'playful tool.' While not feeling the same as the puppet, a child can see himself in it. One can express their truest feelings in the setting without worrying about being judged. Sally's comment aligns with Remer and Tzuriel's (2015) findings. Their study was done with early years children to evaluate the influence of puppetry as a mediation tool on children's motivation and involvement in learning literacy. They found that puppets encourage children to participate in the conversation. Korošec (2012) notes that using puppets with children engages everyone in the work, allowing them to relax, move, and communicate freely.

Maya was aware of the advantages of using finger puppetry for children's learning and personalities. She was pleased to use it with the children because she noticed how beneficial they are for them. She said:

Maya: *"It is a fun way to teach English. It is really a fun way to teach English. It makes students independent. It makes them engaged. It increases the social life in the classroom.*

It gets students socialising with each other. It encourages them to be less shy" (Maya's second interview, p. 9).

Maya recognised the value of finger puppetry in developing the children's social skills and learning, although it is rarely used in the classroom due to COVID-19 concerns. *"They did not have enough time to [...] practice it, but they liked it. It was fun for them"* (Maya's second interview, p. 2). She believes that finger puppetry inspires children to interact with one another to create a social life. It urges them to open up to one another and decreases shyness in the classroom. This suggests that finger puppetry encourages students to learn by fostering connections and collaboration amongst them. Korošec (2012) points out that "silent and shy children" require specific attention in the classroom and that a direct connection with them can lead to rejection.

The process of being accepted into the group might be challenging. The use of puppets can protect these children from direct exposure to the dialogue and help them more easily involve themselves in the activity and communication (p.39). Salmon and Sainato (2005) argue that the vibrant colours, varied textures, and physical qualities of puppets encourage shy and socially withdrawn children to participate in the classroom. Bujoreanu-Huțanu (2020) suggests that the simplicity and colour of the puppets have encouraging messages to deliver to the audience.

Many of the children in the study explained this:

Benten: *I taught King Qatar English when we used the puppets.*

Researcher: *You taught your friend English!*

King Qatar: *Interrupted me saying; I did not know how to say the sentence in English and I asked him. He told me you could say it like this.*

MS: *[…] XR taught me English too.*

Researcher: *What did you teach him XR? Do you remember?*

MS: *When we were doing a role-play I did not know how to act, he told me how.*

Researcher: *That is very nice. I think! Do you believe that finger puppetry helped you learn English?*

They all nodded their heads to agree (Second boy's group discussion, p. 8).

From this exchange, I learnt that children were discovering the benefits of finger puppetry in English lessons. They found puppets to be beneficial because of the social atmosphere they created and the simplicity of the idea being delivered. They helped them speak English and created opportunities for interactions between friends to learn

a specific language target. This corresponds with the literature on using finger puppetry as a tool in a learning interaction context.

The literature explains that finger puppets can generate a dialogue that engages children, explains abstract ideas, demonstrates processes and concepts, and facilitates learning (Lowe & Matthew, 2000; Salmon & Sainato, 2005). Leyser and Wood (1980) have stated that the use of puppets in education as a tool for children instils a sense of play in them, causing them to eagerly engage in any interaction with the puppets. For this to happen, the children will need to feel at ease and able to converse freely with their classmates.

Maya and Sally were in alignment with their children. Sally noted, *"I believe it is a tool that allows children to freely express themselves while also allowing them to speak openly about themselves. It allows them to put what they have learned into practice"* (Sally's second interview, p. 10). Sally's opinion is that puppets enable children to express their opinions and practice what they have learnt away from the confines of shyness. She discovered that using finger puppets enabled her children to put what they had learnt into practice. She observed her students applying what they had learnt in English classes using puppets which is something that does not happen when she uses other games. Sally did not elaborate on how her children expressed themselves. She only expressed her

observation. Maya had a similar point of view regarding the impact of puppetry on her pupils:

Maya: "[…]. Students are spontaneous to begin with in every activity. […] They even went off topic like we had the language structure that particular day. They started with that and then they went off topic. They continued the conversation. They started talking about different things and because we were using finger puppet, they decided to greet each other. I did not even teach them that. I taught them to say; "It is Monday. Let's go to the beach. It is Sunday. Let's go to the museum". While they started by greeting each other. For example, "My name is Aisha, it is Monday. Hi, my name is Mariam let us go to the beach and they continue saying, [Thank you, bye]. So yes, they were spontaneous, they were creative, they added to the conversation, and they had fun" (Maya's second interview, p. 2).

Maya's comment shows that using puppets to practice English speaking altered the children's behaviour. They became more spontaneous decision-makers, creative and even went off-topic. It gives them the flexibility to choose how to welcome one another and reflect on what is on their minds. On the one hand, the finger puppets appear to enhance the children's productivity when used in conjunction with dialogue, as opposed to practicing speaking without the use of any tool. This is in conformity with the results

of Overholt (2010). She noticed that employing puppets to read a range of texts to first-graders encouraged them to go off task. They were focused on what was going on in the classroom, not just on the task in at hand. The children demonstrate that they are rational beings with reasoned behaviours. Everything they do is based on logic. The children are knowledgeable about their lives and cultures and are not the 'blank slate' that the MOE guidelines assume they are. They excitedly 'acted out' their cultural norms with the puppets.

According to Maya's excerpt, they start their conversations with logic. They welcome each other, introduce themselves and then move on to the language structure they learnt before giving a farewell. It was unseemly to them to go right into a conversation with a partner without first saying anything. They recognise that language learning should be taught contextually and not through strict adherence to the standardised lesson and textbook. The children's actions result from logic thinking. For example, understanding that a conversation needs to begin with greetings to incorporate their cultural norms before moving on to the essential topics.

Using finger puppets in class highlighted the point that they can even contribute to the curriculum and not just be learners of it. According to Korošec (2012), puppets enable children to be spontaneously involved in the activity and facilitate creative

expressions. In Hackling et al.'s (2011) study, the majority of teachers found that puppets increased the student involvement in the conversation. It is suggested in the literature that children communicate with puppets, talk about their knowledge, their experiences and everyday life more than they do to their teachers (Ahlcrona, 2012; Hackling et al., 2011). The children in this research were not observed in the classroom observation initiating this kind of this communication with the finger puppets. They were seen playing with them and discovering their different shapes (turtle, lion, ibex, panda, elephant, mouse, rabbit, shark, frog and parrot) (see Figure 9.3) and features (eyes, nose, tail, trunk, teeth and whiskers).

Figure (9.3): The finger puppet shapes that the children used.

Initially, the finger puppets were used as a 'playful technique' to activate discussions with the children and to make the interview more age-related, non-threatening, more enjoyable and less formal (Cohen et al., 2011) (see section 5.5.3 Children's Group Discussions). The children in the group discussion were more relaxed and free to discuss their perspectives. They provided a thorough and clear evaluation of finger puppetry without being afraid of doing so or being judged by me (see section 9.3). For example, one of participants appeared to have a feeling of intimacy towards me and invited me to his home to play and see how he plays and thinks, and another expressed her pleasure at being part of the group discussion. She said, "*I came today because I like your sessions*" (Third girl's group discussion, p. 4). She had become habituated to me discussing issues related to her.

During the discussion, the children "*were happy having them [the puppets] moving them up and down and tapping their friends' faces, noses and shoulders*" (Reflection on the first boy's group discussion, p.2; Maya's first classroom observation, p.3). Some of them answered my questions "*looking at my eyes without considering the puppet I wore on my left index finger*" (Reflection on the first boy's group discussion, p.2), whilst others smiled looking at them but without initiating any communication with them I sensed that they believed puppets were to play with and to "*have fun with*" but not to have discussions with on a given topic (Reflection on the first boy's group discussion, p.2). Their perception seems that they were *"beyond"* and "*above*" talking to a tiny puppet. Perhaps these finger

puppets are more appropriate for children at younger age while children aged seven and eight need a different kind of puppet (Reflection on the first boy's group discussion, p.2).

The findings of this study support the notion that children are rational human beings and have a right to voice their opinion. Children's voices should be heard in matters that relate to the learning strategies used to teach them. Their reactions show that they drew on logical conclusions based on the perceptions they had during the activity. Their comments were based on the experiences they have had. The children's reaction to the finger puppets could be due to the small size of the puppets, which prevented them from thinking of them as actual puppets with whom they could converse (further discussion is presented in section 9.3) or it could be due to the frequency with which these children were exposed to the finger puppets, as Maya noted. If the children were left with the puppets for a longer period of time, perhaps they would have interacted and communicated with them.   For example, Kai changed his tone of voice when he used the three finger puppets (Farfor, Hummus and Fluffy) at home but not at school. The children reacted differently when seeing them for the first time and after they had watched the videos of themselves using them. The children bring richness and creativity to learning when using the finger puppets. They were aware of their particular reaction to the scenario. They behaved according to the situation and their perceptions of it. They were beings in their environment.

9.3 *"Finger Puppet is Boring. Animals' Clothes are much better"*: Finger Puppetry Through the Lens of Children

With a commitment to centralising children's voices in this research, I was dedicated to engaging with the children's voices and extracting their thoughts on finger puppets when learning English. Finger puppets, besides being helpful in the literature and the children's evaluation in this project, acted as a mediator in deciding whether puppets were proper according to the children's preferences and age. The fundamental question that sparked this part of the study is, "How do the children perceive puppetry in English speaking lessons and at home?" The evaluation of this teaching tool comes alive by assessing the participatory method of a home video activity and discussing it.

The results of this activity show that some of the children lost enthusiasm when using the puppets after being introduced to them. Their enthusiasm was 'off.' Potgieter and van der Walt (2021, p. 130) report that incorporating puppets into their research "help[ed to maintain interest". However, some of the children in my research wanted to improve the 'finger puppetry' strategy to more closely meet their perspectives. Others expressed boredom towards 'finger puppetry' as a teaching tool. For example, Roro found the finger puppetry boring and complained that she already used them frequently at school and at home. Daisy, on the other hand, thought finger puppets were somehow uninteresting and preferred the animal costumes:

Roro: When you first brought them, they were nice but when we used them again they became boring.

Researcher: When did you use the finger puppets a lot? At school or at home?

Roro: At home and at school.

Daisy: Finger puppet is boring. Animals' clothes are much better.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Daisy: The clothes clowns wear in parties and they have animals' shapes (Third girl's group discussion, p. 6).

Roro felt that finger puppets were used frequently, although Maya, her English teacher, said, *"We used it twice. In the lesson you attended and, in another lesson"* (Maya's second interview, p. 2). This raises the question of why Roro has little motivation to play with a finger puppet. Perhaps a variety of play opportunities with different techniques and different shaped puppets to practice English speaking may help. She needs adequate time to practice using them herself to discover their benefits or to agree with how the teacher should use them to present the speaking lesson. Using puppets twice to practice a language is insufficient to determine their impact on learner engagement and the interest in the subjects being taught. Children need to read the language exchange (dialogue used in Qatari textbooks) multiple times to become familiar with it so then they

can practice it. Then they can use their own words, gestures, expressions and voice variations to catch the listeners as they become familiar with the dialogue (Lowe & Matthew, 2000).

The children in this study expressed initiative by requesting that interesting activities be incorporated into the classroom (see section 8.2). The children could be involved in planning their own activities (child-initiated play) rather than the teacher deciding what to learn (Gripton, 2017). The teachers put effort into planning activities for the children that was then translated into practice. These are evaluated by assessing whether the children met the teaching goal but the learning is limited and the children remain passive learners. Planning must include the child's insider perspective to be properly connected to their needs. It is imperative that planning is hands-on and experiential for those involved (Gripton, 2017, p.8).

Another group of children evaluated the finger puppets and provided feedback:

MS: *[...] It helped me but it is head is smaller than my finger.*

Benten: *Change to characters.*

King Qatar: *It did not allow me to do anything.*

Researcher: What do you mean King Qatar? [...]

