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The lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a Forest School model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates

by

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Declaration of authenticity and author's rights

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

Signed: 

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Abstract

Forest School (FS) is a ‘child-centred learning process, providing learner inspired, hands-on experiences in the natural environment’ (Plymouth Marjon University, 2024, para. 1). Originating in Scandinavia, the approach is currently being used in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is not the typical physical environment for FS. The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the UAE. This qualitative study used a case study method and followed a hermeneutic approach. Data was collected through two semi-structured interviews with staff from a case study school. Documents which related to FS or the culture and schooling system of the UAE were also analysed. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that the FS pedagogy offers a flexible approach, allowing FS leaders to adapt the teaching and encourages contextualisation to the local natural environment. This was reflected to a small extent in the changes which were made to the FS project in the case study school. The most significant adaptation was the change of name from FS to Desert Discovery. Several local resources were incorporated into the physical area such as sand, spices and local style fencing; however, this was juxtaposed with resources which did not reflect the local context. Findings indicate that training in intercultural awareness would enable staff members to contextualise the project further. Input from a member of the local community would also aid this process. Further research could interview a wider range of staff on the concept of FS in the UAE and document analysis of FS lessons plans in this context could reveal further cultural adaptations.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Forest School (FS) was a concept which originated in Denmark in the 1980s (Davis & Waite, 2005) and has since been adopted in various forms in many countries. Although the term ‘udeskole’ in Danish or ‘outdoor school’ is usually thought about in relation to green outdoor environments and learning through play, the concept can be transferred to any type of environment (Bentsen & Jensen, 2012; Leather, 2018). The FS association in the United Kingdom (UK) define FS as: ‘an inspirational process, that offers all learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees’ (Forest School Association, n.d.a). There are many noted benefits to FS (Harris, 2017; MacEachren, 2013; O’Brien, 2009; Ridgers et al., 2012). FS is not only popular in Europe but also in North America, Japan, New Zealand and Australia (Masters & Grogan, 2018) and ‘is culturally, socially and historically situated' (Leather, 2018, p. 8). The FS approach is currently being used in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a desert country in the Arabian Peninsula, which functions around a set of norms, values and laws which are fundamentally built upon Arab and Islamic principles (Baker, 2018; Heard-Bey, 2017). It is in this setting, which the current study is situated.

The formal schooling system of the UAE is set within this culture and is affected by the culture. Culture has been shown to play an integral part in education (Alhebsi et al., 2015; Godwin, 2006; Heard-Bey, 2017; Kirk, 2015). In younger children, the surrounding culture affects how they play (Baker, 2018; Roopnarine, 2012) and learn. In addition, the increased globalisation within the UAE has led to a rise in international private schools which teach an overseas curriculum (Ridge et al., 2015) and employ expatriate staff (Morales, 2015). As the culture and the schooling system interact, meaning is arrived at, for those working in schools, policy makers, as well as for pupils. It is often the customs and traditions within a culture which impact how individuals and groups interact with the surrounding environment. How one experiences the culture and how meaning is created from that differs from one person to another. This impacts many aspects of life, including education.

As a researcher, I am interested in how these meanings are constructed within the school system by school staff, and how this ‘meaning making’ adapts according to the lived experiences of individuals. The formation and understanding of these meanings is foundational to the hermeneutic approach which this study follows. As lived experiences are described, I seek to interpret separate meanings in light of other ideas shared by the participants, to gain a fuller understanding of the topic under research (Kvale, 1983). This is known as the 'hermeneutical cycle' (Kvale, 1983). I am also interested in how such 'meaning making' affects curriculums within contexts where culture and tradition intermix with international ideas, concepts, and pedagogies.

1.2 Problem statement and gap in the literature

Previous research has highlighted how the culture and language of the UAE feels threatened due to globalisation (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Baker, 2018; Cooke, 2014; Farrell, 2008; Hopkyns, 2016; Raver & O’Donnel, 2010) and the importance of Islam in every aspect of a Muslims life (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014; Al-Mansoori, 2004). Research has also highlighted how the implementation of overseas educational ideas needs to be done with care (Kirk, 2015; Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010; Matsumoto, 2019; Mrab et al., 2010). FS is one such concept. Many studies have shown the benefit of FS (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Harris, 2017; MacEachren, 2013; O’Brien, 2009; Ridgers at al., 2012). However, there have already been warnings about the overcommercialisation of the FS idea (Leather, 2018; Lloyd et al., 2018). Previous studies have reported the links between culture and learning, and the need for cultural adaptations to all aspects of education, particularly those brought in from abroad, in order to reflect local culture and heritage (Al-Qinneh & Abu-Ayyash, 2020; Baker, 2018; Bentsen at al., 2009; Bradley, 2010; Diallo, 2014; Gauvain, 1995; Kirk, 2015; Matsumoto, 2019; Lave & Wenger, 2002; Smidt, 2011). Bentsen and Jensen (2012) called for more research to be carried out on out on outdoor learning in different contexts, with Baker (2018) wanting more outdoor play in the UAE which incorporates local resources. In response, this study investigated how one overseas outdoor educational approach, namely FS, sought to adapt to the culture and environment in which it was situated. There is currently little literature on how the concept of FS is being applied in the UAE and specifically in the city of Al Ain.

1.3 Personal interest in the research subject

It is my experience of living and working in the Arabian Peninsula for the past 13 years which has driven this research. I have experienced firsthand what is described in the literature; how the juxtaposition and tension between the UAE's desire to modernise and the impact of globalisation, is contrasted with the government's desire for the preservation of the culture and heritage. I have seen this throughout the Arabian Peninsula, and most recently, in the UAE. Also, living within the city of Al Ain, I have experienced how this city treasures the culture and heritage of the country.

Through my role as a research assistant at a local university within the UAE, I have been exposed to much literature which discusses the education system in the UAE and how it desires to move forward in a modern capacity. One particular research project in which I was involved touched on the concept of FS. It was this that initially sparked my desire to research this idea further. From my knowledge of living in the region, I saw how this could be one way in which international schools may be able to promote the local culture and heritage. However, what was not known, was if adaptations were being made to one particular FS project in the city of Al Ain to make it applicable to the local context. This therefore fed into the drive and purpose of this study.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the UAE.

Sub questions to this are:

- What have been the staff members experiences of the culture and religion of the UAE?

- What adjustments have the school made to make FS in the case study school applicable to the local environment and culture?
- How do the staff view the adaptation of the FS project in the case study school?
- What are key components of a FS in the context of the case study school in the UAE?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of running a FS project such as this, from the perspective of staff in the case study school?

The study was hermeneutical in nature and attempted, through interviews, to establish how the staff understood FS and the meanings staff made in relation to the culture within the UAE. It also looked at how this has impacted their decisions relating to the practice of FS and the alterations they have made to the FS project in the case study school, to fit the locality where the school is situated. Documents relating to the FS project in the case study school and to the culture of the UAE were also analysed.

1.5 Significance of the study

The study contributes to the knowledge regarding policy borrowing, particularly within the UAE. It focused upon how a FS approach was implemented in the UAE and how this was modified to suit the Arab and Islamic culture of the country. In international education, policy makers, school administration and teachers all need to address how their current educational systems fit with the culture in which they are situated and how their overseas curricula are adapted to the local surroundings. Whilst previous studies have looked at FS worldwide, (Austin et al., 2013; Barfod & Bentsen, 2018; Burns & Manouchehri, 2021; Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Masters & Grogan, 2018) there is little literature on how FS is outworked within the UAE and this study contributes to the knowledge on how schools adapt the FS curriculum to the surrounding culture. Areas for further research, which the current study could not explore, are also identified.

1.6 Thesis outline

Chapter 2 is the literature review. This chapter introduces the background to the study, which is set in the UAE, giving an overview of the country of the UAE. This includes information

on climate, geography, history, culture and heritage, religion and the recent changes brought about by globalisation. It then goes on to present a review of the literature on FS and links between play and FS and FS and contextualisation. The final section focuses on curriculum and pedagogy and the development of the formal schooling system within the UAE. It considers culture and the UAE schooling system, international policy transfer, as well as play and culture.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology which follows a case study method with a hermeneutical approach. The chapter begins by outlining a rationale for qualitative data analysis and outlines the hermeneutical process. The role of myself as the researcher is presented alongside the justification for the use of semi-structured interviews and the analysis of documents as data sources. The methods of data analysis are then presented along with the ethical considerations for the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research along with an analysis of the data collected from two semi-structured interviews and the analysis of a range of documents.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study. Each of the research sub-questions are addressed, to come to a fuller understanding of the main purpose of the study.

Chapter 6 presents conclusions and recommendations from the study. Within this chapter, the limitations of the study are also highlighted and suggestions made for potential further research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study explores the interpretations of the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a Forest School (FS) model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Initially, background contextual information about the profile and culture of the UAE will be presented. Following this, a review of the literature will be split into two sections. The first section will focus on FS, outlining what FS is and the six principles which underlie FS practice. Benefits and drawbacks of FS will be considered, as well as the links between play and FS and FS and contextualisation. Following this, the second section will look at curriculum and pedagogy in the UAE, including the development of the formal schooling system in the country. The interaction between culture and the UAE schooling system is also discussed along with policy transfer. Finally in this section, culture and play is also addressed and the wider context of the study outlined.

The initial search of the literature involved using search engines such as google scholar and the University of Strathclyde library service online. In addition, databases such as Educational Resources Education Centre (ERIC), British Education Index and Scopus were also used to find literature. All literature had to be in English and relevant to the topic under research. Therefore, the literature search began by searching specific key words and phrases linked to the topic such as: United Arab Emirates, UAE culture, globalisation (globalization) and the UAE, contextualisation (contextualization) and education, forest school, UAE education system, policy transfer in education, UAE culture and education and play and culture. Initially, I attempted to only use data published within the last ten years however it became apparent that due to the uniqueness of the topic under research, that I did need to be flexible with this timescale to allow older, relevant data. It also became apparent that much data published researching the Arab world was older than this. Also, as a distance learning student, I was unable to access a physical library, therefore I was limited to using only online versions of texts. Local literature was used where possible, however, due to the gaps in relevant literature for the topic under research, international literature was also considered.

2.2 Country profile

To fully understand the topic under research, the literature review will first give an overview of the UAE in terms of geography, climate, history and demographics. These aspects add to the complexity of implementing FS in the UAE.