King Qatar: I mean it only enables me to sit on the chair. I did not do anything else (Third boy's group discussion, p. 3).

Given the fact that finger puppets had a significant impact on the children's involvement in English lessons, they did not meet some of the children's expectations and preferences. On the one hand, most of them said that the finger puppetry aided them in learning English, generated a sense of cooperative learning, and enhanced their self-confidence. When I questioned the children if they wanted me to ask their teachers to continue using them in future English lessons, the majority of them requested that they be used with other strategies (puzzle, cardboard, playdough and dolls). Some of the children, on the other hand, requested that the finger puppets be replaced with human or animal costumes.

MS and King Qatar claiming that the puppets were uncomfortable to wear due to their small size and lack of physical mobility. According to Lowe and Matthew (2000), using realistic puppets as props allows children to try out their own ideas whilst also examining the textbook context. For example, children can observe how language structure is produced by watching a video about individuals making suggestions (a lesson in the Qatari textbook) for various activities or by watching their teachers do so in class. When

children wear the puppets on their hands or dress up in full costume to understand language structure for themselves, they are able to experience it over and over as they seek understanding.   The puppets are a bridge between the traditional approaches favoured by the Ministry and the children's need to have fun experiences.

The children can more easily relate to real-world situations and personal life experiences using realistic puppets. It will make it easier for them to make suggestions and learn new content (Lowe & Matthew, 2000). In this study, some of the children wanted to use more realistic puppets (human characters or animal costumes) instead of finger puppets. Their proposals appear to be reasoned. Roro explained, *"I mean the teacher wears it on her hand and speaks as the doll speaks"* (Second girl's group discussion, p.9). Amal added, *"[…] the teacher can use hand puppet"* (Third girl's group discussion, p.2). These children were unable to grasp "the context of making a suggestion" because the finger puppets being used were not realistic enough for them. Perhaps these finger puppets are suitable for younger children who are under the age of seven or eight, or perhaps the textbook content implementation requires more lived experiences for the children to activate the creative powers of puppets in captivating them and bringing the context to life. More mobility is given to the children to move in the classroom while using these finger puppets.

Salmon and Sainato (2005, pp. 18) note that finger puppets are fun and attractive puppets that can easily be adapted for use by very young children. I was led to the realisation that puppets are an excellent way to increase the children's involvement and engagement in English speaking lessons. Nevertheless, choosing which type of puppets to use with children is critical, and the children's opinions should be sought on this, something I was not quite aware of.

Another limitation of puppetry was that the teachers exclusively used textbook content to implement finger puppetry to teach speaking, as indicated by the data. Despite using a creative approach (puppets are considered to be a creative pedagogy in Qatar), they continued to teach children using a textbook as the only source of information. If children struggle to understand the meaning because they need additional curriculum content, they are limited to the MOE framework and cannot refer to another resource.

This finding parallels with Potgieter and van der Walt's (2021) finding that, notwithstanding the teacher's use of art as a creative pedagogy, they still teach lessons using the textbook. The difference between the findings of this study and theirs is that teachers in Potgieter and van der Walt's study were able to refer to a variety of resources when they sensed that the learners struggled to understand what was being taught (Potgieter & van der Walt, 2021). The restrictions placed on teachers in this study has

had a range of effects on their students. For example, the children expressed a desire to walk around the classroom whilst using the puppets to practice speaking but this was impeded by the limits of the MOE.

Data collected from the classroom observations revealed that the English teachers struggled to follow the workshop content that was presented to them on teaching a speaking lesson when implementing finger puppets in the classroom. The observations identified that some aspects of finger puppetry discussed and agreed upon during the workshop did not manifest to the same level in their classroom activities. Teaching speaking requires specific steps to be followed to ensure that the speaking lesson is delivered effectively (see Appendix D). For example, teachers must gain the children's attention before presenting any new element of the speaking lesson. The teachers in this study missed the opportunity to do this and were unable to effectively engage the children in eliciting contextual speaking structures (story, conversation and text) (Maya's first classroom observation, p.2; Sally's first and second classroom observations, p.2 & 3). Teachers lack the experience of using puppets in the classroom within a context; they would rather focus on completing the activity as an obligatory duty.

Using finger puppetry in a context perhaps is able to help the children be more active in learning a new speaking lesson, engaging them and increasing their interest in what is

being taught. This may concur with the other findings that conclude that the teachers necessitate focusing on the process of improving children's reading skills in elementary schools, as well as the rehearsal process, rather than on the final performance product (Fisler, 2003). According to Ahlcrona (2012), teachers who employ puppets in preschool education should be capable of using puppets. Teacher familiarity will help their children build interactions and experiences with the puppets. In turn, the children will be able to express themselves by playing with them as a tool to communicate with their world. The teachers in this study were familiar with the finger puppets used with the children in the classroom and were aware that other puppet types existed. I used the same finger puppets the children used with the English teachers during the workshop. Being familiar with a variety of puppets does not mean being able to use the same teaching steps to teach speaking.

To conclude, the findings of the children show that the space for their voices is not about them adhering to the researcher's views about whether puppets are appropriate for them. Finger puppets and the home video activity provided an opportunity for participation, discussion, reflection and imaginative thinking. They facilitated an open dialogue between the children and researcher in this study. The children were able to examine each other's ideas. Finger puppetry elicited their voices and encouraged them to communicate their thoughts, which were not otherwise obtained by extracting responses to please the researcher (McNair & Blaisdell, 2022).

9.4 Summary

The data was able to capture the children's thoughts on the finger puppets in a variety of ways. For example, the majority were pleased and overjoyed with them and some limitations were identified in that a few children were a little bored. The English teachers expressed their support for finger puppetry. This chapter discussed finger puppetry as a teaching speaking strategy that has the potential to interest and excite the majority of children. For example, some were already finding ways to modify puppetry to suit their particular preferences, regardless of their limited time using it. This means that children were motivated to learn a subject matter, express themselves freely and acquire knowledge by working collaboratively (Ahlcrona, 2012). In teaching English as a foreign language, puppets interest and engage children in their learning, create a cooperative learning environment by helping them to teach one another, influence their self-confidence and free them from the restrictions in their learning system.

My aim was to put the children's voice in Qatar at the centre of this research by using creative methods to elicit their voices and improve the system of listening to them. The children needed to know that their voices were able to be heard by the researcher so then they could communicate their thoughts effectively and propose appropriate ways to learn English in a pleasant way.

In Qatari schools, listening to children's voices is still in its infancy but teachers are becoming more conscious of the need to listen to children and include them in the development of teaching strategies to help them learn. This research intended to bring children's voices to the foreground in order to understand how important it is to consider their ideas and opinions in the educational context. The operationalisation of children's rights into education in Qatar will involve raising awareness, education and commitment (Byrne & Lundy, 2015, p. 274).

In this study, the children were knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their education. The young children were able to share their knowledge and passion as well as make their voices heard by participating in this research project with finger puppetry. The voice and viewpoints of the children were central to my research. The use of finger puppetry in the classroom and at home for this study was very beneficial because it allowed the children to express themselves. Finger puppetry was not just a medium; it can also be viewed as a pedagogical tool. For example, it was important to gain a deeper understanding of the activities, skills, and processes that various kinds of puppets might give and consider how they might meet the desired learning goals to promote puppets in learning. It is important to consider how puppets will be used in a learning process (Kröger & Nupponen, 2019, p. 399). However, the scope of this investigation was significantly wider than the importance of finger puppets.

10.1 Introduction

This study, exploring the voice of early years children about their experiences of learning to speak English in primary schools in Qatar, has investigated specific features of the educational system in Qatar that governs government schools. For example, its authority, inflexibility, instability and space are explored to understand what it means to be a learner and educator in the system. It provides an insight into the views children and English teachers have of their English learning experiences. This study has explored the education system that operates the schools from the viewpoints of both children and teachers. It has examined the restrictions and limitations the educational system places on both the teachers and children, as well as the impact of the hierarchal authority that permeates the system.

This study has identified the barriers to the adoption of policies and practices and provides recommendations that have the potential to make real change (Byrne & Lundy, 2011, p.2). It has analysed the complexities and contradictions that exist between the policies and their application in schools. This study has analysed Lundy's (2007) four factor model (space, voice, audience and influence). It evaluates the Qatari education system at schools using the model and acknowledges its limitations for use in this

research. Ultimately, the model does not fit with the education system because children have no input on the education they receive in Qatar. This study has provided opportunities for children to express their voices through the use of a participatory approach and brought attention to the ways in which children can express themselves and have their appreciated but it remains challenging for them to be heard in the education system that controls all who work within it. This study examined the children's opinions on learning English-speaking and their preferences. It has highlighted the degree to which their right to participate in their learning exists and how this affects their learning. It has explored how the rights of children are interpreted by the English teachers and identified the extent to which the children's voices are heard when creating speaking strategies for teaching.

The children's right to play, participate and enjoy recreational learning activities was examined in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that rarely exists in the classroom. The participant children voiced their opinions on finger puppetry. They evaluated its effectiveness in relation to them gaining interest and engagement in the English-speaking lessons and suggested techniques to boost their involvement. Table (10.1) below presents the research questions and summarises the key findings derived from the thematic analysis from the last three chapters.

Research Question	Key Findings	Concluding Findings
a. How are the rights of children conceptualised by the primary English teachers that are part of this research?	• The top-down hierarchical line of authority is preferred in the education system in Qatar rather than the bottom-up approach. • The ambiguous manner in which the MOE policies are interpreted produces routine teacher behaviour and meaningless learning experiences for the children. • A low level of authority is allocated to teachers on decisions regarding the children's learning, although they have the ability to independently think creatively to enhance the children's learning context. • The teachers' comments highlight their inability to facilitate the children's right to learn, to be engaged and to express their voices because they themselves are unable to uphold their own rights in the classroom. • The absence of agency and autonomy amongst teachers has a negative effect on the children's rights in the classroom.	The strict education system in place in Qatar has a negative impact on all parties involved, including the teachers and children. It deprives them of the ability to exercise agency and act on it. Consequently, the children's rights are not able to be conceptualised by the teachers.
b. In what ways are and can teaching strategies in Qatar be informed by the voice of children and teachers? a. How would early years children in Qatar like to learn speaking English as a foreign language?	• Traditional, one-sided linear teaching is situated in the English classes with teachers centralising the process and exporting strategies to be used in the class with limited involvement from the children. • Teachers are aware of the importance of using a play-based approach but do not have appropriate guidelines or the "space" to use them effectively. • Children's voices within the Qatari system are not heard. They are not able to contribute to the development of the pedagogies being taught in the classrooms. • There is a strong correlation between the children's learning and play. All of the children indicated that play is the preferred way for them to learn English speaking.	English-speaking classrooms are traditional and teacher-centred. Children's voices have no place but they insist that playing pedagogy is used. The children refuse to accept the traditional teacher-led educational approach.
c. How does the implementation of puppets into the classroom influence the children's interest and attention at home? a. How do the children perceive the use of puppetry as a pedagogical tool in English at home?	• The children and teacher's comments revealed that finger puppetry is an engaging teaching tool that liberates the children from restrictions, helps them learn English speaking, and adds an element of joy and interest. • Children were spontaneous, creative, collaborative and provided personal input without shyness or fear of being judged. • Finger puppetry can be considered a play-based pedagogy with little modifications. • Some of the children held the view that the finger puppets were interesting but did not offer different ways of play. • There is a clear benefit to using puppets. It gives the children the "space" to voice their opinions on how to learn.	In spite of some criticism, finger puppetry has a lot of potential in English-speaking classrooms because it gives children the "space" to express themselves.

Table (10.1): Key findings in relation to the research questions.