The UAE is in the Arabian Gulf and the greater Arab world. The term 'Arabs' constitutes over 420 million people, in eighteen countries who speak Arabic (Nydell, 2018). They are not all Muslim and often speak many different dialects. The common language of Arabic, which unites the people of the Arabian Peninsula (AP), also later united them under Islam (Heard-Bey, 2001). It is through tribal connections, the common religion of Islam, and the dialect of Arabic specific to the region (Gulf Arabic) that has developed to become 'Gulf Arab Culture' (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011). The approximate area of the UAE is 30,000 square miles (Zahlan, 1978); a mix of coastal island and reefs, sandy desert, gravel plains and mountains (Böer, 1997; Heard–Bey, 2001; Hurreiz, 2002; Potts, 1997; Zahlan, 1978). Most of the population is clustered along coastal areas (Zahlan, 1978) with the availability of water and climate directing how the land was used in the past (Heard-Bey, 2001). The main cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi are both found on the coast. A map of the UAE and the surrounding counties can be seen in Figure 1. It is estimated 93% of the landscape is desert (Luomi, 2014). The climate of the entire AP is very similar; a hostile, mostly arid environment, characterised by extreme heat, limited rainfall and limited amount of fresh water (Böer; 1997).

Figure 1 Map of the UAE and surrounding countries

(Nations Online Project, 2024)

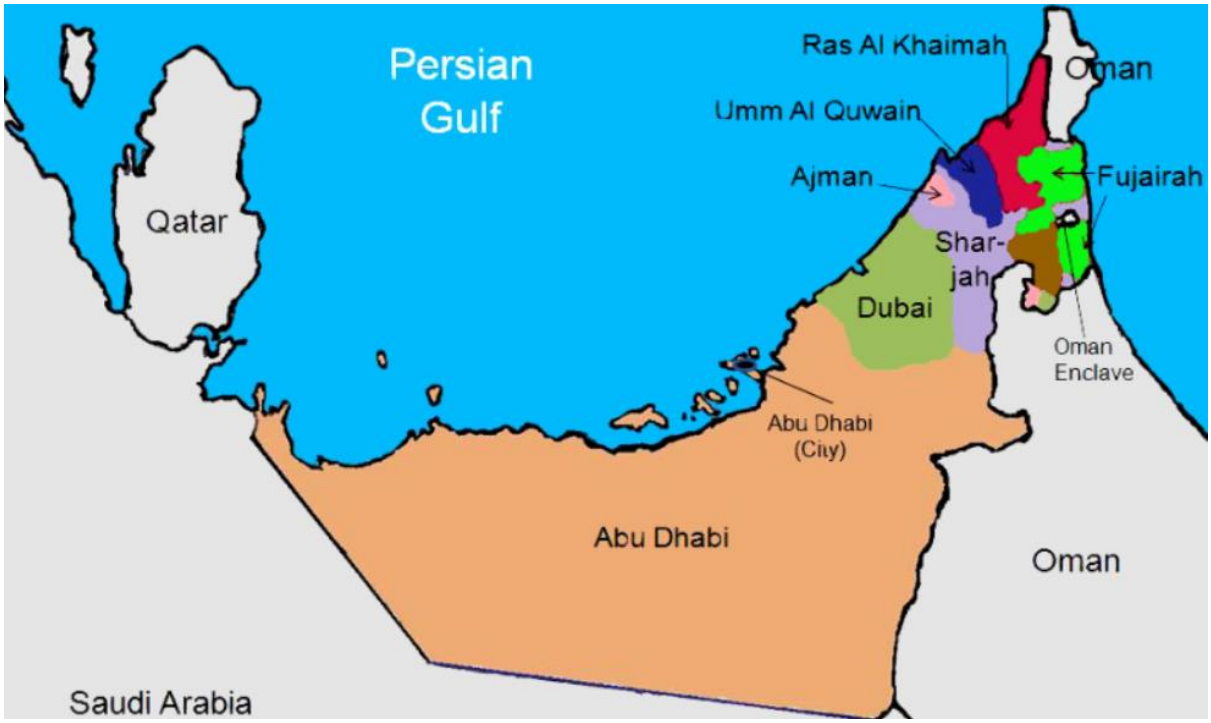
This study is set in the inland oasis city of Al Ain (Figure 1) which is hot and dry for most of the year and is known as ‘the garden city’ due to its lush, green landscape, traditional falaj watering system, abundance of date palm oases and fertile soils which historically, made it an attractive place for living (Heard-Bey, 2001, 2017; Zahan, 1978). A photo of the main date palm oasis in Al Ain can be seen in Figure 2. Even homes in Al Ain were built from various parts of the palm tree (Heard-Bey, 2017) which grew well due to the availability of fresh water. With the founder of the country having lived for a considerable time in Al Ain (Luomi, 2014), the country’s current leader being born in Al Ain, as well as the abundance of historical sites (UNESCO, 2023), Al Ain is an important cultural location within the UAE.

Figure 2 Al Ain Oasis

(Travel AbuDhabi, 2024)

The country was formed through the unification of six Trucial states in 1971 following the departure of British protection (Heard-Bey, 2017). Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah, Umm Al Quwain and Ajman were united under the leadership of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan with Ras Al Khaima, joining the union in 1972. These emirates can be seen in Figure 3. Abu Dhabi has 87% of the land, and is home to the Bani Yas tribe, the UAE's largest tribe (Heard-Bey 2017).

Figure 3 The Emirates of the UAE



(Dubai Business Guide, 2019).

The UAE's geographical position on trade routes as well as being at the center of the Islamic world, made it a hub for economics and politics (Hurreiz, 2002). Historically, the British had indirect rule of the area with minimal involvement in local dealings (Hurreiz, 2002), settling mainly in coastal areas (Zahlan, 1978). This oversight stayed until the nation was formed in 1971 (Bradshaw, 2019). Even after this, the British still had considerable roles in defense, oil, banking and engineering (Bradshaw, 2019).

The structure of the UAE's ruling make up did not change to adapt to the modern world, but flexed, maintaining a tribal base, staying true to its traditions (Al-Mansoori, 2004). There is the federal government which has overall responsibility, with the local governments of each of the emirates having a say in local matters. Tribal influences still play a part in maintaining the distinct nature of each of the emirates and the outworking of laws locally (Al Abed, 1997; Al-Mansoori, 2004; Heard-Bey, 2017).

In 2020, the population of the UAE was 9,282,410 (Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre, 2020). The population of Al Ain, within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (Figure 1), was estimated at 0.77 million in 2016, 26.4% of the total population living in the Emirate (Statistics centre of Abu Dhabi, 2020). Within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, in the school year 2018/19, there were 499 schools, of which 198 were private schools (Statistics centre of Abu Dhabi, 2020). It is in the private school sector, in the city of Al Ain, that this study is set. There are more Emirati pupils compared to non-Emirati pupils in Al Ain compared to any other region within Abu Dhabi Emirate, in both private and government schools (Statistics centre of Abu Dhabi, 2020). Therefore, these demographics influence how the schooling system is conducted.

2.2.1 Culture and heritage of the UAE

Education is not a standalone feature in society, but rather it is intertwined with the culture. It is important to consider the culture of the UAE, it's values and heritage, to fully appreciate how education in the UAE is situated. Culture is not easily defined but is collective to those in each area, hidden, outworking itself in the small things of everyday life (Hofstede et al., 2005). Schein (2017, p.17) defines culture as:

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Culture is something which is learned and is manifested in 'symbols, heroes, rituals, and values.' (Hofstede et al., 2005, p. 7). Closely linked with culture, is heritage. 'Heritage is the cultural legacy which we receive from the past, which we live in the present and which we will pass on to future generations' (UNESCO, n.d. para. 1). The concept of culture is diverse and not limited to:

> monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social manners, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe, and knowledge and techniques linked to traditional crafts (UNESCO, 2021, para. 1).

Authors have identified aspects of heritage which are important to the UAE: camels, hospitality, falconry, traditional values, traditional architecture such as wind towers (Hobbs, 2017; Ledstrup, 2019; Sobh et al., 2013), traditional weaving skills; dances and songs and Arabic coffee (Khansaheb, 2021), much of which it shares with other Gulf states (Heard-Bay, 2017). Some of these can also be seen in local proverbs (Isleem, 2017), which demonstrate further how the people of the UAE have strong links with the natural environment and how they use imagery from the natural surroundings to convey meaning. Examples of local proverbs can be seen in Appendix 1.

A large part of culture in the UAE is based upon the historical tribal structure of the population. The country is tribal in origin (Heard-Bey, 2001), each tribe with its own ruler (Heard-Bey, 2017), elected by people of the tribe, to rule over them in a way which was fair, in accordance with Islamic principles (Al- Mansoori, 2004). Loyalty within tribes is paramount (Al- Mansoori, 2004) and tribal allegiances are still very strong and are engrained within the culture, with tribal rulers playing a role in government and society (Al- Mansoori, 2004; Ghubash, 1997; Heard-Bey, 2017; Partrick, 2012). The tribal background of Emirati nationals is seen in their tribal name (Heard-Bey, 2001). While there were those tribes who were Bedouin, nomadic and roaming the desert, in Al Ain, there were also a number of static tribes, similar to other areas of the Gulf (Heard-Bey, 2008). Therefore, not all those who have Emirati citizenship are from a Bedouin background (Akinci, 2020). However, some values are shared by all Arabs: the role of the family, class structure, religious, political behavior, standards of social morality (Nydell, 2018) and hospitality (Sobh et al., 2013). 'Social rituals' have long since been held in high importance in the Gulf (Heard-Bey, 2017). Honour and shame are important, as is loyalty to family and a belief in God (Al-Omari, 2008; Nydell, 2018; Oghia, 2015). The culture is collectivist where a strong group mindset prevails within society over individualism (Kamp & Zhao, 2016). The word for hospitality, and the word for honour are closely linked in Arabic, therefore, hospitality is seen as an obligation, an opportunity to uphold and promote honour (Al-Omari, 2008; Nydell, 2018) and is mandated in Islam (Sobh et al., 2013). Gulf hospitality could be described as ritualistic with a set format to meeting, greeting and entertaining guests (Sobh et al., 2013) with skills being passed down through generations (Khansaheb, 2021). Coffee, dates and an opulent amount of food are all part of Arab hospitality (Sobh et al., 2013). Many of these core values are very different to the West and Fox et al., (2006) noted the importance of family honour, how religion provides the ultimate meaning and how hospitality is paramount for Arabs. These factors, Fox et al.,

(2006) suggest, are in contrast with American values of equal opportunity, individual success and a focus on work. It is in this situation of contrasting values that the study is set.

Another cultural aspect is clothing, which conveys a message about the values and attitudes of the wearer (Bouvier, 2018). The clothing worn by Gulf Arabs not only fulfills religious and cultural obligations, but speaks of their identity, in a land which is predominately populated by non-nationals (Akinci, 2020; Bouvier, 2018; Heard-Bey, 2008). The abaya, the black outer garment worn in public by women of the UAE (Al-Qasimi, 2010), is linked to preserving honor and avoiding shame and is both a 'social and cultural practice' as well as fulfilling Islamic obligations to preserve modesty (Al-Qasimi, 2010, p.50; Bouvier, 2018). Preserving modesty covers many aspects of life from clothing, to how the home is set up, with separate spaces for men and women (Sobh & Belk, 2011). The women's reputation must be upheld and today, some families are still concerned about this when it comes to ladies taking up educational opportunities outside the UAE (Prager, 2020). Males and females are separated in Emirati homes to maintain the honor of the family and prevent women meeting unrelated men (Sobh et al., 2013). Men typically wear a long white robe called a kandoura which is the national dress for Emirati men, signifying national identity and distinction from others (Cooke, 2014; Hopkyns, 2020; Ledstrup & Ledstrup, 2019). It is often also worn with a white head covering called a ghutra with a black iqal cord structure wrapped around it (Hopkyns, 2020; Ledstrup & Ledstrup, 2019).

Several cultural traits of Gulf Arabs have been identified. I have experienced many of these values and many are different from my British culture. Large, community weddings of the Gulf contrast with the invite only British affairs. Gulf Arabs often do not make decisions individually, as in the UK, but big decisions are often discussed within the family, with the male head having a large input into the final decision, which will be made for the overall good of the family, not only the individual. Guests are welcome at any time with lavish displays of hospitality shown in Arab homes, in contrast to 'calling ahead to warn of your arrival' which often occurs in the UK. In the UK, religion and state are separate, whereas Islam plays an integral role in everything within the AP.

Islam is the official religion in the UAE and influences one's entire outlook in life (Ahammed & Cherian 2014; UAEpedia, 2019).

> Islam also represents a system of moral and ethical principles that apply not only to an individual but to the entire social, economic and political structures of every society. It is…an attractive system of values which gives people certainty in an uncertain world. The all-encompassing nature of faith plays a vital part in a Muslim's life. It affects everything from family, social affairs to economics and political life (Al-Mansoori, 2004, p. 44).

Sheikh Zayed was religious and the nation he founded reflects Islamic principles in its tolerance and behavior (Maksoud, 1997). With many churches, temples and religions living side by side, the UAE stands out as very tolerant and welcoming (Nydell, 2018). Much of the culture of the past was based upon the teachings of Islam (Al- Mansoori, 2004) and it affects how globalisation is outplayed within the country (Al-Khazraji, 2009). The government is built upon Islamic principles, as interpreted by Sunni Muslims, the dominant sect of Islam followed in the UAE (Baker 2018). Islam also highlights the importance of man's care for the environment. Sheikh Zayed saw his care for nature as an Islamic duty (Luomi, 2014), a duty given to all Muslims (Sarkwi et al., 2016). Children need to learn to care and respect the environment, as directed by their religion. This has become increasingly difficult as the country has developed with the exposed nature of the hot, arid climate of the UAE making it vulnerable to climate change (Luomi, 2014). These concerns were first brought to the attention of the UAE government in 1970's and since then, there have been many committees and agencies set up to protect the environment (Hurreiz, 2002; Luomi, 2014). Therefore, this is an area of governmental focus which will also trickle down to impact schools and has strong links with the FS ethos.

2.2.2 Globalisation in the UAE

There has been widespread socio and political change within the UAE since the nation was formed in 1971, mostly due to globalisation and the influx of expatriates who fulfil job roles and aid development through their expertise (Aswad et al., 2011; Global Media Insight

Blogger, 2020; Gonzalez, 2008; James & Shammas, 2013; Morales, 2015; Schoepp, 2011). However, many traditional values and religious beliefs remain (Al-Khazraji, 2009; Al-Mansoori, 2004) even though it is estimated that UAE nationals only make up between 11-12% of the total population (Global Media Insight Blogger, 2020). These workers brought not only skills, but some of their culture and family life came too (Hurreiz, 2002), making the UAE a cultural melting pot. Consequently, there is an overarching threat that the influence of other nations and increased globalisation is beginning to undermine and consume the traditional values of the UAE (Baker, 2018; Cooke, 2014; Farrell, 2008; Raven & O'Donnel, 2010). Many of those coming into the country do not appreciate the country's heritage and background (Baker, 2018), creating tension between the new, modern, commercial aspect of globalisation, and the traditional views and heritage of this Islamic country (Al-Khazraji, 2009). Even the elders of this modern nation are struggling to deal with how new, overseas values sit alongside traditional UAE values (Heard-Bey, 2017). Nydell (2018, p. 33) explains:

> the issue for Arabs is how they will be able to adopt Western technology without adopting the Western values and social practices that go with it, and thereby retain their cherished traditional values. Their ideal society would retain its Islamic character, relying on Islamic values while undertaking reform.

An assimilation of values between cultures increases the links between various identities as they create shared identities together (Labes, 2014). However, with such a mixed population, it has been stated that there is often little overlap between Emirati nationals and the expatiate population (Aleya & Shammas, 2013; James & Shammas, 2013). Some Emirati nationals are happy to be part of a global worldview, as long as it does not infringe on their Islamic beliefs (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014). Cultural values have remained traditional while globalisation has forced the nation forward into a different realm (Bahgat, 1999). Al Mansoori (2004) describes what he calls 'cultural lag' within the UAE where the material culture moves faster than values and customs and where conservative values mix with new modern ideas. Al-Khazraji (2009, p. 18) observes 'it would seem unlikely that a culture that has been in existence for centuries would change in similar fashion and in such short time.' However, mindsets and attitudes are changing, as are some more traditionally held beliefs, such as the changing role of women in society (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014). Due to globalisation, there is now a gap between the older generation, who grew up with the traditional way of life and

the younger, who have adapted to a modern way of life, which may be in conflict with traditional values (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014). Globalisation has brought to the forefront some interesting dilemmas for the UAE, where the role of Islam is questioned and where traditional values encounter wider world values and ideas (Stetter, 2012). The government are aware of this and are attempting to preserve history and culture of the UAE through vision statements such as UAE Vision 2021 (UAE Vision 2021, 2018) and committees, such as the Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development. Museums and heritage centers have opened to promote the traditions of the past to today's youth and educate expatriates (Al-Khazraji, 2009). On the other hand, when outside influences such as globalisation begin to interact with local cultures, it can have the effect of strengthening cultural pride and family, tribal and national relationships (Al-Khazraji, 2009). It is possible for a country to move forward in becoming 'modern' in their own way. To harness the culture and traditions of society and not merely accept those of the West, is modernity in its cultural and contextualised form (Mazlish, 2002). Government documents have touched on these issues (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014; The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008; UAE Vision 2021, 2018). These documents, along with other values and documents will be considered during this study and how they play a part in shaping the field of education within the UAE.

There is an interconnectedness between language and culture and much of the culture which is truly embedded in society is unseen, linking attitudes and inner belief systems (Oxford & Gkonou, 2018). However, with Arabic being key to uniting Arabs (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2020; Partrick, 2012), as well as having a foundational place in Islam and Arab culture (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2020), the fact that it has now almost become a second language in many Gulf Arab states, could be seen as a undermining the very 'Arab-ness' of the country. Despite Arabic being the official language of the UAE, many residents do not speak this language (Heard-Bey, 2017). The use of English in business and commerce, English speaking nannies raising children in Emirati homes, and the continual push for English teaching in schools, all increases the profile of the English language (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Hopkyns, 2016). Hopkyns (2016) found that Emirati students were positive about English and associated it with education and the world, but linked Arabic with culture, religion and history. Some felt that English added to their Emirati identity, however there was a fear for the use of Arabic for future generations. Parents have noted many Western cultural inferences in the English medium curriculum and have expressed their concern that these

Western values and identities were being adopted by students (Belhiah & Al-Hussien, 2016). Conversely, in Saudi Arabia, Al-Qahtani and Al Zumor (2016) found that parents encouraged young children to learn English and saw the importance of English as a global language, believing English would open more educational and employment possibilities in the future. Students and teachers felt similarly in Oman (Denman & Al-Mahrooqi, 2019). However, the lack of a deeper knowledge of Arabic will not only affect individuals' day-to-day communication but their religion also, as they will struggle to appreciate the classical nature of Quranic Arabic (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011). In recent years, the UAE has begun to promote the Arabic language more with book fairs and cultural projects dedicated to Arabic (Hopkyns, 2016).

2.3 Forest schools

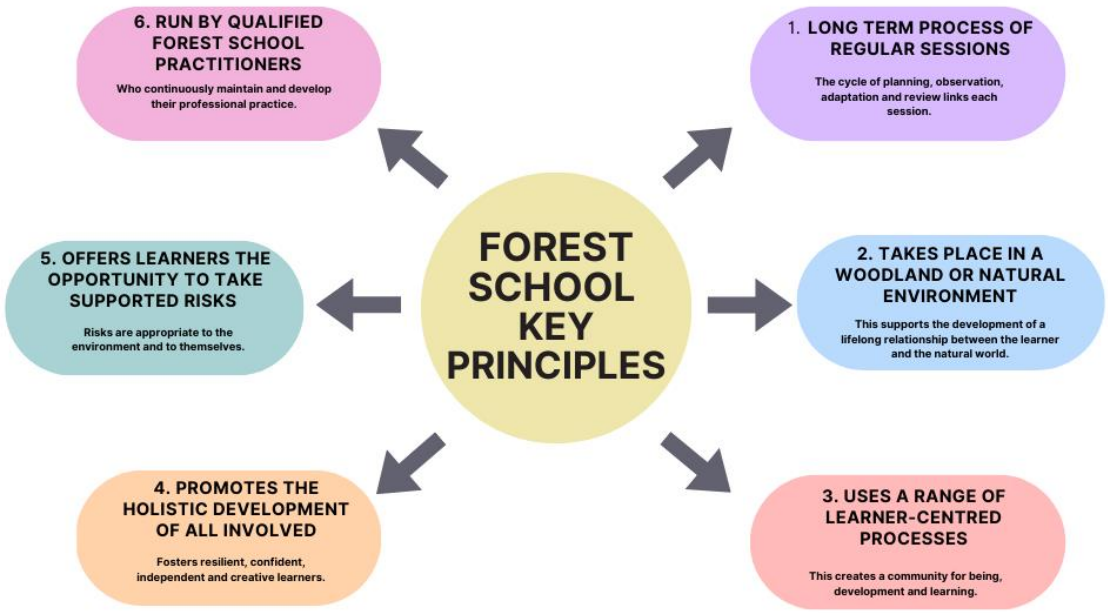
With the cultural context to the study having been outlined, an overview of FS and the underpinning pedagogy of this educational approach will now be given. The following section will give an introduction to the FS model, highlight the main principles of FS and consider the benefits of FS. Following this, research will be presented which highlights the links between play and FS, along with looking at FS and contextualisation.