The first section of this chapter explains how the participatory visual approach utilised in this study made it possible to explore the children's thoughts and opinions in Qatar on their learning experiences in relation to the rights stipulated in the UNCRC, Article 12. This study is discussed contextually with other empirical and conceptual studies. The first section identifies the new knowledge that the study produced and how it contributes to the literature. Recommendations for English teachers, researchers, and the Ministry of Education (MOE) are provided in the second section.

10.2 Final Study Conclusions

In this research, I assume that children are competent, independent and capable individuals who are experts on the educational matters that affect them (Dockett et al., 2011; Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; James & Prout, 1997). They are aware of their issues, just as adults are (Valentine, 1999). In contrast, this study reveals that the children's right to participate, play, enjoy and voice opinions on education matters is not recognised (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015) during English lessons in Qatar. The teachers in this study were not fully aware of the child's right to exist in this way because they are not able to uphold their own rights in the classroom. The participatory and exploratory nature of this study produced new knowledge on how children function in a system that limits rights. For example, the children realise that they have a passive role in the system but actively seek their rights when there is an opportunity to do so. They want to improve their role

in the classroom and exercise agency to have a better education. For example, they want play pedagogy to replace the existing teaching approach.

This study's findings align with managerialism system theory (Klikauer, 2015). Managerialism is viewed by Locke (2011) as a form of management that forcefully and systemically invades an institution. Employers are unable to make decisions, and employees lose their capacity to combat managerialism. Managerialism assumes control over the organisational management and its workforce. Managerialism cites greater knowledge, specialised training, and the exclusivity of people management as justifications for its one-dimensional management approach (Klikauer, 2015). Managerialist organisations deprive their employees of their rights to make decisions on matters pertaining to them (Klikauer, 2015).

Education in Qatar shows there to be a relationship to the managerialism system. It has a top-down hierarchical line of authority that penetrates those at the top of the education system, the MOE specialist, with the teachers in the centre and the children at the bottom (see section 3.2). The study findings have revealed that the system's structure has caused agency loss amongst the teachers. For example, they were unable to influence educational policies for themselves. They were unable to give feedback because the MOE specialists who supervise the school control the proceedings. They explained that those

employed in the educational system lose their ability to influence policy, and were confused over who really had authority over the educational policies.

Studies on teachers who work in authoritative top-down systems (like managerialism) show that they lack opportunities to make decisions that would enhance their teaching strategies and the children's achievements. Their opinions are disregarded and they are compelled to carry out policy procedures regardless of how effective the policies are (Brewer & Goldman 2010; Akkary, 2014; Romanowski & Du, 2020). I asked the teachers to provide their experiences of the system they were working in. Their declarations show that the inflexible top-down authoritative system they work in forces the teachers to follow a highly structured plan. They are unable to contribute their own thoughts and practices into the system or generate new educational ideas with the children (see section 7.1.1).

High management control mechanisms permeate the system but some teachers find a way to create space to practice some agency (individual autonomy). For example, a participant teacher explained that she gives her children activities to complete that are not organised by the specialist. Another teacher used her inner potential and motivation by modifying the learning content and making decisions on educational issues. Teacher autonomy when influencing the learning content is a critical element of providing

children with effective learning opportunities (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007; Frostenson, 2015) (see section 7.2.2).

In Qatar, teachers work in a centralised education system that relies on top-down authoritative polices to improve the teaching practices and children's achievements. The aim in Qatar is to decentralise its practices and empower teachers with autonomy to make decisions (Brewer & Goldman 2010; Romanowski & Du, 2020). In the present situation, the teachers do their utmost to improve the children's performance. They understand that continuous improvement is essential in the learning context (Elgart, 2016). Elgart (2016) argues that success in learning practice requires specific components to be in place. Teachers, policymakers and curriculum designers need to work together to rethink both policies and practices to enable children's voices to be heard and to include play-based pedagogy in classrooms.

Realising children's rights in Qatar is not an optional issue but rather, it is a moral and legal necessity (Byrne & Lundy, 2011). The participant teachers explained that in Qatar, schools are unable to rethink the policies and practices because each of the components highlighted above are disconnected. Incoherent policies underpin the education system and teachers are unable to provide input which increases the instability and damages the educational experience of everyone involved (Horn, 2002; Mustafawi & Shaaban, 2019;

Rand-Qatar Policy Institute, 2007; Zakhidov, 2015). They cannot use joyful teaching methods because they unintentionally neglect listening to the preferences of the children because they are too busy adhering to unstable policies and responding to demanding policy changes.

This study's mediated visual group discussions (drawing and videoing) provided an opportunity to afford the children in Qatar with space to express themselves. The study underlined their right to be heard in an authoritative top-down educational system. The system demands that everyone within it conforms to set patterns of behaviour. When the children behave outside its parameters and speak to their teacher, they are not listened to because the teacher is restricted by the system (limited time and the need to strictly follow the prescribed teaching techniques).

In this study, the children took every opportunity to voice their opinions and exercise their agency. This study reveals that the children and teachers seek to exercise their rights in the restricted system. The children demonstrate that they are 'being' in their world in their own unique way. They have the capacity to 'be' and 'seek' their rights when the opportunity presents itself. They are capable of participating in the learning process. Other researchers (Al-Hassan, 2022; Lansdown, 2005; Višnjić-Jevtić et al., 2021) assert that children are able to voice their thoughts and make independent decisions. I have

presented evidence that children actively pursue their right to participate in the restricted authoritative education system. For example, they discern which game to play to have fun. Article 12 of the UNCRC stipulates that educators should afford children a safe space to express their thoughts and listen to them (Lansdown, 2005). This study highlights that children in the Qatari setting strive to find ways to exercise their rights in a system with educational policies that impedes them from doing so.

The teachers in this study demonstrated 'developed' awareness of the rights of children in the classroom but their position within the 'top-down' hierarchical system hampers them from putting them into practice. The teachers in Qatar respect and maintain their knowledge of children's rights despite their unfortunate position in the hierarchy (Theobald, 2019). The status of the teacher within the education system is reduced and represents a 'small part' of the system (see section 7.2.2). Children's rights therefore present in the classroom in a conditional way, contingent upon specific conditions. For example, rights versus responsibilities, and unalienable rights. The children can play a game if they sit quietly or if they finish the textbook within the scheduled time. This is significant because the children's lives are intricately linked to the adult's lives but the children's rights should not be dependent on adult circumstances (Theobald, 2019).

This study's findings align with research into the accumulative nature of voice work. It presents evidence that teachers and children must engage in continuous communication to create meaningful learning (Wall & Arnott, 2022). This can happen when teachers have time to provide 'space' for children in the classroom to play and express themselves. This study affirms the importance of teacher agency and autonomy in being able to exercise children's rights in the classroom and to provide them with the space they need to learn and be happy.

Research on children's rights within Qatari legislation and policies (NGO Group for the Convention on the rights of the Child, 2009; United Nations Digital Library System, 2001) (Article 12 of the UNCRC) reveals that their rights to voice opinions on their education are outlined in the State's legislation. Conversely, this study produced data that indicates that these rights are confined to law and do not actually manifest in educational practices. According to Byrne et al. (2015), the CRC rights are interrelated, therefore restricting children when it comes to the opportunity to express themselves that satisfies the UNCRC requirements which may have a negative impact on their ability to learn, have fun, and be themselves. The educational regulations extend from those who work in the Ministry of Education to teachers who work in schools. It is the system's obligation to instil these rights in the classroom and not the teachers.

Qualitative data in this research indicates that Qatar's educational regulations are interpreted differently by the MOE specialists and teachers during implementation. There is an unclear educational agenda which has a detrimental effect on the attitudes and performance of both the teachers and children. Despite the confusion, the teachers continue to be ardent supporters of raising the bar for both their own teaching and the learning of their children. They make every effort to provide input into the material and methods they use to teach.

The children who took part in the participatory visual activities for this study indicated that having fun and engaging in playful activities to learn English is essential. This discovery contributes valuable knowledge to the literature on children in Qatari classrooms. It indicates that play techniques are needed to teach children English speaking. The children demonstrated mindfulness of their own learning by recommending types of play (hands-on activities, drawings, colouring, using playdough, doing slime, playing with blocks, puzzles and Legos) identified in the literature on play (King & Howard, 2014; Van Gils, 2007; Whitebread et al., 2012). Their recommendations reinforce the belief that learning is an active process and not a passive one. They knew the mechanics of learning (see Chapter 8). For example, play is not a common practice in government schools and there is no room during the lesson for children to express thoughts but they knew that they needed to be happy to learn. In some circumstances, an adult will scaffold their learning by referring to the social context.

The children's behaviour in this study aligned with the stipulations of UNCRC Articles 12 and 13. For example, they happily provided opinions on educational matters and suggested a variety of forms of play to be used in the classroom. The children sought a playful atmosphere in the English lesson and challenged how their teachers currently taught them. They wanted to replace the rigid formal style of teaching with a playful informal approach (Sylva et al., 2004).

The qualitative data collected from the teacher interviews and classroom observations supports this finding. The teachers explained that play-based pedagogy is restricted in English classes and that the children are subjected to a one-dimensional interaction. The one-dimensional interaction is not considered play because play is a shared social action (Barnett, 2013). Byrne and Lundy (2011, p.7) recommend that "training and capacity-building" be available for all those involved in working with children. They argue that it should be incorporated into educational curricula. The training should emphasise the concept of children as right holders to increase the understanding of the UNCRC (Byrne & Lundy, 2011).

The techniques that the children are exposed to are traditional, stereotypical and boring. They are centred on the teachers and marginalised children. This study fills the gap in the knowledge in the literature on the emotions that children feel in the classroom

environment when unable to play. Most of the children believed that finger puppetry (play-based pedagogy) was an exciting, interesting and engaging strategy that positively impacted their learning of English speaking (Korošec, 2012; Çağanağa's & Kalmış's, 2015; Potgieter & van der Walt, 2021). The teachers corroborated this finding by affirming the increased involvement of the children during the English lessons. They asserted that finger puppetry created a sense of space in the classroom because of its mobility nature as it does not require being in a specific place, time or the teacher's availability.

The discussion activity with the children about the recorded home video revealed that finger puppetry had an invaluable influence on them. For example, it positively impacted their learning, their personality, self-esteem, self-confidence, their freedom from restrictions and enabled them to voice their opinions fearlessly (Aronoff, 2005; Korošec, 2012; Korošec, 2013). Finger puppetry enabled the children to go off-topic and encouraged them to be spontaneous, creative and helped them make decisions. The puppets increased the productivity of children in the classroom when used in conjunction with dialogue (Overholt, 2010).

Some of the children took the opportunity to use their initiative during the study and were critical of the puppets. They wanted the puppets to be more realistic with human and animal costumes (Lowe & Matthew, 2000), assuming that the finger puppet does not

allow them to move from their seats. The data indicates that this was because the teachers exclusively used the MOE textbook as source content for the finger puppets and that the children must stay seated when using the textbook. The finger puppets were a creative way to learn the textbook content but significant limitations remained throughout the activity (see Chapter 9). For example, the children were not allowed to consult other textbooks to clarify meaning because they had to work within the MOE framework. There is no place for an innovative approach to teaching children in the Qatari context. The control that pervades the education system hampers teachers and directly impacts the children's capacity to learn and be heard. Finger puppetry is excellent for developing voiced expressions when learning English speaking in Qatar. For it to reach its true potential, modification to the education system in Qatar would be needed.

Overall, this research recognises children as being rights holders who are experts in educational matters that concern them. Children in the Qatari educational context are competent and capable of making decisions but the strict education system prevents their true potential from being realised. English-speaking classrooms are dominated by the traditional teacher-centred approach that marginalises playful pedagogy. Consequently, the children are asking for the teaching techniques to be updated and include play pedagogy. Finger puppetry has creative potential in teaching English-speaking. It eases the restrictions placed on children so then they can freely express themselves but its full potential has little room in this rigid system. Finger puppetry

reduced the existent power relation between the teacher and children but did not eradicate it completely. Using the knowledge gained from the findings of this study, I provide recommendations for early childhood teachers, researchers and the Ministry of Education (MOE) in section (10.5).

10.3 Limitations of the Study

It is important to highlight the study's strengths as well as limitations and shortcomings. No research is perfect and mine had some limitations. For example, the data collection was completed during COVID-19 which impacted the implementation of finger puppetry. I intended to implement it into the classroom for two months but this was not possible. Consequently, the children had to become familiar with the puppets in a reduced amount of time which might have influenced their evaluation of them, either positively or negatively.

The authoritative system that controls both teachers and children leads to heavy usage of a predesigned textbook. This prevented the teachers and children from freely using the puppets when they wanted to. Despite time restrictions with implementing finger puppetry, I was able to notice the influence they had on the children. I was not able to alter my pedagogy, put into practice the playful strategies proposed by the children or use the type of puppets they requested for use in the study because of COVID-19

constraints, time limitations, and the restrictions imposed by the system. Consequently, there was marginal disparity between rights philosophy and the children's ability to influence pedagogy through the selection of specific puppets.

The finger puppets used as a pedagogical tool in this study were imposed upon them and were restricted for use only in English speaking lessons because of COVID- 19 constrains. This prompted the children to criticise them and wanted to use alternative puppets to engage them in the English lesson (see section 9.3).

A study limitation was the challenge of applying the voice work concept in the context of a system that tightly controls education, educators, and students. It was difficult to convince parents and teachers of the value of children's contributions and the significance of their input in enhancing the learning environment.

10.4 Study's Contribution to Knowledge

This study explores the voice of early years children about their experiences of learning to speak English in primary schools in Qatar. It has made a significant contribution to the corpus of knowledge both nationally and internationally. The study was the first of its kind to directly engage children and listen to their opinions and perspectives in Qatar. It gave them a platform to use drawing as a participatory method to communicate their

thoughts and feelings about their learning experiences. The study accessed the silenced

voice of young children in schools who study English as a foreign language. The children

belong to a society where freedom of expression is restricted due to the tribal structure

that governs Qatari families and society (Al Ghanim, 2012; Brewer et al., 2007). The study

listened attentively to their voices and payed attention to the extent they are heard in

their schools.

This thesis had added to the growing body of knowledge on the necessity of

implementing play-based pedagogy into children's learning in English lessons and beyond

English language in Qatar (see section 8.3). It argued that early years children in Qatar

cannot learn the language without the use of playful pedagogy. The study documented

the feelings of young children when play was lacking in their classroom. The children's

responses prove that play is an integral part of their education and lives. It can be applied

for learning and teaching any subject.

This study is the first in Qatar to examine finger puppetry and its features, influence, and

limitations for entertaining young children. It evaluates the extent that it supports their

voice in a controlled educational system. It contributes to the learning context in Qatar

and establishes that finger puppetry activates children's prior knowledge and connects

their learning to real life. It contributes to the UNCRC, Article (31) from a global

perspective because it is the first study in Qatar that listens to children's voices to discover how they want to learn the English language.

This study had increased our understanding on how to combine the voice aim with the aim of establishing a teaching tool that engages and interests students. This contribution extends beyond the study and teaching of English and has implications for learning and pedagogical approaches and practices more broadly. This can provide educators in Qatar with new linkages and avenues for investigation.

10.5 Recommendations for Early Childhood Teachers

Play-based pedagogy is essential in children's classrooms and should be incorporated into the teaching practices that take place in them (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Finger puppetry is a playful pedagogy (Prendiville & Toye, 2013) that needs further exploration by researchers for it to reach its full potential in the classroom. Play-based pedagogy techniques require time and dedication when implementing them in English speaking lessons. Puppetry can be combined with other playful techniques (exploration, manipulation, tangible objects, solving problems and involvement in an action) (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012) to increase the engagement of children in learning English speaking as a foreign language.

Children should be construed as competent experts on matters that concern them. They are active learners who are 'being' in their world. They are not incompetent and passive learners who are 'becoming' in their world (Nairn & Clarke, 2012; Prout, 2005) as perceived by society and the education system in Qatar (see sections 3.2 and 3.3). Consequently, it is important that teachers perceive children as being mindful of their own learning issues. Teachers should not merely replicate the Ministry's approach to teaching and continue to not listen to their voices on educational matters. They need to find ways to break down the cycle of their marginalisation. For example, teachers can activate their sense of agency by encouraging children to express their thoughts and ideas and listen to them.

Teachers need to allocate time and space in the classroom to hear the children's learning requirements and preferences. To some extent, they need to subvert the excessive control placed on them by the MOE to activate their agency and enable them to be empowered to make independent decisions. In a system like this, empowering oneself will be challenging and demanding but not impossible. Teachers may face resistance from the Ministry of Education towards their behaviour but activating agency is the final step in the process. Early years teachers must communicate their teaching agenda with their children and their thoughts should be interpreted as being part of the unique development of meaning (Sommer et al., 2010). It is necessary for teachers to receive

the children's input on the teaching strategies used in the classroom as part of developing engagement in the English lessons.

The teachers in this study revealed that they were unaware of the need for children's voices to be heard because it was not something that was part of their teaching practice in Qatar. Seeking children's opinions on learning practices never happens in the classroom but despite the limitations to learning, the children actively pursue their right for their voices to be heard. The Bedouin nature that permeates Qatari society means that listening to children's voices and valuing them as part of Qatari culture will take time and effort for it to become a societal norm (see section 3.3). Teachers must embrace listening to children in the classroom and put it into practice to be successful, even if it's in a limited capacity. Both teachers and children must assert their rights within the educational system to stimulate positive change in Qatar.

10.6 Recommendations for Researchers

Children are rights holders and competent, independent, experts on matters that concern them. They are capable of making their thoughts known and are able to act on them (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Therefore, researchers in Qatar need to conduct research 'with' children and not 'on' them. They need to approach them directly to

understand their own unique perspectives on issues related to their learning (to improve

performance and learning experiences at school) (Adderley et al., 2015; Hajisoteriou &

Angelides, 2015), which is essential in this region (see Article 12 of the UNCRC, 1989).

10.6.1 Research Focus

Researchers need to shift the research focus away from the education system and its

impact on teachers, parents, students and teaching practices to the listening of children's

voices in Qatar to improve their learning context and implement their rights. This study

shows that children are capable beings able to express their thoughts and views when

given "space" to do so, where their voices are deemed reliable sources of information.

Researchers are responsible for translating the Convention on the Rights of the Child that

Qatar ratified in 1995 (UNCRC, 1989) into issues to be explored and evaluated.

Researchers can explore the educational matters of children and teachers to develop an

understanding of how to effectively facilitate children's voices in the classroom. For

example, research into the restricted agency that teachers have in the rigid system that

makes it difficult for children's voices to be heard. Research into children's voices in

different aspects of the learning context in the Qatari education system is vital (the

classroom environment, indoor and outdoor activities, facilities and learning programs).

Researchers can investigate children's voices at home within their families and its impact

on Qatari culture. Other research topics might include teaching qualifications, teaching/learning materials and the equipment needed for playful pedagogy.

10.6.2 Facilitating 'Space' for Children in Research

The views of children matter and contribute towards improving the education system in Qatar. They need to be treated within Qatari culture as 'being' in their own world. Sociologist discourse on childhood needs to be disseminated in Qatar so that their right to participate in society is respected by educational policymakers and the level of adult authority over children is evaluated (Al-Ghanim, 2012). For example, the extent that children are involved in decision-making on issues related to them. When early years children are given adequate space to express themselves, researchers can be surprised at how insightful they are. Providing children with 'space' is important when exploring their perspectives and experiences of learning English-speaking. The children in this study used the 'space' effectively to give their views and suggested teaching methods that would enhance their learning. The research process and study demanded that I fully utilise my practical skills and I endeavoured to be open-minded at all times. This involved detaching from my adult self to appropriately consider the viewpoint of the children in the early childhood setting (Gilgun, 2008). This enabled me to grasp their unique perceptions and points of view. I recommend that researchers in Qatar are flexible when working with children, trust in their ability and provide them with the 'space' they need.

10.7 Recommendations for the Ministry of Education: Policymakers

10.7.1 Children's Voices Matter. Hear them

This study has highlighted the usefulness of discovering the voices of children aged between seven and eight years old to understand their experiences of learning English speaking in Qatari primary schools. It presents a range of learning experiences, identifies what helps them to be engaged in learning English and the aspects of it that they found enjoyable. The research sample of this study and its findings alone are not enough to cause a reform of the current educational system but they do support the argument that children's voices need to be listened to and their opinions heard to effectively overcome educational challenges in Qatar.

I recommend that the Ministry strives for an early years education that effectively engages and stimulates the interests of children. Hearing their voices is a key part of this development and a core educational priority for the state of Qatar as part of targeting educational system objectives. Children's voices need to permeate the educational system in Qatar to have a positive influence (Lundy, 2007). Policymakers in Qatar need to incorporate a less centralised, top-down hierarchical approach to management. A bottom-up policy will more effectively incorporate children's voices into the system with

policy transformation originating from the actions of children at the bottom of the educational hierarchy (Liebel, 2012).

Stakeholders can integrate individuals from various sectors to improve education and to review previous obstacles to success. For example, involving children in the development of new policies to improve Qatar's current educational practices. This structure will support early years English teachers in listening to their children when designing and forming teaching strategies to use with them. Overlooking all that children have to offer because of poor educational infrastructure will not enhance their learning and educational situation.

The education system is duty-bound by the ratification of the UNCRC and it is the responsibility of policymakers to translate the children's rights from it and make them applicable in practice (Lundy et al., 2013). It is the first legal international human rights agreement that perceives children as being competent experts whose voice is to be valued. It is a voice that can contribute towards improving the inflexible authoritative education system in Qatar. Byrne and Lundy (2015) argue that the CRC should have a central role to play when forming policy for young children. Teachers need the support of the educational system, its policies and autonomy to be able to effectively listen to children's voices (feedback) in the classroom to improve teaching strategies. Elgart

(2016, p. 27) argues that system improvements "are driven by a process of continuous measurement and feedback with a focus on collecting and sharing data that informs and transforms."

10.7.2 Play-Based Pedagogy and Curriculum Practices

There is wide recognition of the role that play-based pedagogy has in the early years setting. It is an essential component of their development and a variety of types of play should be encouraged for use in speaking lessons. This study has demonstrated that play is an integral part of a child's meaningful learning process because they cannot learn without an element of play. To be a child means to play (Van Gils, 2007). Educational policies and practices in Qatar should explicitly include play-based pedagogy in the learning process. Play is a powerful pedagogy in early years classes that stimulates and brings children into the learning process and eases the learning of a language (Allee-Herndon et al., 2022; Barnett, 2013).

Policymakers must acknowledge the negative impact that a lack of play has on young children. For example, in the educational setting, it causes a scarceness of social interactions, challenges, nurturing learning experiences, support and the right to take part in enjoyable activities. This study highlights the paucity of these important learning components but the children were still able to share a common perception of play as

being fun, regardless of their educational contexts, level of agency or whether their voices were heard (Nicholson et al., 2014).

The Ministry of Education must facilitate an environment that encourages teachers to innovatively create their own teaching strategies. Teachers need space, agency and autonomy to develop teaching strategies that provide children with joyful learning experiences. They need to develop, design and implement teaching strategies that generate opportunities for playful pedagogy. The Ministry of Education policies must empower teachers by trusting their judgements on teaching techniques and respect their experience to minimise over control of their classroom practices. Flexible and stable educational policies will uphold a positive learning environment. The Ministry should facilitate the teachers' autonomy in the teaching profession because it correlates with fluidity and self-confidence, and helps teachers pick up innovative approaches (Brown et al., 2021).