Forest school is a model of education which takes place in an outdoor environment (Davis & Waite, 2005). It has become popular particularly in the United Kingdom (UK) but originated in Denmark in the 1980s (Davis & Waite, 2005). The Forest School Association of the UK is the recognised body which provides training and direction for FS leaders and staff in the UK. FS 'is a child-centred learning process, providing learner inspired, hands-on experiences in the natural environment' (Plymouth Marjon University, 2024, para.1). In a more expanded definition, the FS association in the UK define FS as:

> a child-centred inspirational learning process, that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. It is a long-term program that supports play, exploration and supported risk taking. It develops confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting (Forest School Association, n.d.a).

FS is typically used in younger children (Leather, 2018) and research has noted that activities such as den making, crafting using outdoor materials and climbing all take place in FS (Austin et al., 2013). Activities can be child or adult led (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019), with the principles of FS underpinning the activities and the FS structure. These six key principles are detailed in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Forest School principles



From the FS Association website (Forest School Association, n.d.a).

2.3.1 Benefits of Forest School

The benefits of FS are wide ranging, and this holistic approach is key to FS (Principle 4, Figure 4). The outdoor environment offers motivating and enjoyable learning opportunities (Harris, 2017), engages learners' interests in a way technology cannot (MacEachren, 2013), uses all five senses and appeals to many leaning types (Harris, 2017), increasing engagement of pupils who would otherwise have low motivation (O'Brien, 2009). Through regular experiences of nature, children grow in their understanding, appreciation and care of the

environment, whilst noting seasonal changes (Michek et al., 2015; Ridgers et al. 2012), linking with FS principles 1 and 2 (Figure 4). Coates and Pimlott-Wilson (2019) found that the children attending FS enjoyed the change of routine, collaborated with peers and were encouraged to play an active role in their learning, linking with Principle 3 (Figure 4). Children have shown improvements in curiosity, understanding between adult and child, vocabulary, concentration and social skills as result of taking part in FS (O'Brien 2009). Despite the small sample size of only twenty-four children being observed in this study, the triangulation of the data between FS staff and parents strengthens the trustworthiness of the findings. Ridgers et al. (2012) noted improved motor skills in children through the hands-on opportunities afforded by FS.

Being in nature also had positive effects on older primary school children (Sobel, 2020), therefore FS is not only confined to the early years, where it most frequently used. Despite the benefits of the outdoor environment, children are now spending less time outdoors (Edwards-Jones et al., 2018; Sandseter et al., 2012). Play and exploration in the natural world is in decline, with screen and time indoors on the rise. FS is therefore, one way in which educational providers can build quality outdoor time into the school day.

2.3.2 Drawbacks of Forest School

However, a drawback to FS is that it takes time to prepare for outdoor classes, with an extra burden of needing the correct equipment (Barfod & Bentsen, 2018). Weather should be accommodated, with both sun and rain needing equipment such as sun cream and raincoats respectively. Those responsible for FS need to consider risks, the development of suitable educational goals, as well as staff training for FS (Edwards-Jones et al., 2018) (Figure 4), which takes both time and finances.

2.3.3 Play and Forest School

The FS association says: ‘play and choice are an integral part of the Forest School learning process, and play is recognised as vital to learning and development at Forest School’ (Forest School Association, n.d.a) which underpins principle 3 (Figure 4). The very nature of FS, being outside in the ever-changing landscape, lends itself to learning through play (Forest School Association, n.d.a; Leather, 2018; Ridgers et al., 2012). The hands-on approach to den

building, minibeast hunting and tree climbing, combined with the vastness of the wall-less classroom, encourage diverse, imaginative play. Play in this type of environment will satisfy and challenge the sense of adventure in children and lead to a knowledge of dealing with risk (Maynard, 2007). Part of this risk comes from the increased physical challenges which the outdoor environment brings (O'Brien & Murray, 2007; Ridgers et al., 2012) and studies have documented the need for a safe approach to FS risks whilst noting the benefits (Harper & Obee, 2020; Masters & Groga, 2018; Sandseter et al., 2012) (Principle 5, Figure 4). These physical challenges and explorations lend themselves to the constructivist approach to learning in FS (Harris, 2017; O'Brien, 2009). The tasks which children are drawn to in a FS setting allow for exploration and problem solving through hands on experience. Teachers are seen as facilitators of child-led, play based learning rather than instructing them in tasks (Harris, 2017; O'Brien, 2009) and seek to be practitioners who guide children as their interests develop.

2.3.4 Forest School and contextualisation

Whilst FS has many benefits and the FS approach can be adapted to suit different contexts, Leather (2018, p. 3) warns that FS leaders must be aware of the philosophical background to FS to retain 'some cultural sensitivity to the place and comprehension of the tensions that arise through implementation in different contexts.' He explains that the Scandinavian basis of FS was established upon being free in nature and having connections within the landscape. However, this is not necessarily true in all contexts. Similarly, Harper (2017) warns that FS is at risk of being 'lifted and transplanted' from one country to another without the contextualisation of materials, concepts and underpinning philosophies. Leather (2018) shares similar thoughts. Lloyd et al. (2018) argues that the FS approach has been over commercialised and internationally, does not consider the cultural context in which FS is practiced. Lloyd et al. (2018) are critical of FS and say FS does not emphasise the local environment but both Leather (2018) and Lloyd et al. (2018) see it as a 'social construction', being influenced by both place and culture. Lloyd et al. (2018) argue that many of the so-called advantages of outdoor learning could be achieved in a variety of environments. In Turkey, Bal and Kaya (2020) interviewed five FS teachers and found that FS allowed children to integrate classroom knowledge with real life situations, providing the child the freedom to explore and try new things, whilst building self-conference. To do this, FS needs

to have ‘societal relevance’ (Harper, 2017, p. 4), something which is key to the purpose of the current study.

New Zealand has adapted its own program of ‘nature kindergartens’, which are similar to FS. Named ‘Te Whāriki’ meaning ‘a woven mat’ in Māori, it aims to highlight the interwoven curriculum which incorporates local Māori ideas and beliefs (Masters & Grogan, 2018). This programme looks at identifying local features and how the native Māori culture ‘respects(s) and appreciate(s) the natural environment’ (Masters & Grogan, 2018, p. 235). This is one way in which outdoor education has been contextualised to the local area. In Norway, the outdoors is at the very essence of the culture and plays an important part in the life of Norwegians (Sandseter at al., 2012). Therefore, there is a deep connection with the outdoors which lends itself to outdoor education. In response, Lloyd et al, (2018, p. 47) call for ‘place responsive pedagogy’ where the physical location of the learning is considered to allow ‘children the benefits of the localised cultural experiences’ offering a more personalised learning opportunity in the outdoors. Whilst it has been acknowledged that there have been changes made to FS within the UAE (Takriti et al., 2020), the literature is lacking in-depth studies on this topic.

2.4 Curriculum and pedagogy in the UAE

A country profile of the UAE has been presented alongside an overview of FS. The next section will look at curriculum and pedagogy within the UAE. Information on the development of the formal schooling system within the UAE will be explored alongside information on how the culture of the country relates to the schooling system. Following this, the idea of educational policy transfer will be considered, as FS is an educational concept which has been brought from outside the UAE and employed within the case study school. Lastly, the final section will look at play, as this is an important aspect of FS and how play is interrelated with the local cultural context.

2.4.1 Development of the formal schooling system in the UAE

Although this study focuses upon the formal schooling system in the UAE, this is not the only recognised form of education. Historically in the UAE, knowledge was passed down

verbally (Alhebsi, 2015) and the transfer of 'skills-based knowledge' was through apprenticeships, which boys usually began around eight years old (Alhebsi et al., 2015; Morrison, 2021). These apprenticeships were common through the Arab world and added to the economic system and the wider community (Ibish, 1977). This could be seen as non-formal learning (OECD, n.d.), and even before the formal schooling system was set up, Alhebsi et al. (2015, p. 2) adds that 'self-education was deemed as legitimate within this cultural context'.

Before the country was formed, formal education was mainly focused on teaching religion, maths and literacy, from homes or mosques (Alhebsi, 2015) and was only available for boys (Gallagher, 2019). The religious pattern of education continued until schools opened (Alhebsi, 2015). One catalyst for formal schooling in the early nineteenth century was the wealth which came from the pearling industry along the UAE coast (Kippels & Ridge, 2019). Through the development of schools and promotion of Islamic teachings, it allowed more people to adhere to Islam and traits of these educational ideas are still present within the UAE today (Alhebsi, 2015). This preceded the opening of the first modern school in the UAE in Sharjah in 1930, based on a Kuwaiti curriculum (Alhebsi, 2015). The counties which backed the early schools, such as Kuwait and Egypt, usually staffed them also (Kippels & Ridge, 2019).