The Ministry of Education must reconsider and revise the curriculum provided to children at schools to improve the children's learning and make it meaning-making. For example, the topics presented in the textbooks must be congruent with children's real-life situations to be relevant to their learning environment and context (Filice, 2011). The quality of information presented in English lessons must be prioritised over quantity and

the amount presented must be reduced. This will create the space needed for children to grasp and practice what is being taught, as recommended by the English teachers in this study.

I recommend that the Ministry incorporate themes into an integrated teaching curriculum for young children. For example, topics can be chosen (time) according to the children's preferences and incorporated across all subjects (Arabic, English, Math, Science and Social Studies). Integrating teaching and learning with a specific theme can increase the sense of community and enhance the learning experience. Focus in the curriculum must be on the development of purpose through interactional scenarios that lead to two-dimensional interactions between the teachers and children. An integrated curriculum can be the catalyst in Qatar that replaces one-dimensional teacher to children interactions with teaching that generates a fluid learning process.

Ultimately, Qatar needs to better prepare for the current and future demands of its children and teachers. It must confront its problematic education system with its top-down authoritative power, restrictiveness and inadequate policies. To support its National Vision 2030, Qatar must invest in the development of authentic educational learning environments and an educational system that has a decentralised culture that promotes teacher autonomy and empowerment (Brewer & Goldman, 2010). The aim is

to develop an enjoyable and child-centred learning atmosphere where teachers and children have the time and space to voice their opinions.

To conclude, children are the treasure of the government in Qatar. Their input into the education system is vital if it is to be a vibrant and positive environment. Their rights to have an active role in the system and their voices listened to is essential. Policy formation must begin from the bottom-up and not from the top-down. The perspectives of the teachers and children at the bottom of the hierarchy must be incorporated into any new educational reforms.

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Appendices

1) First Teachers' Interview Questions (Before the Finger Puppet Intervention).

- As an English primary teacher for the early year's children what do you usually use to teach your students English speaking?
- Why do you use those strategies to teach speaking?
- What do creative strategies mean to you?
- Do you use creative strategies? (why? Or why not?)
- How do you decide which strategy to use in your teaching?
- To what extent are you able to choose the strategies to use in your teaching?
- Does the Ministry of education ask you to use particular strategies to teach children speaking? (If yes, why do they do that? Do they justify their views?)
- Have you ever tried to explain your view to them? (Explain - give an example)
- As an early year educator, when planning your speaking lesson, what are your considerations regarding your children?
- Based on your work experience with children, can you give an overview about the way your children like to learn English speaking? (If yes, how do you know that?)
- What do you do when you know about their preferred strategies?
- Have you tried to implement them during your teaching? (Why? Or Why not?)
- Have you ever asked for the opinion of your students on the teaching strategies you use in your English-speaking lessons?
- Do you consider early year's learners as being dependent or independent humans and what rights do you believe they have in your class?

2) Second Teachers' Interview Questions (After Completing the (Intervention) – Evaluation/Seek Feedback).

- Having attended the workshop and now implemented finger puppetry in the classroom, could you tell me what you consider to be are its main benefits?
- Thinking about spontaneity, enjoyment and confidence. How would you describe your students behaviour when you used finger puppetry in the classroom?
- There is a proverb: 'Practice makes perfect'. In your opinion, can you please tell me how this relates to teaching your early years learners when using finger puppetry as your strategy? (Prompt: related to children's videos)
- Do you think finger puppetry is an effective teaching strategy that increases the involvement of early year's learners in English speaking classes and stimulates their interest? Why? Why not?
- Does this new strategy add to your experience of teaching? (If yes, in what ways?)
- Are your students more involved, attentive and eager in your English speaking class when you use the other strategies you have mentioned or when you used finger puppetry?
- How do you perceive early year's learners after this intervention? As dependent or independent humans and what rights should they have in your class? (Has your view changed? Why? Why not?)
- Do you feel it is the responsibility of the teacher to increase the rights of early year's learners in your class?
- What do you think can be done to increase the voice that children have on issues related to their learning?
- Briefly, could you please tell me what finger puppetry as a teaching strategy means to you?
- Can you tell me how finger puppetry relates to your professional practice, instructional teaching and how you can improve it to suit the preferences of your children?

1) First Children's Group Discussion (Before the Finger Puppet Intervention- Based on their Drawings).

- What a nice drawing you have? Can you tell me what you have drawn?
- Where do you locate yourself in this drawing? Why?
- Do you like the position that you have drawn? Why? Why not?
- Can you tell me what you are doing in this drawing?
    - Are you speaking with your English teacher? (Prompt)
    - Are you speaking with your friends? (Prompt)
    - Are you sitting and listening? (Prompt)
    - Are you giving ideas to your teacher? (Prompt)
- How does this make you feel?
- Why did you draw that?
- Do you like to change the position /role that you have drawn in an English lesson? Why? Why not?
- What would you do to change your position?
- Would you tell me how do you like to learn English speaking?
- You told me that you like to learn English in this way ...., why do you like to learn this way?
- Can you tell me how does this drawing help you think about learning English speaking?
- If I were to ask you to draw yourself again in an English-speaking lesson, what would you draw?
- Would you like to add anything?

2) Second Children's Group Discussion (During the intervention and after recording their videos).

- Your films were presented in front of your class today what impressed you most in your film?
- Did you enjoy English speaking practice with your family members using the finger puppets? (Prompt: Why?)
- What did you learn from recording a film while speaking English using the finger puppets at home? (Promp: Enjoyment, gaining confidence, expressing myself)
- What other things do you think can help you improve your speaking in this film? (Prompt: Practice)
- Let's go back to the English class when you used finger puppets with your friends. Did you enjoy using finger puppets to speak with your friends? (Prompt: Why?)
- Do you think finger puppetry helps you to like English speaking? (Prompt: How?)
- What activities can stimulate, interest and motivate you to practice English speaking in the classroom?
- What makes you feel bored in English classes? (Prompt: Lack of activity variety and too much practice)
- To what extend you are able to speak in English lessons (Prompt: Are you given enough time and space?)
- Are you allowed to suggest a method for practicing English speaking? (Prompt: Do you have influence in the classroom? Children's rights)
- If your teacher asks you about which activities to use in the English-speaking lessons? What is your favorite activity?   (Prompt: What would you say? Children's rights)
- If you speak, does your teacher listen to you? (Prompt: Audience and children's rights)
- If yes, does your teacher apply what you suggest? (Prompt: Influence, children's rights)

3) Third Children's Group Discussion (After Completing the (Intervention) – Evaluation/Seek Feedback).

- You have used finger puppets in your classroom and at home. Do you like it? (Why? Or Why not?)
- Would you like your teacher to keep using it in the classroom or would like her to use a different tool? (Why?)
- What do you like most about using the finger puppet?
- What things don't you like about finger puppetry and what would you want to change about it?

1) Information Sheet (Puppet-Book).

Finger Puppets Book

Book Title:

'Children's Voices':
Exploring the Voice of
Early Years Children About
Their Experiences Of
Learning English-Speaking
In Primary Schools In
Qatar

Zainab Attar
PhD Education
University of Strathclyde

Let's discover the views of Grade 2 students at primary schools in Qatar:

A study designed to explore the voices of early years children to reveal their experiences of learning English-speaking.

Who is Zainab?

My name is Zainab. I am from Syria but I live in Qatar. I was an English teacher who teaches grade '1' and '2' students (kids like you).

Grade 2 students

Who is Zainab?

Now I am working at Qatar University. I am doing a project about how children experience leaning English-speaking in the classroom and how they would like to learn it.

Qatar University

Who is Zainab?

I am doing this project as part of my study at the University of Strathclyde Glasgow.

University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

What does a project mean?

A project is something you do when you want to know more information about a topic or find out something new. I would like to learn new things by finding out your opinions on how you would like to learn English speaking.

I want to know what activities you would like your teacher to use when teaching you English speaking. I have already talked to your parents and teachers about this project before talking to you and giving you this sheet.

Do you have to take part in Zainab's project?

No, you do not have to take part in this project if you do not want to. It is up to you to say

YES 😊 or

NO 🙁 .

I will not be sad or upset if you don't want to.

If you say **YES** at first, but then change your mind to **STOP** taking part you can tell your parents, your English teacher or me. Or you can show up the **STOP** sign that I have given to you

Why has Zainab asked you to join her project?

I want to talk with a maximum of 7 male children and 7 female children aged 7 and you fit in this criteria. That is why I am here talking with you.

Why has Zainab asked you to join her project?

I am asking you to join my study because you are grade '2' students who learn English speaking in the classroom. You can help me find out how you would like to learn English speaking inside the classroom.

Grade 2

Who else will take part in this project?

Only your English teacher and your classmates will take part in this project.

What will you do in Zainab's project?

If you say YES, I will talk to you at different times when you are at your school during the English-speaking lesson or after it finishes.

School day/ English lessons

FUN

You will do some exciting activities during your work with me.

These activities include:

1) Drawing yourself in the English-speaking lesson.

2) Using a finger puppet in the English-speaking class to speak with anyone you choose (your teacher, friends or even me).

3) Videoing yourself at home with anyone you would like to speak English with using finger puppets.

I will audio record my conversation with you and take notes about you speaking when using a finger puppet inside the English-speaking lesson.

How long will the project take?

I will be around a year in your classroom during the English-speaking lesson only. After your English lesson finishes, I will exit the classroom to attend to my work. If you want to talk to me you can do so before I leave.

One year

What are the good things about the project?

I hope this project is good for you because you can give your opinions, ideas and preferences. This project will help you learn English speaking inside the classroom in a fun way.

What are the good things about the project?

The project is also good because your contribution will help me find out how you would like to learn English speaking and what you think about the finger puppet.

What are the good things about the project?

By having your say I can talk to your teacher to recommend the activities that you suggest.

Are there any bad things about the project?

No, I don't think so. There are no bad things about this project.

Who will know about what I will say to Zainab?
I will only talk about my project to my supervisors in the University, who is like your teacher in the school. I will not tell them your name and this will be kept secret between you and me.

Who will know about what I will say to Zainab?
At the end of the project, I will communicate with you, your parents and English teacher about what you have said without mentioning your name.

Who will know about what I will say to Zainab?
If you have said something that makes me worried about your safety, I will talk to your parents and then to my supervisors. This is to keep you safe.
I will talk to you first before I talk with your parents and my supervisors.

Who will know about what I will say to Zainab?
I will present your videos to different people outside your school to see how you are interacting with finger puppets. People who see your videos may like them and record part of them or take photos.

Are you going to get rewards if you take part in Zainab's project?

No, you will not be rewarded. You will enjoy and have fun when joining this project.

**What to do before
deciding to take part?**

I hope this will help you learn
English in a fun way. So there
is a pace for you to THINK
about what you want.

think

**What to do before
deciding to take part?**

Talk with your parents (mum
or dad), brothers or sisters
about this project. Tell me
your decision. Either YES
or NO.

Decide

**Where will my
information be stored?**

Your drawing, audio recordings,
home videoing and the note taking
for the classroom observations will
be stored in a safe place,
where no one can access
them except me.
I will describe
what you have
said and
suggested during
the activities
without mentioning
your name.

**Whom should I ask if I
have questions?**

You can ask me as many
questions as you like about
anything you would like to know
about the project at any time,
now or later.

question

If you have decided to say
YES to participate in this
project, you need to sign a
YES form

If You Want To Know
More About This Project.
If You Want To Ask More
Questions.
Ask Zainab when she
is available
at the school.

2) Visual Activity- Puzzle Parts

draw

finger puppet

record

talk

speak

take notes

yes

observe

want

video

stop

don't want

sad

happy

3) Visual Activity- Storyboard

Let's Complete the Story about Zainab's Project

When Zainab comes to my classroom, she will ask me to _____ myself in the English lesson. She will _____ with

me about my drawing. She will give me _____ to _____ English with my friends in the English class. She will

_____ me while I am talking with my teacher and my friends. She will _____ my conversations and will

_____ about my speaking when using finger puppet. Zainab will ask me to _____ myself at home while talking

with anyone I want. She will talk to me if I say _____ and if I want to stop, I need to show the _____ sign. I

am_____ to participate with Zainab. I _____ Zainab to come to my class and do the project activities.