More recently, much of the wealth gain from oil went into developing and modernising the schooling system (Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010; Morgan, 2018) and was seen as a long-term strategic plan by the UAE government to grow citizens who can compete in the global economy (Badry, 2012; Schoepp, 2011). Initially, the number of students, schools and teachers grew from 1970s until the end of 1990s. ‘Qualitative improvements’ followed focusing on the improvement of public schools, the development of private schools, as well as the quality of higher-level education (Gallagher, 2019). The private school system has grown tremendously to provide schooling solutions for expatriate families (Gallagher, 2019) and UAE nationals (Godwin, 2006). Emirati children are entitled to free education in primary and secondary governmental schools, as well as at university level. The UAE Ministry of Education (MOE) estimates that there are approximately 643 private schools in the UAE, with 869 teachers, teaching 810,537 pupils (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Education, 2019) offering a range of curricula, from the English national curriculum to the Indian syllabus (Ridge et al. 2015). The government has encouraged this growth of the private

school sector as an alternative to the government system (Ridge et al., 2015). Nuqul (2014, p. 8) says of international schools that ‘any school in which teachers use a curriculum other than that of the national curriculum of the country and employ the English language as a medium of instruction is generally considered international’. UAE nationals are often unhappy with the public school system or are seeking a particular curriculum for their children and are thus attracted to the international private schools (Ridge et al 2015). However, one drawback of private schooling is the cost, with private schools being a lucrative business (Ridge et al 2015).

The UAE education system is complex with overseeing bodies from federal and Emirate level involved (Kippels & Ridge, 2019). The MOE was established in 1972 (Ridge et al 2017), overseeing all educational establishments and sets guidelines which private schools must follow (U.ae, 2023). Each Emirate then has its own governing body responsible for Emirate wide initiatives and inspections (U.ae, 2023). Within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, where Al Ain is located, the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) is responsible for overseeing the private school curricula (Kippels & Ridge, 2019).

2.4.2 Culture and the UAE schooling system

Due to the rapid progression and development of the schooling system, the UAE has relied heavily on teachers from other countries to staff schools (Morgan, 2018), many of whom lack understanding of the UAE culture (Baker, 2018). In one study, Emirati high school students felt that bringing in Western teaching staff was a potential threat to their culture (Dickson, 2013). To promote the heritage of the country, all schools are required to teach social studies to every student in years 2-10 covering subjects such as: the history of the nation, the map of the UAE, key figures in the story of the UAE and some aspects of local culture (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014; Knowledge and Human Development Authority, 2019). Arabic must also be taught to all students, with Islamic studies taught to Muslim students (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015). The curriculum in all schools is censored to remove topics such as evolution and sex education, making it permissible to local values and the Islamic religion (Godwin, 2006). Despite this, UAE schools have been the receptors of various curricula and ideas brought from abroad, many of which have not had links with local ideas, values or culture. It has been estimated that the UAE has the highest number of international schools

within the Arabian Gulf, with there being 511 in the country (Edarabia, 2020a), in contrast with other Gulf countries such as Qatar, having 338 (Edarabia, 2020b). For many years the modern UAE schooling system followed a variety of borrowed curricula, with the UAE creating and implementing its own national curriculum in 1985. It is only a recent phenomenon that the UAE has been following more 'home-grown' educational ideas, which have been influenced by outside expertise (Ridge et al., 2017).

2.4.3 Policy Transfer

Educational policy transfer or using teaching concepts and ideas from other countries is a complex issue, often referred to as 'policy borrowing'. When used correctly it can be a powerful tool in educational reforms (Burdett & O'Donnell, 2016; Romanowski & Karkouti, 2021). Kirk (2015, p. 88) states that although intentions may be good 'borrowing of tried and tested models … misses much of the contextual and cultural uniqueness required of an education system'. FS is once such idea which has been employed in the case study school but did not originate in the UAE. Many nations within the Gulf region have adopted the principles and curriculum from countries such as the UK, USA and Finland (Kirk, 2015). It was in the mid-1990s that the UAE started to look to Western countries to provide education models and influence the education system (Kippels & Ridge, 2019). These ideas are not always successful or even helpful to the countries involved (Kirk 2015). Not everything that works in Western education will work in the Arab world (Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010), as new, imported educational ideas may not have traditional Islamic values at the core and do not foster traditional cultural or religious norms (Mrabet, 2010; Romanowski & Karkouti, 2021). Education is not a standalone concept but is intertwined with society, culture and the political sphere (Bentsen at al., 2009) and to remove an educational idea from the society in which is set, can change the original meaning of the educational practice (Matsumoto, 2019). What is best practice in one country is not always best practice in another. There is a culture of 'replication' rather than 'innovation' in Gulf education systems put down to lack of autonomy in schools, hindering their ability to be truly innovative with the curriculum (Kirk, 2015). Mohamed and Morris (2021) took a critical look at policy borrowing in the Gulf region and concluded that since the global education industry is a private organisation, it is influenced by profit. Whilst the concept of policy borrowing is to share 'best practice' Matsumoto, (2019) points out that when thinking about 'borrowing' educational practices, the UAE could consider the culture of the country from which the practice comes, which may help find

practices which align more with Emirati culture and vision (Matsumoto, 2019). There is a need for countries such as the UAE to move away from the transfer of educational policies, towards more home-grown ideas and policies (Morgan, 2018) and adapt borrowed ideas as necessary (Aydarova, 2013). Within the state of Abu Dhabi, there have been various educational ideas brought in, which may or may not take local cultural variations and traditions into consideration (Baker, 2018). These imported curricula do not promote in-house curricular development nor are they specific for the context in which they will be used (Ridge et al., 2017). Bahgat (1999, p. 131) said that there is a dilemma facing schools within the Gulf Monarchies, that is 'how to reconcile the requirements for modernisation with their traditional values'. With fears that the national identity of the UAE is being eroded (Raven & O'Donnell, 2010) there is much to consider.

There is an added dimension to the UAE, when considering the use of foreign school curricula, as well as the employment of foreign staff in education. That is, the country's unwavering dedication to the national religion, Islam. Ibn Khaldun, a respected Islamic scholar in history, suggested that through the process of education, people do not only acquire knowledge, but morals also (Al-Rimawi, 2011). Al-Rimawi (2011, p. 84) says that 'in Islam, education is a process of mental and spiritual preparation…to learn…responsibilities and moral values….to play his role in the building up of society.' Therefore, historically, the development of education was built upon a basis of allowing the citizen to be educated to follow Islam better and access Islamic teachings (Alhebsi, 2015). Even today, government schools are single sex, and the education system is still based on Islamic principles (Godwin, 2006). Textbooks in Arab counties often have verses from the Holy Quran included (BouJaoude & Noureddine, 2020). In many Muslim countries, imported educational ideas have not shown the respect for local ideas and traditions (Al-Rimawi, 2011), however, the UAE government has placed the respect of Islamic values high within the educational realm (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013; Dubai Knowledge et al. 2015).

Educational thinking in western cultures and Islamic cultures differs. In the West, education is mostly secular, where the learner strives to develop and attain knowledge through reasoning, critical thinking and interpretation (Diallo, 2014). In contrast, Islamic educational principles see religious teaching as non-negotiable, where faith is a lens through which events are interpreted and, for many events, only God knows the full truth (Diallo, 2014). Recitation and memorisation are foundational to religious Islamic teaching, therefore rote learning

became a familiar learning model in the Arab world (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Chrystall, 2014; Diallo, 2014; Tabari, 2014). This contrasts with the play based, constructivist approach to learning which FS is based upon, where the children lead the learning as opposed to receiving knowledge from instructors (Harris, 2017; O'Brien, 2009). Romanowski et al. (2018) warns that constructivist ideas may not fully be transferable to the Arabian Gulf, as it requires the learner to be an active, reflective participant, seeing the teacher as the facilitator of knowledge, the opposite of what is seen in traditional rote learning. In fact, UAE Vision 2021 (Vision 2021, 2018) set out by the UAE government highlights that the education system needs to move away from rote learning to a curriculum which involves 'critical thinking and practical abilities' (Vision 2021, 2018, p. 23). Therefore, the FS philosophy, with a focus on holistic development and play based learning, may link well with the government's vision but also challenges traditional learning styles.

2.4.4 Culture and play

Culture is also an integral part of any education system. Culture is not a static force but is constantly changing whilst striving to maintain certain values (Gauvain, 2009). Children grow and adapt into the cultural situation in which they find themselves (Gauvain, 1995) and interact accordingly (Chen, 2012). Culture impacts how children behave, as well as their emotional and social development (Chen & Eisenberg, 2012). Children learn about their culture through experiences which come together to shape the child (Gauvain, 2009). Some communities put less expectations upon children to take on 'work type' responsibilities than others, some parents intervene in play, others do not (Edwards, 2000). Adults in the child's environment model culturally appropriate norms and children are often seen to imitate these in their play (Edwards, 2000). Artefacts of the culture carry meaning, and children develop an understanding of this meaning through interactions with fellow members of the culture and can thereby respond in a culturally appropriate way (Gauvain, 2009). Culture also determines how children interact with peers (Chen, 2012). School is one of the many places children learn from and interact with others through play.

Play is something that is common amongst all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, or social status and is seen as a vital part of a FS curriculum. Some see it as a learning tool, while others find that the two do not overlap (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). Play has been described in many ways, from free to guided, part of the learning process to distinct from it (Pyle &

Alaca, 2018). Pressure to focus on academic skills can often hinder a school's ability to fully harness play based learning (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019). The FS association highlights the place of play in FS: 'Play and choice are an integral part of the Forest School learning process, and play is recognised as vital to learning and development at Forest School.' (Forest School Association, n.d.b) linking with FS principle 3 (Figure 4). Play can address many needs of the child, from the physical to cognitive, the emotional, the social and academic (Howard, & McInnes, 2013; Kinkead-Clark, 2019; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Through play and working with others, a child learns self-regulation skills, collaboration, sharing and motivation, all of which will be needed in the future (Kinkead-Clark, 2019; Pyle, & Danniels, 2017; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Although classroom staff are in direct contact with a child and their play, school management and headteachers need to be involved in the consultation when schools decide to adopt a more play-based curriculum (Smidt, 2011). This ensures the philosophy and pedagogy of play is supported from the top down, as there is often a tension between what is directed from policy level in terms of academic standards and how play-based pedagogy can be integrated (Pyle, & Danniels, 2017).