Appendix E: Participants' Consent Forms

1) Ministry of Education and Higher Education Approval

وزارة التعليم و التعليم العالي

مصادر إدارة السياسات والابحاث
التربوية جهات خارجية

178/2019

التاريخ : 11 \ سبتمبر \ 2019م

تسهيل مهمة القائم بالبحث الميداني في المدارس

السيد: مدير المدرسة   المحترم

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

نود إحاطتكم علما بأن الباحث / الباحثون المذكورة أسماءهم أدناه، بصدد إجراء دراسة ميدانية في مدرستكم وبياناتهم كالتالي:

اسم الباحث: زينب عمر عطار

- **جهة البحث:** جامعة ستراثكلايد – جلاسجكو \ جامعة قطر

- **عنوان البحث:** دراسة مسحية حول آراء طلبة مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة حول تجاربهم في تعلم التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الابتدائية في دولة قطر

- **هدف البحث:** يهدف البحث إلى معرفة الخبرات التي اكتسبها طلبة الطفولة المبكرة من خلال تعلمهم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في مدارس دولة قطر. يسعى إلى البحث والتقصي حول مدى فعالية استخدام استراتيجية الدمى المتحركة لتعزيز انتباه الطلبة وتحفيزهم للمشاركة أثناء دروس اللغة الإنجليزية. كما يهدف البحث إلى توفير فرص للطلبة للتعبير عن أنفسهم في القضايا المتعلقة بتجربتهم التعليمية، تبحث هذه الدراسة إلى فهم ما هي الطرق المناسبة التي يرغب بها الأطفال لتعلم التحدث في اللغة الإنجليزية.

- **عينة البحث:** مرحلة الصف الثاني الابتدائي (معلمات وطلبة).

- **التاريخ:** 5 \ سبتمبر \ 2019

عليه، يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحث، علما بأن البيانات ستكون سرية ولأغراض البحث العلمي.

مع شكرنا لحسن تعاونكم معنا ،،،

د. نوف الكعبي

مدير إدارة السياسات والأبحاث التربوية

2) Teachers' Information Sheet and Consent Form.

Participant Information Sheet for [Early Year Primary English Teacher]

[FOR USE WITH STANDARD PRIVACY NOTICE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS]

Name of department: Education
Title of the study: "Children's Voices": Exploring The Voice Of Early Years Children About Their Experiences Of Learning English-Speaking In Primary Schools In Qatar.

Introduction

My name is Zainab Attar and I am the investigator for this research. I am a doctoral student at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. I have over twelve years educational experience in Qatar.

Researcher's Email: **Zainab.attar@strath.ac.uk**

What is the purpose of this research?

This research study is aiming to:

- Explore the experiences that early years children have of learning English-speaking as a second language in Qatar Public Schools.
- Investigate into whether finger puppetry as a play-based child-centred strategy can enhance the attention of students and stimulate their interest and involvement in English classes.
- Provide the children with opportunities to express themselves on issues related to their educational experience. For example, they will be asked for their views on the effectiveness of finger puppetry as a strategy to enhance involvement and interest in English classes.
- Understand how early year learners would like to learn English speaking and whether they are given adequate time and space in the classroom to give their opinions on the chosen strategy used by the teacher.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this research is on a voluntary basis and therefore you have full right to withdraw your participation at any time should you choose to do so without detriment. If you choose to withdraw your participation, please notify me at your earliest convenience. You can send me an email, leave a written withdrawal message at the head's office or talk to me when I come to school. If you decide to delete your data after your withdrawal, you need to inform me. Any data that has not been anonymised can be withdrawn at any time before November

2020. After November 2020 all data will be anonymised and you cannot withdraw your data after this time. Nothing will change regarding your employment.

What will you do in the project?

You will be interviewed two times throughout the research process and you will be provided with the interview questions before the interview to familiarise yourself with them. In the first interview you will be asked to answer (14) questions and for the second interview (11) questions. The interview will happen at a place and time suitable for you during the school day. The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour and forty minutes (100 minutes) and will be audio recorded. One of the interviews will be conducted before the start of the puppetry intervention and the other one will be completed after the intervention finishes to seek your feedback. During the interviews, you will be encouraged to express your thoughts, beliefs and opinions regarding the issues being investigated.

After the first interview, you will be asked to attend a training workshop that I am delivering about the presentation of speaking skills to early year learners through the use of finger puppetry as a teaching strategy. The objective of the workshop is to maximise your chances of success in implementing finger puppetry into your own English-speaking classes. During the workshop, you will be asked to develop a model of what you currently teach to early years learners that will include an analysis of how, "voices" are used in your classroom. You will also be asked to organise role-playing activities that will require you to work in pairs. If you feel that the steps that I have presented during the workshop need some modifications, you will be welcomed to give your suggestions.   You need to be flexible and confident to be able to use the puppets and act in front of your children and I will support this process. During your English-speaking lesson, you will need to converse using the English language on a realistic level (e.g., using subject matter that is closely related to the lives of your students and environment. To achieve this, you will need to incorporate the use of finger puppets into your English-speaking lesson plans.   You will be invited to modify your ordinary planning to involve the steps that have been presented during the workshop.

Throughout the implementation stage of this research, you will be observed on a weekly basis by the researcher (me) on days that you are teaching, "speaking" for all of the lesson. This will be for two months and it will be notes taking. I will perform the role of privileged active participant observer during the observation. This means that I will observe you whilst you are teaching speaking skills using finger puppetry as a strategy. When there is a need to take part and support you by providing useful information, I will become part of your class. I will also observe the children whilst they are practicing speaking English with each other through the use of finger puppets. This will require me to move in and out of the classroom activities and vary my role from supporter to observer. My observation of you will generate two kinds of information. Descriptive information on what is happening in the English-speaking classroom and reflective information that will include my own experience of the observation (e.g., my thoughts on the collected observational data in relation to the knowledge I have acquired from

the literature review). Before the class observation, you will be provided with observational protocol to guide you on proceedings.

The students who practice conversing in your English-speaking lesson using finger puppetry will be requested to take ownership of the puppets for one or two days. They will take the puppets home to apply what they have learnt in school with their siblings, parents, cousins or neighbours. Then your students will film and record the conversations they have with the person they choose and bring that to class with them to discuss the material with you and their colleagues. No cameras will be provided to your students and the video that they produce with the other person will be recorded using the smart phones of their parents. When this is completed, the students can upload their videos on a secure server (LMS). On completion of the finger puppetry intervention, you will be interviewed for your opinions and feedback on the use of finger puppetry as a teaching strategy. When all of the research data has been collected I will initiate a research feedback meeting with you discuss your overall ideas, thoughts and opinions including the experiences that your students have on learning English.

No expenses or payment will be needed for this research.

Why have you been invited to take part?

This research is looking to recruit two volunteer female English teachers from two different schools of children aged seven. As a participant who teaches grade two children English as a second language your contribution to the research will be highly valued. Your ideas, thoughts and attitudes will significantly develop understanding on how children experience learning English speaking and how they interpret the teaching strategies that you use in the English-speaking lesson.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

I do not anticipate any risk to you in taking part.

What information is being collected in the project?

This research is seeking the opinions of early years learners on their experiences of leaning English speaking and how they interpret the teaching strategies that their teachers use to teach them in the classrooms in Qatar. I will also explore their preferences on learning English speaking with a view to finding ways to increase their involvement during the English speaking classes. The research aims to examine whether finger puppetry as a teaching method influences attention, interest and involvement in the English-speaking lesson and how the children and teachers evaluate its influence. The study will also explore how the rights of children are interpreted by the primary English teachers in Qatar. For example, it will identify

the extent that the voices of children are taken into consideration when designing teaching aids for speaking activities. No personal information about the participants is being sought (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion and race) other than their names which is being stored confidentially.

Who will have access to the information?

The identity of participants taking part in this research will kept safe and anonymous at all times throughout the research process. Participant names will be anonymised and given a code name, with the key for code names being stored in a separate place from the raw data. The researcher herself will be the only one who can access the stored data. The collected information will not be shared with any organisations outside of the University of Strathclyde and will be processed in Qatar.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

The research data will be stored electronically on the University of Strathclyde secure servers that has restricted access. A hard copy will be stored in a lockable secured place. The consent form and subject data will be retained by the University for 5 years. After this period of time has elapsed the data will be permanently destroyed from the university secured servers and the hard copy will be shredded confidentially. As participants you have the right to request access to the field notes for the classroom observations and to the audio recordings for the interviews and to rectify the audio transcripts if they are incorrect or incomplete. Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

Please also read our **Privacy Notice for Research Participants** [A paper copy is provided with PIS form]

What happens next?

If you have any further questions regarding the nature of this study please do not hesitate to contact me and I will assist you with anything you require. If you agree to the conditions of the study and would like to take part, please sign the consent form and return it to me in person. When the research study's findings are completed you will be provided with opportunity to discuss them as part of the feedback process. The research results will be published in academic journals and presented in conferences. Thank you for taking the time to read this form.

Researcher contact details:

If you have any queries regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or any of my supervisors:

Researcher's contact details: Zainab Attar

Post-Graduate Student/ PhD Student

University of Strathclyde

Department: Education

Email: **Zainab.attar@strath.ac.uk**

Consent Form for [Early Year Primary English Teacher]

Name of department: Education
Title of the study: "Children's Voices": Exploring The Voice Of Early Years Children About Their Experiences Of Learning English-Speaking In Primary Schools In Qatar.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the study of some personal information and that whenever possible researchers will comply with my request. This includes the following personal data:
- field notes of the classroom observation that identify me;
- audio recordings of interviews that identify me;
- my personal information from transcripts.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study after November 2020.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project ('Yes / No').
-

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

3) Parents' Information Sheet and Consent Form.

Participant Information Sheet for [Parents of Participant Children]

[FOR USE WITH STANDARD PRIVACY NOTICE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS]

Name of department: Education
Title of the study: "Children's Voices": Exploring The Voice Of Early years Children About Their Experiences Of Learning English-Speaking In Primary Schools In Qatar.

Introduction

My name is Zainab Attar and I am the investigator for this research. I am a doctoral student at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. I have over twelve years educational experience in Qatar.

Researcher's Email: Zainab.attar@strath.ac.uk

What is the purpose of this research?

This research study is aiming to:

- Explore the experiences that early years children have of learning English-speaking as a second language in Qatar Public Schools.
- Investigate into whether finger puppetry as a play-based child-centred strategy can enhance the attention of students and stimulate their interest and involvement in English classes.
- Provide the children with opportunities to express themselves on issues related to their educational experience. For example, they will be asked for their views on the effectiveness of finger puppetry as a strategy to enhance involvement and interest in English classes.
- Understand how early years learners would like to learn English speaking and whether they are given adequate time and space in the classroom to give their opinions on the chosen strategy used by the teacher.

Does your child have to take part?

No. Participation in this research is on a voluntary basis and therefore your child has full right to withdraw his/her participation at any time should he/she choose to do so without detriment. If he/she chooses to withdraw his/her participation, please notify me at your earliest

convenience. You need to tell the English teachers or the researcher herself (me) about his/her choice. You can email the English teachers or me, write a letter to one or both of us, or meet one or both of us and inform us verbally. If you decide to delete your child's data after his/her withdrawal, you need to inform me. Any data that has not been anonymised can be withdrawn at any time before November 2020. After November 2020 all data will be anonymised and you cannot withdraw your child's data after this time.