There are several aspects to play which draw upon various theoretical underpinnings (Howard & McInnes, 2013). The external world has played a part learning theories such as those of Piaget and Vygotsky (Bradley, 2010) adding weight to the argument that children do not learn in isolation and are affected by their surroundings. Piaget (1951), saw play as a way for children to confirm their learning, often through repetition, with the child being an active participant in the process. Piaget (1951) also had ideas about how children, through play, imitate reality. Vygotsky's social constructivist theory of development (Vygotsky, 2021) sees the child as an active participant in learning, who learns through a series of social interactions (Derry, 2013; Howard, & McInnes, 2013; Vygotsky 2021), where culture, family life and other factors dynamically interact (Vygotsky, 2021; Rogoff, 2003). The constructivist theory places play as a necessity for cognitive development, as children actively interact with their environment and that it is through this environment that the child learns (Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Vygotsky (2021), with his 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) identified the role of social interactions, with teachers 'scaffolding' and 'supporting' the learning, where the child can achieve more with assistance than alone (Bradley, 2010; Howard and McInnes, 2013; Lave & Wenger, 2002; Vygotsky 2021), bringing the adult into the learning

process. FS recognises the importance of adults in the learning process and requires all FS leaders to be fully trained (Forest School Association, n.d.a, Figure 4). The ‘cultural’ aspect places the ZPD as the range between the learner's knowledge which he gains from the cultural context and instructive knowledge (Bradley, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 2002). A popular interpretation of Vygotsky's work on the ZPD is the ‘collectivist’ or ‘social’ which looks at the ability to learn not only from ‘pedagogical structuring’ but also from everyday life (Bradley, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 2002). Bronfenbrenner (1979) also places a child’s learning within a socio-cultural context and classifies various factors/participants which can directly or indirectly play a part in how a child behaves, as part of the wider ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Howard & McInnes, 2013). Bruner saw play as a concept in which children could explore, experiment and problem solve (Bruner, 1972; Howard, & McInnes, 2013). There is a continual pull for teachers regarding their position in play: to be involved or not, and everything in between (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019).

The society and culture in which a child lives can have implications for play (Baker 2018; Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Howard & McInnes, 2013; Roopnarine 2012). Culture is agreed upon between those who are involved in a specific community and 'reality' is constructed together and passed on from generation to generation and although individuals can have thoughts independent from this community, it is shaped through a cultural lens (Bruner, 1996). There have been differences noted in how children play across cultures (Chessa et al., 2013; Fleer; 2013). Meaning is gained through experience within context (Haight & Black, 2001; Rogoff, 2003), as highlighted by Piaget, with Vygotsky noting the important place culture holds in development (Smidt, 2011; Vygotsky, 2021). The physical environment also impacts how children play (Roopnarine, 2012). There is a need therefore to consider both culture and the surrounding environment when children are learning (Bruner, 1996; Chessa et al., 2013). This is also applicable to FS, where learning occurs in a natural environment. In every cultural setting, children learn about aspects of everyday life through play and imitation of reality, and that this will reflect aspects of their own society's norms, values and what is expected of them (Baker, 2018; Bruner, 1996; Fleer, 2013; Roopnarine, 2012; Piaget, 1951; Taylor & Boyer, 2020). Whilst many may view the formal education system as the only way learning can take place, there is also informal learning which constantly occurs through experiences (OEDC.org, n.d.). How toys are used in the classroom can reflect cultural roles and views (Trawick-Smith et al., 2015). Therefore, there needs to be an understanding of culture and its norms and values when considering which toys and objects are placed in a

school setting. Vygotsky (1994) identified how cultural development takes place as children grow and this cultural knowledge is developed alongside natural development and that they complement and merge as the child grows.

A study was undertaken by Baker (2018) in Abu Dhabi addressing the combination of learning through play and the culture and heritage of the UAE. Baker (2018) noted the moving away formal 'didactic' pedagogy towards a more play-based model within Abu Dhabi, in recognition of the importance of social interactions when learning and the place of culture in socio-constructivist learning. One respondent in this study of 52 Emirati Kindergarten teachers recalled the use of natural palm materials to make playthings, highlighting an important aspect of Emirati culture, namely the date palm tree. Baker (2018) identifies the link between significant aspects of the Emirati culture and the concepts and tools which children link with play. The lack of outdoor play opportunities was also mentioned in this study, with there being a particular fear of allowing girls to play outside. Role play equips children with the knowledge of social roles and values which are attuned to their Emirati culture (Baker, 2018). One respondent described how they set up their classroom to incorporate cultural skills such as pouring traditional coffee, an important aspect in hospitality. This knowledge is vital today when thinking about what play means for both the children and teachers in a modern Emirati context, where global ideas converge with traditional culture. Baker (2018) calls for a revival of outdoor play with traditional materials from the UAE and having a traditional Emirati take on role play to reflect the culture. Al-Qinneh and Abu-Ayyash (2020), also highlight the need for play to reflect local socio-cultural perspectives. They found that the family living situation provided extended play opportunities, with children playing with cousins who lived with them, highlighting the communal aspect of Emirati life. In this study, Emirati mothers paced a high value on children being taught social norms in early childhood settings over academic values and they did not see play as a learning tool, with many not spending time playing with their child (Al-Qinneh & Abu-Ayyash, 2020). These studies have direct implications for a FS in this context with regards to materials used and activities planned.

2.5 Wider context of the study

This research sits in several larger research themes which are beyond the scope of the current study. Once such theme is the ideas of how countries develop and modernise. The theory of

multiple modernities looks at modernisation, not as a uniform happening, but rather something in which culture and history play a vital role (Eisenstadt, 2000; Fourie, 2012). Those who advocate for this theory would suggest that Western ideas of modernity cannot be fully transplanted to other cultures (Schmidt, 2006). Even within Islamic communities, tension has been felt between modernity and the boundaries set by the religion (Eisenstadt, 2000). Both religion and freedom are engaged together in the multiple modernities theory (Fourie, 2012) and this can be seen in the UAE, where these ideals both compete and complement each other in a global society. There is also the thought that the subject of re-colonialisation, where several powers seek to gain back power in an area, can be sought through foreign influences in education systems (Samier, 2020; Sloan et al., 2017). Although this study will not explicitly touch on these topics, there is an appreciation of the wider context where this study is set.

2.6 Summary

This chapter began by looking at a country profile of the UAE, its culture and heritage and the impact of globalisation on the country. Following this, relevant literature was presented on FS, its core principles, benefits and drawbacks to FS, as well as links between play and FS and contextualisation and FS. Information on the curriculum and pedagogy of the UAE was laid out which looked at the development of the UAE formal schooling system, culture and the schooling system, as well as policy transfer in education. Chapter 3 will present the hermeneutical methodology used for the study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

To look at the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a Forest School (FS) model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a case study approach with a hermeneutical interpretation was adopted for this study. This chapter begins with outlining the rationale behind using a qualitative research approach. Then, the hermeneutical framework and the case study method is discussed in relation to the purpose of the study. Further to this, the chapter goes on to highlight my personal experiences in the UAE in relation to the study, along with the procedures for data collection, which were open ended semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Next, the procedures for data analysis are described along with addressing the trustworthiness of the data, as well as ethical considerations.

3.2 Research approach

Qualitative research is 'study(ing) things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 43). Life experiences are at the core of qualitative research. The complexity of these experiences, and the meanings created are what seeks to be understood (Fuster Guillen, 2019). The researcher can delve into the world of the participants and even uncover aspects of the area researched to which the participants are unaware (O'toole & Were, 2008). Qualitative studies value the viewpoint of the participant, how they interact with and make meanings within a given context (Flick et al., 2004) and attempt to interpret and explain findings whilst considering the context of the situation under study (Banks, 2007; Creswell, 2003). Therefore, due to the desire to glean participants viewpoints and experiences, a qualitative, case study method was chosen for this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), as I was seeking to explore hermeneutically (Gadamer et al., 2004), the views of those adults who have had the lived experience of partaking in FS, the meanings they are constructing from this experience within the cultural context and how changes are being made to the FS model.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 37) describe a case study as ' an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system' and it is the study of one particular case or phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) that makes a case study approach suitable for this study. A case study does not look at patterns, but rather at describing activities and the understanding of the case being studied (Creswell, 2012), which is the aim of this study, as it seeks to understand lived experiences of staff involved in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in one private school in the UAE.

The school for this case study was chosen because it has a fully functioning FS in the city of Al Ain. Creswell (2012, p. 465) says ' a “case” may be selected for study because it is unusual and has merit in and of itself. When the case itself is of interest, it is called an intrinsic case.' In this situation, the case study school is one school, finite and limited to a definite number of staff in that school, as advised by Merriam and Tisdell (2015). Therefore, considering this and the accessibility to myself, this made the chosen school suitable for the study, as advised by Creswell (2012). Remenyi et al. (2002) suggest that case studies have more than once source of evidence, are focused on one particular issue, as well as providing 'meaning in context'. Therefore, data collected from the case study school was gained from both open ended semi-structured interviews as well as the analysis of one school document.

This study used a hermeneutical approach to understand the lived experiences of staff involved in the FS project in the case study school. Hermeneutics first originated in religious circles (Howarth, 1997). Gadamer is seen as the founder of philosophical hermeneutics (Fuster Guillen, 2019) and Gadamerian hermeneutics seeks to investigate culture and societal norms to experience, reflect and see how others view the world they live in (Misgeld & Nicholson, 1992). Therefore, context is vital, and no two people may interpret a given experience the same way. Language and the sharing of meaning through words is key to the hermeneutical process (Gilstrap, 2007; Greenwood & Lowenthal, 2005), which is why this study will employ open ended semi-structured interviews to collect data. Gadamerian hermeneutics urges the researcher to continually reflect on data, with questioning enabling the matter under research to be understood in the light of prior knowledge (Fleming et al., 2003). The hermeneutical cycle is key to the interpretation. It is this recognition of our preconceptions in Gadamerian hermeneutics (Flemming et al., 2003; Grondin, 2015) and how this interacts with the interpretation of the spoken word, where the meanings of the individual parts are considered in light of the whole meaning in the hermeneutical cycle (Gadamer et al.,

2004; Grondin, 2015; Kezar, 2000; Kvale, 1983). A hermeneutical approach to culture and research may not give clear cut answers but interpretation is key and even this is often ambiguous (Bruner, 1996). Hermeneutics is not an attempt to predict future events, but rather a description of an event passed (Howarth, 1997), therefore it is suitable for this study exploring the lived experiences of staff involved in the FS project in the case study school.