If you refuse for your child to take part in the research yet he/she wants to participate, I will allow your child to engage with the research activities that excite his/her learning and facilitate their involvement in the English-speaking lessons. However, their contributions will not be included in the research data. They can take part in all the research activities (i.e., drawing, discussing with me about their drawings and using finger puppets in classroom with their classmates) if they wish but their contribution will not be included in the research data.

What will your child do in the project?

Your child will be recruited to participate in different activities including drawing, interviewing, observations and the production of a home video. The research will be completed during the school day in the English lessons except for the home video which is to be completed at home with your support. You will be provided with another information sheet and asked to sign a consent form for the home video activity.

Your child will be interviewed 3 times throughout the research process. In the first interview he/she will be asked (13) question, in the second interview the child will be asked (13) questions and in the last and third interview (4) questions will be posed to your child. The interviews will happen after the English lessons finish at a time and place that suits the child during the school day. All the interviews with your child will be conducted as a group interview so that your child can discuss with me and other children (maximum seven) about issues related to their learning English speaking. The duration of each group discussion with your child will be approximately thirty minutes or more if needed to maintain their attention during the discussion and it will be audio-recorded.

During the research process, I will observe your child inside the English-speaking lessons on a weekly basis for two months whilst they use finger puppetry with his/her friends. The aim of the observation is for me to witness the interaction that happens between the child and the English teacher and between the children themselves during use of the finger puppet. I will be observing the body language and the facial expressions of the child when engaging in dialogue with classmates using finger puppetry. I will ask the child about his/her dialogue and answer any question he/she has. During the class observations field notes will be taken about what is happening inside the class will be taken.

No expenses or payment will be needed for this research.

Why has your child been invited to take part?

This research is looking to recruit a maximum of seven volunteer male and seven female children from two different schools of children who are in grade two and aged seven. As your child is a participant who learns English as a second language his/ her contribution to the research will be highly valued. His/ Her experience, opinion and view will significantly develop understanding on how he/she experiences learning English speaking inside the classroom and the ways your child would like to learn English-speaking. Your child's opinions on the use of finger puppetry will be invaluable to the research data.

What are the potential risks to your child in taking part?

I do not anticipate any risk to your child in taking part.

What information is being collected in the project?

This research is seeking the opinions of early years learners on their experiences of leaning English speaking and how they interpret the teaching strategies that their teachers use to teach them in the classrooms in Qatar. I will also explore their preferences on learning English speaking with a view to finding ways to increase their involvement during the English speaking classes. In addition, the research aims to examine whether finger puppetry as a teaching method influences attention, interest and involvement in the English-speaking lesson and how the children and teachers evaluate its influence. The study will also explore how the rights of children are interpreted by the primary English teachers in Qatar. For example, it will identify the extent that the voices of children are taken into consideration when designing teaching aids for speaking activities. No personal information about the participants is being sought (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion and race) other than their names which is being stored confidentially.

Who will have access to the information?

The identity of your child taking part in this research will be kept safe and anonymous at all times throughout the research process. Your child's name will be anonymised and given a code name, with the key for code name being stored in a separate place from the raw data. The researcher herself will be the only one who can access the stored data.

The collected information will not be shared with any organisations outside of the University of Strathclyde and will be processed in Qatar.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

The research data will be stored electronically on the University of Strathclyde secure servers that has restricted access. A hard copy will be stored in a lockable secured place. The consent form and subject data will be retained by the University for 5 years. After this period of time has elapsed the data will be permanently destroyed from the university secured servers and the hard copy will be shredded confidentially. As your child is a participant's you have the right to request access to the audio recordings for the interviews and to the home videos and to rectify the audio transcripts if they are incorrect or incomplete.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

Please also read our **Privacy Notice for Research Participants** [A paper copy is provided with PIS form]

What happens next?

If you have any further questions regarding the nature of this study please do not hesitate to contact me and I will assist you with anything you require. If you agree to the conditions of the study and would like your child to take part, please sign the consent form and return it to me in person. When the research study's findings are completed you and your child will be provided with opportunity to discuss them as part of the feedback process and to validate my research data. I will create a puppet mini-book to suit your child's age and present the results to him/her. The research results will be published in academic journals and presented in conferences. Thank you for taking the time to read this form.

Researcher contact details:

If you have any queries regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or any of my supervisors:

Researcher's contact details: Zainab Attar

Post-Graduate Student/ PhD Student

University of Strathclyde

Department: Education

Email: Zainab.attar@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form for [Parents of Participant Children]

Name of department: Education
Title of the study: "Children's Voices": Exploring The Voice Of Early Years Children About Their Experiences Of Learning English-Speaking In Primary Schools In Qatar.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my child personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).
- I understand that my child participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw him/her from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can request the withdrawal for my child from the study of some personal information and that whenever possible researchers will comply with my request. This includes the following personal data:
- field notes of the classroom observation that could identify my child;
- audio recordings of interviews that identify my child;
- my child personal information from transcripts.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify my child personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study after November 2020.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies my child will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being my child a participant in the project.
- I consent to being my child audio and video recorded as part of the project ('Yes / No').
-

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Participant Information Sheet for the Home Video Activity for [Parents of Participant Children]

[FOR USE WITH STANDARD PRIVACY NOTICE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS]

Name of department: Education
Title of the study: "Children's Voices": Exploring The Voice Of Early years Children About Their Experiences Of Learning English-Speaking In Primary Schools In Qatar.

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- Investigate into whether finger puppetry as a play-based child-centred strategy can enhance the attention of students and stimulate their interest and involvement in English classes.
- Provide the children with opportunities to express themselves on issues related to their educational experience. For example, they will be asked for their views on the effectiveness of finger puppetry as a strategy to enhance involvement and interest in English classes.
- Understand how early years learners would like to learn English speaking and whether they are given adequate time and space in the classroom to give their opinions on the chosen strategy used by the teacher.

Does your child have to take part?

No. Participation in this research is on a voluntary basis and therefore your child has full right to withdraw his/her participation at any time should he/she choose to do so without detriment. If he/she chooses to withdraw his/her participation, please notify me at your earliest convenience.   You need to tell the English teachers or the researcher herself (me) about his/her choice. You can email the English teachers or me, write a letter to one or both of us, or meet one or both of us and inform us verbally. If you decide to delete your child's video after his/her withdrawal, you need to inform me. Any data that has not been anonymised can be withdrawn at any time before November 2020. After November 2020, all data will be anonymised and you

Participant Information Sheet for the Home Video Activity for [Parents of Participant Children]

[FOR USE WITH STANDARD PRIVACY NOTICE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS]

Name of department: Education
Title of the study: "Children's Voices": Exploring The Voice Of Early years Children About Their Experiences Of Learning English-Speaking In Primary Schools In Qatar.

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- Provide the children with opportunities to express themselves on issues related to their educational experience. For example, they will be asked for their views on the effectiveness of finger puppetry as a strategy to enhance involvement and interest in English classes.
- Understand how early years learners would like to learn English speaking and whether they are given adequate time and space in the classroom to give their opinions on the chosen strategy used by the teacher.

Does your child have to take part?

No. Participation in this research is on a voluntary basis and therefore your child has full right to withdraw his/her participation at any time should he/she choose to do so without detriment. If he/she chooses to withdraw his/her participation, please notify me at your earliest convenience.   You need to tell the English teachers or the researcher herself (me) about his/her choice. You can email the English teachers or me, write a letter to one or both of us, or meet one or both of us and inform us verbally. If you decide to delete your child's video after his/her withdrawal, you need to inform me. Any data that has not been anonymised can be withdrawn at any time before November 2020. After November 2020, all data will be anonymised and you

cannot withdraw your child's data after this time. If you refuse for your child to take part in the research yet he/she wants to participate, I will allow your child to engage with the research activities that excite his/her learning and facilitate their involvement in the English-speaking lessons. However, their contributions will not be included in the research data. They can take part in the home video activity if they wish but their contribution will not be included in the research data.

What will your child do in the project?

Your child will be invited to participate in the production of a home video. The home video will be completed at home with your support. Your child will be invited to produce a video at home with a person he/she would like to converse with using finger puppets (e.g., parents, cousins, siblings, friends or their neighbours). The finger puppets will be given to your child by me to take them home and keep them for one or two days to enable him/her to record the video. The video that is produced by your child is mainly for the researcher to refer to when conducting the second interview with your child and to discuss his/her performance and finger puppetry. The video is also for the English teacher to discuss in class in order to stimulate and encourage other children to use English outside the classroom. The video will appear in the research publications and presentations if you are happy with that.

Your child can film him/herself using finger puppets in a place that is comfortable for him/her (e.g., in the living room, bedroom, dining room, kitchen, front yard or back yard) or any place he/she chooses. Your child needs to wear the finger puppet when videoing him/herself to practice what he/she has learnt during the English speaking class or can create his/her own dialogue using English. The other person who agrees to record a video with your child also needs to wear a puppet.   Anybody who will appear in the recorded video with your child is required to have informed consent. For that, you can inform me about the person to make sure that consent for participation is signed. When the consent form is signed, you can give it to me or to the English teacher. If the parents of the other child, who agrees to record the video with your child, does not want to present their child's video in front of the classroom, the video will not be presented. If no one is interested in recording a video with your child, he/she can record a conversation with him/herself taking on both roles in the conversation.

I will not provide any cameras to your child and the video that he/she produces with others will be recorded using your smart phones. This will make it easier for both you and your child to produce the video. Once the video is completed, you can upload the recorded video on the LMS website. I will view your child's video through the English teacher's login account. To keep your child safe while he/she is recording the video, you need to monitor and supervise his/her recording. Once you have agreed that your child can produce a home video, you need as parents to review the video to check that you are happy with the recording before sending it to the teacher. You need to agree the settings of the video. For example, does the video contain

any setting that might be sensitive or unacceptable according to your customs in Qatar? As parents, you have the authority to delete the video if you are concerned in any way.

No expenses or payment will be needed for this research.

Why has your child been invited to take part?

This research is looking to recruit a maximum of seven volunteer male and seven female children from two different schools of children who are in grade two and aged seven. As your child is a participant who learns English as a second language his/ her contribution to the research will be highly valued. His/ Her experience, opinion and view will significantly develop understanding on how he/she experiences learning English speaking inside the classroom and the ways your child would like to learn English-speaking. Your child's opinions on the use of finger puppetry will be invaluable to the research data.

What are the potential risks to your child in taking part?

I do not anticipate any risk to your child in taking part.

What information is being collected in the project?

This research is seeking the opinions of early years learners on their experiences of leaning English speaking and how they interpret the teaching strategies that their teachers use to teach them in the classrooms in Qatar. I will also explore their preferences on learning English speaking with a view to finding ways to increase their involvement during the English speaking classes. In addition, the research aims to examine whether finger puppetry as a teaching method influences attention, interest and involvement in the English-speaking lesson and how the children and teachers evaluate its influence. The study will also explore how the rights of children are interpreted by the primary English teachers in Qatar. For example, it will identify the extent that the voices of children are taken into consideration when designing teaching aids for speaking activities. No personal information about the participants is being sought (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion and race) other than their names which is being stored confidentially.

Who will have access to the information?

The identity of your child taking part in this research will be kept safe and anonymous at all times throughout the research process. The researcher herself will be the only one who can access the stored data. The teacher of the children taking part in the study will review the home video to discuss it with them to further encourage the children to speak English outside the school. The collected videos will not be shared with any organisations outside of the University of Strathclyde and will be processed in Qatar.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

The research data will be stored electronically on the University of Strathclyde secure servers that has restricted access. A hard copy will be stored in a lockable secured place. The consent form and subject data will be retained by the University for 5 years. After this period of time has elapsed the data will be permanently destroyed from the university secured servers and the hard copy will be shredded confidentially. As your child is a participant's you have the right to request access to the home videos.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

Please also read our **Privacy Notice for Research Participants** [A paper copy is provided with PIS form]

What happens next?