The researcher themself is an integral part of qualitative research, bringing their ideas, analytics, and pre-understandings to the study (Lauterbach, 2018; McAuley 2004), aiding understanding and interpretation (Howarth, 1997). Therefore, I, brought my personal characteristics into the interviews, and this was not seen as a stumbling block but rather as allowing me, as the interviewer, to become more fully emersed in the interview process (Chirban, 1996), with past experiences allowing meaning to be made from new experiences (McNess et al., 2015) aiding interpretation. Both I, as the researcher, and the participants, share the similar experience of moving to the UAE and living and working in a culture which is not our own. Shah (2004, p. 260) adds that this 'shared cultural knowledge' allows bridges to be built to facilitate the interview process. New meanings can be made between researcher and participant (Chirban, 1996) and even as one engages with text (Fischer, 2009). This is contrary to more traditional models of qualitative interviewing and highlights the need for the interviewer to be aware of his/her personal characteristics (Chirban, 1996), be reflexive and understand how they are situated within the research (Cleary, 2013). McNess et al. (2015) highlight the need for research empathy to fully understand those involved and to create and understand meaning. However, prior knowledge about the topic in question, can lead to presuppositions and mask what can be gained and learned from research findings (Cleary, 2013; Van Manen, 1990). Bracketing can address this.

Husserl was a mathematician and social scientist who is credited with using the term 'bracketing' when placing prior knowledge of the researcher to the side when conducting research (Husserl, as cited by van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990, p.175) describes bracketing as 'the act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world to study the essential structures of the world'. However, it is difficult to suspend all previous knowledge (Atkinson et al., 2001). As a result, the researcher is called to identify prior thoughts and ideas about the research topic and through this identification, is made more aware of bias (van Manen, 1990). Fischer (2009) explains that even hunches should be

bracketed for the researcher to have a fresh view of the data. Bracketing should occur throughout the project, with researchers being reflexive, constantly aware of their engagement with the findings, altering thoughts, having a mindfulness about pre-existing ideas and constantly checking back on the data to search for new concepts (Fischer, 2009).

The researcher's personal experiences

Having lived in the Arabian Gulf since 2011, I have had opportunities to experience the host culture and witness the worldview of Gulf Arabs. My British worldview and wider experiences must be acknowledged, to fully understand and make meaning from what is expressed during this study. Through my work as a research assistant in the UAE since 2018, I had read extensively about education within the UAE and recognise that it needs to be contextualised to fit with the cultural and religious norms, and visions of the country's leaders. Therefore, I needed to set aside the findings of previous work and not let this prior knowledge interfere with how I considered the current study's findings. Through reading on the topic of FS, I had formulated many personal ideas on this subject. Therefore, as Cleary (2013) suggests, these prior experiences and background reading led to me having to bracket pre-formed ideas, and the conscious and unconscious bias I had developed needed to be set aside to clearly see the meanings made by the participants in the study.

Although researchers can be termed 'insider' or 'outsider', this term may be fluid and the researcher could be both at the same time depending on the group and the context (McNess et al., 2015). I know many families of children who attend the case study school and who have also attended the FS programme. There are positives to having these links, as there is more understanding of the context (Trowler, 2011). Therefore, I am familiar with how the FS is run and know what children's perceptions are of FS in the desert environment, and these insights led me to form preconceived ideas that the children enjoy FS in the case study school.

Steps such as anonymising the school's name for publication and conferences, ensuring the interviews follow the interview guides to stay on topic, as well as seeking consent from all participants will attempt to minimise some of the pitfalls which endogenous research can have (Trowler, 2011). I am not aware of how much the staff from the case study school know

about the customs and traditions of the UAE, how this impacts their practice and how they perceive their teaching as being adapted for the local context.

3.3 Site and participant selection

The site was chosen through purposive and convenience sampling and was readily accessible for the study (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Purposive convenience sampling was chosen due to the uniqueness of the topic under study, the participants met the inclusion criteria, were willing to be included in the study, were accessible to me (Creswell, 2012) and had the knowledge about the topic under research (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). Due to this purposive and convenience sampling, the potential sample is small because of the uniqueness of the situation under study. There is only one case study school which limits the sample and also, only a small number of classes in the lower junior school take part in the FS project, therefore the number of staff involved is also small. Although there is no definitive answer as to the perfect sample size (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Edwards & Holland, 2013), it is important to receive a range of responses, although even one, rich case study can expose thoughtful data (Baker and Edwards, 2012). The study set out to interview and ascertain the perspectives of a range of staff who are involved with the FS.

As suggested by Creswell (2002), formal permission to use the school as a case study was sought, from the Junior school headteacher, who acted as the gatekeeper (Appendix 2). Permission to recruit TLAs was gained via e-mail also from the Junior School Headteacher (Appendix 2) and further emails were sent to other members of staff who had an input into the FS programme, inviting them to participate in the study. The headteacher forwarded an invitation email to TLAs (Appendix 3) and the headteacher also received an invitation email directly from myself (Appendix 4). All potential participants were emailed personalised participant information sheets, consent forms and a privacy notice, all of which were approved by the University of Strathclyde Ethics committee. To work within ethical boundaries and maintain confidentiality of the initial proposed sample, due to the small sample size of the case study school, exact details of others who were approached to take part in the study will not be discussed. In the final sample, two open-ended semi-structured interviews with staff in the case study school were undertaken who had received personalised

participant information sheets (PIS) (Appendices 5 & 6), consent forms (Appendices 7 & 8) and a privacy notice (Appendix 9).

Results are presented through the main themes that arose in the interview transcripts.

3.3.1 School context

The case study school is a private school, teaching the National Curriculum of England. It opened in 2013 and is part of a wider international schools group. In 2014 it was reported as having only 255 students and in the 2014 inspection, 61% of students were Emirati, followed by 17% British and 4% American being the next most popular nationalities. No data on the number of teachers was included in the 2014 inspection report. In 2018, 68% (n=604) of students were in the early years foundation stage (EYFS) and primary phases; in contrast to only 148 students in 2014. The most recent inspection in 2018 for the entire school, which runs from EYFS to six form, found that the school had 105 teachers and 899 students. The most recent government data reports that the school has 64.82% Emirati pupils with the next most popular nationalities being British (11.81%) and South African (3.37%) (TAMM, 2023). The school has been given the highest rating from the government inspection board, both in this latest inspection and the previous inspections.

The case study school prides itself on not only excelling academically, it also promotes the holistic development of the pupils. The school culture encourages pupils to develop academic skills, confidence, creative thinking, as well as interpersonal skills. The school is well resourced financially and has access to excellent on-site facilities. In the Junior school where the study took place, the school encourages a hands-on approach to learning. This is in contrast to many schools within the UAE which still promote a very textbook driven, rote learning pedagogy.

The FS was started in 2017 by a teacher who was trained to FS level 3, which allowed her to set up and run a FS programme according to the Forest School Association's recommendations (Forest School Association, n.d.a).

3.3.2 Participant inclusion criteria

Firstly, all staff members who had a direct input into the FS in the case study school were invited to participate in the study. TLAs were emailed a set of criteria which allowed the participants to self-select if they wished to participate in the study (Appendix 3). The criteria were that participants must:

- Have been involved in the FS project in the case study school for at least five weeks over the past three years, or
- Have completed FS Level 1 training.

This selection criteria were chosen as the most viable way to access TLAs, as I did not have a list of those TLAs employed in the case study school, nor was I aware of who was involved in the FS project. Allowing participants to self-select if they wished to participant in the study avoided the need for myself to enter the school and arrange a meeting with TLAs to establish who may be suitable for the study. Therefore, I had very little to no prior contact with these TLAs, minimising the possibility of coercion for TLAs to join the study. However, allowing participants to self-select participation has its downfalls as there was the potential that those who have not met the criteria could decide to join the study. By having no prior contact to myself as the researcher, there is also the disadvantage that potential participants cannot ask face to face questions about the study and rely upon the emailed documentation to glean information on the study.

3.4 Methods and procedures of data collection

3.4.1 Open ended semi-structured interviews

Language is seen as key to a hermeneutical study, as through shared language and discussion between a participant and interviewer, meaning and understanding can be constructed (Fuster Guillien 2019; Gilstrap, 2007; Greenwood & Lowenthal, 2005; Kvale, 1983). Therefore, interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method of data collection. Interpretive research, such as hermeneutics, uses open-ended semi-structured interviews similar to the one

designed for this study. Kvale (1983, p. 174) described a semi structured interview as 'neither a free conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire', having more freedom than a structured interview, but leaving room for openness and sharing. Interviews allowed for the free exchange of information during discussion and the ability for me to mould the interview to each participant, within the parameters of the interview guide. This study uses the active term 'participant' for those being interviewed (Edwards & Holland, 2013) and not 'interviewee' as active participation was necessary to understand participants' perspectives about the topic under research. There is value in gathering a variety of perspectives on a topic (Cleary, 2013), therefore the purpose of the interviews will be for the lived experiences of staff involved in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in the case study school to be revealed and meaning behind these experiences explored (Kvale, 1983). Participants had unrestricted freedom to answer research questions (Creswell, 2002). Interviews were recorded to allow an accurate representation of what was covered to be analysed (Creswell, 2002).

3.4.1.1 Interview guides

Interview guides, structured around key themes, were utilised as recommended by Kvale (1983) to allow me to lead the interview, limit interviewer bias and allow certain themes to be discussed (see Appendices 10 &11). Van Maanen (1990) suggests that interviews should be focused around the research question and not stray from this focus, which in this study, the interview guides supported. Various interview guides were designed and available for use, depending upon which participants opted into the study. The use of interview guides also falls in line with recommendations from Creswell (2002) who suggested that there should be a plan during the interview, whilst allowing some flexibility. Therefore, I identified key questions which I wanted to ask during the interview and marked them with asterisks on the interview guide, as seen in appendices 10 and 11. The questions composed for each interview guide were cross checked with the original research question and sub questions to ensure the questions were applicable and would enable the participants to remain focused on the topic (Fleming et al., 2003; Kvale 1983), whilst still permitting them to speak about their ideas. Although the interview guide seeks to keep the interview focused, there is also a need for flexibility in the order in which topics may be covered (King, 2004).

3.4.1.2 Pilot Study

As advocated by Creswell (2002), a pilot study of the instrument was conducted to check the clarity of the questions, as well as aiming to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the instrument. Three expatriate teachers who had at least four years of experience teaching in an international school within the city of Al Ain volunteered to take part and were not employed in the case study school. I emailed all interview guides to the pilot study participants and invited them to provide constructive feedback. Due to Covid 19 restrictions, I did not meet these participants face to face. Feedback was received in relation to clarity of questions and questions were amended accordingly, as advised by Lancaster et al. (2004), without changing the meaning, after consultation with the project supervisor.