If you have any further questions regarding the nature of this study please do not hesitate to contact me and I will assist you with anything you require. If you agree to the conditions of the study and would like your child to take part, please sign the consent form and return it to me in person. When the research study's findings are completed you and your child will be provided with opportunity to discuss them as part of the feedback process and to validate my research data. I will create a puppet mini-book to suit your child's age and present the results to him/her. Your child's video will be published in academic journals and presented at conferences but they will not be uploaded to repositories. I will ask the audiences to refrain from recording the videos as a precaution. But you need to be aware that if you agree for me to use your child's video in presentation at conferences, some audiences might still use it in different ways such as recording your child's video or taking photos despite that I inform them to refrain from recording. Thank you for taking the time to read this form.

Researcher contact details:

If you have any queries regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or any of my supervisors:

Researcher's contact details: Zainab Attar

Post-Graduate Student/ PhD Student

University of Strathclyde

Department: Education

Email: Zainab.attar@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form for the Home Video Activity for [Parents of Participant Children]

Name of department: Education
Title of the study: "Children's Voices": Exploring The Voice Of Early Years Children About Their Experiences Of Learning English-Speaking In Primary Schools In Qatar.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my child personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).
- I understand that my child participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw him/her from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- Please discuss with your child the following and confirm your answer using a tick where appropriate:
- I give permission for my child to record a video at home. ☐
- I give permission for the video to be viewed in class. ☐
- I give permission for my child to record a video but I do not want it to be viewed in class. Only the teacher and researcher can view my child's video. ☐
- I give permission for my child to record a video but I do not want it to be viewed in class. Only the researcher can view my child's video. ☐
- I do not give permission for my child to record a video at home. ☐
- The researcher would like to use the videos in presentations at conferences, and in research publications. ☐
- I give permission for the researcher to use my child's video in presentations at international conferences, and in research publications. ☐
- I do not give permission for the researcher to use my child's video in presentations at international conferences, and in research publications. ☐

- I understand that the researcher will not upload my child's video to repositories.
- I understand that the researcher will ask the audiences to refrain from recording my child's video.
- I understand that if I agree for the researcher to use my child's video in presentation at international conferences and in research publication, the audiences may still use it in

different ways that cannot be expected by the researcher such as recording my child's video or taking photos.

- I understand that I can request the withdrawal for my child from the study of some personal information and that whenever possible researchers will comply with my request. This includes the following personal data:
- home video recording for my child
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify my child personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study after November 2020.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies my child will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being my child a participant in the project.
- I consent to being my child audio and video recorded as part of the project ('Yes / No').

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

4) Children's Consent Form

Consent Form for Participant Children [YES Form]

Title of the study: "Children's Voices." Exploring The Voice Of Early Years Children About Their Experiences Of Learning English-Speaking In Primary Schools In Qatar.

This form needs to be completed by the child and parents

I have read the information sheet. Zainab has explained it to me.

Zainab has told me this study is about learning how grade 2 students at school like to learn English speaking.

I was able to ask Zainab questions about this project.

Zainab has answered all my questions.

Zainab told me what I need to do in this project.

😊 ☹️
☐ ☐

I know that I don't have to participate in this project. It IS UP TO ME.

😊 ☹️
☐ ☐

I know I can STOP doing the activities for this project at any time, it will not change how my teacher teaches me, and Zainab treats me.

😊 ☹️
☐ ☐

I know that Zainab will visit me in my classroom for a year.

😊 ☹️
☐ ☐

Zainab and her supervisors will know about my activities but they will not know my name. All my information will be as a secret between Zainab and me.

😊 ☹️

I can ask Zainab more questions any time I need help for this project.

😊 ☹️

Zainab will present my video in front of people. Those people may record my video or take photos.

😊 ☹️

Circle the statement that you prefer.
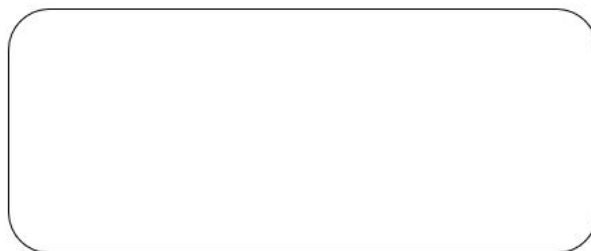
1) I want to participate

2) I don't want to participate

3) I am not sure. I need time to think

Draw inside the box what you have decided.

Completed by the child and parents

I /We want to take part in this research

Printed Name child/parent	
Signed by the child /parent	
Date	
Time	

Completed by the Researcher

Printed Name/ Researcher	
Signed by the researcher	
Date	
Time	

YES and STOP Signs

Theme: Finger Puppetry Inspires Learning but is Tedious	
Theme scope and boundaries	**Relative codes**
This theme reflects participant perspectives on finger puppets in positive and negative ways; everyone was excited, overjoyed and a little bored. This theme delves into an explicit model of a teaching speaking technique that has the potential to captivate the majority of children but some require modifications to satisfy their preferences.	• Finger puppet is a favored learning tool for children. • Puppets teach children English. • Puppets excite and engage children. • Puppets keep children busy. • Puppets print a smile on children's faces. • Puppets free children from restrictions and provide them space to talk. • Children are delighted watching their videos using finger puppets. • Puppets help children personate different characters. • Finger puppets increase self-sufficiency. • Finger puppets increase self-confidence. • Puppets arouse children's imagination. • Puppets evoke children' previous knowledge. • Puppets encourage children to create real-life scenarios to help them learn. • Puppets are appropriate for all learning styles. • Finger puppetry is more flexible strategy than other strategies. • Finger puppetry can suite different learning atmospheres, school, and home, etc. • Puppets generate a cooperative learning atmosphere. • Puppets help to break down barriers (i.e., between the children themselves and the teacher). • Finger puppets are small to wear. • Puppets do not live up to children's freedom aspirations (move/talk). • Children prefer human characters of puppets. • Children prefer costumes instead of finger puppet. • Use theatre to help children build confidence. • Puppetry altered teachers way of teaching.
Theme: Rigid System Penetrates the Education Process	
Theme scope and boundaries	**Relative codes**

This central theme demonstrates the control that participants have as a result of the rigid system in which they live. This rigidity pervades every part of the education process. It limits participant (children and teachers) space in the education process and strengthens hierarchical authority. The rigidity of the system, requires teachers and children to follow a prescribed plan with little room to apply ideas. It reduces, and in some cases eliminates, opportunities for learning to occur and makes school a place that does not meet participant expectations. It influences and governs the other themes.	- Discipline is required in English lesson. - A traditional classroom setting. - Discipline can become controlling. - Hierarchy of authority. - School reality does not match the expectations of children. - Rigid system being required to function in an almost robotic way. - Inflexible system permeates the classroom. - MOE specialist subjectivity. - Instability of policies and instructions. - Teachers overwhelmed with administrative duties. - Ministry restricts teachers. - Some flexibility is provided by the Ministry of Education. - Implement the imposed plan by the MOE. - Curriculum is inadequate for time allocated for instruction. - Emotional relationships between a teacher and students is limited. - Cultural influence of perfectionism bored children. - Time and space for creativity in the classroom is limited.

Theme: Teachers neither have Voice nor do they Give Voice to Children	
Theme scope and boundaries	Relative codes
This theme highlights the extent to which voices of children and teachers exist in the school environment, as a result of its rigorous structure. The theme: teachers neither have voice nor give voice to children encompasses two facets of voice; the first is teachers voice in the school system and their ability to communicate opinions. The second is teacher awareness of children's rights and voices and the extent to which their rights are recognised by teachers. This theme is dichotomous; on one hand, teachers lack of recognition of children's rights, on the other, some children are given rights because of academic performance.	• Some children are labelled negatively. • Limited space to express opinions in class. • Children's cognitive abilities are not trusted. • Children's opinions have less weight in classroom. • Space for children to express their preferences. • Teacher is not responding to children's preferences. • Teachers' voice and input in the classroom is limited • Flexibility in choosing teaching strategies. • Teachers awareness about children' voices must be heard is limited. • Rights are assigned according to educational level (high achievers). • Teachers are uncertain about their role in forming teaching strategies. • Children have rights to learn and to be happy at school/ teacher's perceptions. • Children have a voice that must be heard. • Children's cognitive abilities are higher than adult's perceptions. • Children are not aware of their rights in classroom. • Conditional play: • Be polite and you can go out to play. • If time is available children can go out to play. • Complete the book to play a game. • Children's right are being to re-conceptualise by teachers. • Society (schools, teachers) are responsible for increasing children's rights. • To increase children's voice; teach beyond the scope of the textbook. • Teachers are responsible to educate children about their rights. • Ministry has the main role to increase children's voice.

Theme: Teaching English-Speaking Strategies	
Theme scope and boundaries	**Relative codes**
This theme captures the scope of stereotyped speaking strategies, used by English teachers and the consequences on children's feelings that vary between positive and bored. It reveals the children's preferences on learning English speaking. It shows how teachers struggle to teach speaking because of the limited use, of play-based pedagogy in English-language classrooms.	- Drawing arouses children's thinking. - Drawing helps to learn English. - Positive feelings in English lesson. - Neutral feelings in English lesson. - Bored feelings in English lesson. - Stereotypical learning: - Rules and regulations (sit quietly, noiseless classroom). (Exams-dictation) bored children. - Stereotypical teaching processes /bored children. - Compliant with traditional teaching methods: Sitting, listening and answering questions. - Drawing to express thoughts is a new concept for children. - Games to teach speaking. - Games generate positive learning. - Using children's preferred strategy. - Teachers intend to continuously improve. - Limited speaking strategies are used in the classroom. - Limited amount of time to practice speaking in classroom. - Teachers are aware of how children prefer to learn. - Strategies are implemented into the classroom without input from the students. - Teacher has increased awareness on what teaching strategy to use and why. - New issues identified and new concepts introduced to the teacher. - Teaching instructions need improvement. - Struggle in teaching speaking. - COVID-19 exacerbates challenges in teaching speaking skill. - Teach to complete the textbook. **Sub-Theme: Children's Preferable Way of Learning** - Learning through play. - Children prefer hands-on play. - Drawing is favored by children. - Physical movement /sport-football is preferred by children to learn. - Gaming is children's preferable way to learn. - Write to learn English. - English videos can improve English speaking. - Drawing and reading are preferred by children to learn English. - Reading English stories to learn English speaking. - Hand puppets to speak English. - Finger puppet to read a story. - Learning should be related to lived environment/realistic. **Sub-Theme: Limited Play-Based Pedagogy**

	• One-sided interaction –teacher -student. • Limited play opportunities in classroom. • Physical movement is limited in classroom. • Having fun in class is children's request. • Children need to be involved in classroom.

Theme: Children are Being in their World in their Way	
Theme scope and boundaries	Relative codes
This theme emphasises children's status as a distinguishing feature (being). It reflects the school community perception of children as becoming. Children, on the other hand, demonstrate who they are by being in their world in their own unique way.	• Children are perceived as becoming. • Children are 'being'. • Children are right seekers. • Children are creative thinkers. • Children are experts in matters related to their learning. • Self-esteem: Refuses to label oneself negatively • Self-esteem: Emphasis on being polite and smart. • Children need to be trusted by adults. • Children need attention. • Children are independent learners/ teachers' perspectives. • Children are dependent learners/teachers' perspectives. • Uncertainty on the meaning of children being or becoming, dependent or independent. • Children have altered teacher's point of view.
Theme: Miscellaneous	
Relative codes	
• View me as a friend; someone to share special moments with. • Children build rapport with the researcher. • Families need to be educated about their role towards their children. • COVID-19 has a manageable impact on data collection. • Creativity need to be engaging and achieve lesson objectives/ teachers' perspective. • Creative strategies involve and activate children's thoughts / teachers' perspective. • Creativity raises the academic level of students/ teachers' perspective.	