3.4.1.3 The Interviews

Interviews followed standards set out by Creswell (2002) who advocated for the use of open-ended questions to allow participants to fully share their ideas. Creswell (2002) also identified the need to record the interview, find a suitable, quiet interview location, obtain relevant consent, for the researcher to be flexible with questions and have questions which can be used as probes to gain further information from the participant. Due to Covid 19 restrictions, interviews were carried out by Zoom and each participant had a quiet interview location. Each of the two participants were interviewed once each, after relevant permission was obtained. Participant 1's interview was carried out on the 8th June 2022 and lasted 51 minutes. Participant 2 was interviewed on 18th June and lasted for 41 minutes. Questions asked during the interviews focused around several themes. These were: personal information, country context, curriculum and pedagogy and community and social engagement. The general themes were the same for both interviews with variations in the questions asked, to make them applicable to each individual participant. The interview guides for the headteacher and TLA can be seen in appendices 10 and 11 respectfully.

3.4.2 Documents

The analysis of documents can be used to gain meaning on a topic, help triangulate other collected data and to answer a specific research question (Bowen, 2009; Gross, 2018). Documents are uninfluenced by the position of the researcher (Gross, 2018), removed from their author (Hodder, 1994) and are not affected by feelings or emotions of participants which Bowen, (2009, p. 37) describes as their 'lack of reactivity'. Therefore, document analysis was chosen for this study to gain a winder understanding of the topic under research.

3.4.2.1 Inclusion criteria for selection of government documents to analyse

Whilst there were many potential documents available for analysis, as suggested by Gross, (2018), inclusion criteria were developed for the government documents used in this study. These were as follows:

Documents must:

- Relate to the UAE education system or private schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.
- Be available in English.
- Contain insights and explanations regarding important cultural and heritage values.
- Give an overview of the environmental concerns of the UAE.
- Have been published within the last ten years, or be the most up to date version of the document available

3.4.2.2 Accessing documents

The majority of documents were accessed through a thorough internet search. National and Emirate level open access documents were chosen from government websites to gain a variety of insights to topics which related to the research question. Key word such as: education, education in the UAE, Abu Dhabi private schools, UAE school requirements, UAE environmental concerns, UAE heritage and culture were used during a google search. It appeared that government entities did not update many policies.

One open access document was received directly from the case study school as it related directly to the FS project under study. A section of the FS association website was also

analysed, which was the section on the expanded FS principles as well as the criteria for good practice. This particular section was chosen as it had the most relevance to the topic under study. Although these two documents do not meet the above inclusion criteria set for the government documents, these documents were non-governmental, and both gave specific information on FS.

3.5 Data analysis

3.5.1 Analysis of interview data

Interview data was analysed through thematic content analysis, used commonly with hermeneutical studies (Creswell 2002; Greenwood & Lowenthal, 2005). The resulting text from the verbatim transcription of interview recordings (Kvale, 1983) was broken down into ‘text segments’ and codes identified, which is the process described by Creswell (2002). Within the thesis, these codes are referred to as sub-themes. From these sub-themes, it became apparent that some could be grouped together to form main themes (Charmaz, 2008; Fleming et al., 2003; Howarth 1997; Kvale 1983; Misgeld & Nicholson, 1992). An example of the sub-themes identified from the interview text, and the main themes that then emerged from these is provided in table 1.

Table 1 An extract of data from the interview with participant 1 which demonstrates an example of the initial data analysis process.

Interview text	Sub-themes	Emergent main themes
I think that whatever you do as a school you serve your community and you serve your community as best you can, in terms of its history and its Culture and interest, etc... And I love living in Al Ain and rather than anywhere else actually because you've got more culture and history, I think here in Al Ain more than anywhere else I've been anyway here or Ras Al Khaima, but here the culture and traditions genuinely live on.	Community Respecting culture The city of Al Ain Respecting culture/History of the country	Community engagement Culture of the UAE
I'm not (someone)…who has liked to tick boxes, because the government of the UK tell you to do something. I actively rejected stuff that didn't fit in with what the children needed or what the Community needed and I've been offered substantial money in terms of grants and stuff to try stuff out from the UK Government here in the UAE. I think that the ADEK have it correct in ensuring that the traditions you know, through the 'my identity' program in particular are preserved because if you think about it (they came)…from a Bedouin culture, I mean I'm older than this country in terms of Union.	Contextualised education School compliance with values, laws and regulations of the country Desert culture	Curriculum & pedagogy Culture of the UAE

The codebook used for data analysis can be seen in appendix 12.

As the researcher, I conducted and transcribed both interviews, to allow maximum interaction with the data (Edwards & Holland, 2020). The researcher seeks to 'read between the lines'

and attempt, what Kvale (1983, p.181) describes as ‘extending’ the meaning. Firstly, the interview texts were read over several times to establish an overall meaning. Then, the hermeneutical circle continued by identifying themes which I checked against the transcription, as suggested by McAuley, (2004). Hermeneutical analysis could be never ending, however, the researcher must decide to stop when there are no longer contradictions and a sensible meaning has been established (Kvale, 1983).

With the advancements in technology, this has shaped the qualitative interview over the years (Edwards & Holland, 2020) and due to Covid 19 restrictions within the UAE, the study used Zoom to carry out and record the interviews which were then transcribed verbatim. However, added ‘data’ such as gestures and facial expressions which can add meaning to the data when interviews occur face to face (Kvale, 1983) may have been missed out on. The audio recording of the interview allowed me to focus on the interview and be an active listener and removed the distraction of copious note taking (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

Ambiguities and ‘an element of uncertainty’ may exist in the findings (Mirza et al., 2014, p.1987) however this adds to the richness of the data and can be clarified and delved into by the researcher (Kvale, 1983). It is paramount not only to gauge the meaning of the text, but also what the author intended it to mean (Kvale, 1983). The meanings gained from analysing a text are not subjective but will be different for each reader (Blee & Billings, 1986). Therefore, the findings and analysis of the study are specific to this research (Howarth, 1997).

3.5.2 Document analysis

Bowen (2009, p. 27) describes document analysis as ‘a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents - both printed and electronic’. Documents can yield valuable data and can range from public documents to private communication (Creswell, 2002; Dalglish at al., 2021). Document analysis is often a low cost, straightforward and time efficient method of data collection, as many documents are available to the public (Bowen, 2009; Hodder, 1994). However, there does need to be an awareness of bias in both the selection of documents and how/when/by whom the document is written (Bowen, 2009; Gross, 2018; Hodder, 1994), as well as the purpose of the document (Dalglish at al., 2021) and it’s original, intended reader (Bowen, 2009). Disadvantages of document analysis are that although documents are useful

within their context, they have not been created for research purposes and may not fully align with the research question (Gross, 2018). Also, there may be an element of author bias which needs to be considered (Gross, 2018). Some documents can be difficult for the researcher to access which is another drawback (Creswell, 2002). Therefore, I sought to obtain documents from a range of sources to minimise author bias and gain a variety of views on the topic under research. Documents were gathered from government websites which gave a variety of government documents, written by various government entities. In addition to this, a section of the Forest School Association website and a PowerPoint presentation from the case study school were also chosen for analysis.

Document analysis involves highlighting themes from the document and the utilisation of codes to label these themes (Bowen, 2009; Gross, 2018). When documents are being analysed alongside other methods of data collection, not as many documents are needed to add to the data set (Bowen, 2009). This is also the case when the research topic is extremely focused (Dalglish et al., 2021), which this research is. Therefore, the sample of documents in this study is relatively small. Bowen (2009) suggests reading the documents several times, each time going deeper into the examination and interpretation process. The analysis of data taken from documents is not confined to the end of the data extraction process when the full picture can be seen, but also takes place as the researcher extracts the data (Dalglish at al., 2021). Although there are little concrete systems to follow when analysing documents, it is important that there is a process which is systematic, to ensure trustworthiness in the process (Dalglish at al., 2021; Gross, 2018). Thought needs to be given as to how themes within documents are linked and tie in with the main research question (Gross, 2018). Since this study is hermeneutic in nature, the analysis sought to develop main themes and meanings from the documents and how they relate to the FS project under discussion.

Bowen (2009, p. 32) suggests that if the document analysis is not the sole data source in a study, that ‘predefined codes may be used’ in the analysis of documents. In the case of this study, several main themes, with sub-themes were identified through reviewing the literature (Gross, 2018), prior to the document analysis of the government documents taking place. These main themes and sub-themes were the basic guidelines during the initial government document analysis and are shown in Table 2. However, this is not a definitive list as the need for additional sub-themes became apparent during the document analysis.

Table 2 Initial main themes and sub-themes identified for the analysis of government documents

Culture of the UAE
National identity
Valuing community
Maintaining heritage and traditions
Moral behaviour
Family
Arabic language
Maintain traditional values in the face of modernisation
Islam
Tolerance of other cultures and religions
Observance national religion
Natural environment
Sustainable development
Environmental protection
Curriculum & Pedagogy
Schools required to operate within cultural values
Global society
Promotion of local culture

Initially, I read each document through more than once to gain a general understanding of the contents. Following this, after reading documents additional times, thematic analysis sought to identify general phrases within each document, which related to the main pre-determined themes of culture of the UAE, Islam, natural environment and curriculum and pedagogy and their related sub-themes, which were predetermined determined through reviewing the literature (Table 2). New sub-themes also became apparent as the analysis process progressed. Table 3 provides an example of initial document analysis, the sub-themes identified and the main themes which emerged from one section of text from one of the documents analysed.

Table 3 An extract of data from UAE Vision 2021 (2018) document which demonstrates an example of the initial data analysis process.

Extract of text from UAE Vision 2021 (2018, p. 7)	Sub-theme	Emergent main theme
We want the UAE's Arab Islamic roots to be treasured as a profound and sacred element of our nation's rich heritage. The nation's progressive and moderate values of Islam will continue to support its traditions of respect and openness in public and private spaces. A Spirit of religious tolerance will forge mutual understanding and acceptance within the countries pool of diversity.	Observance of the national religion Tolerance of other religions	Islam Culture of the UAE Islam
By preserving the core tenets of Islam, Emiratis will face the challenges of openness to the world with self-assurance, confident that the homogenising effects of globalisation cannot erode their moderate religious values.	Observance of the national religion The challenge of globalisation (new sub-theme emerging)	Islam
Arabic will reemerge as a dynamic and vibrant language, expressed everywhere in speech and writing as a living symbol of the nations progressive Arab Islamic values.	Arabic language Observance of the national religion	Culture of the UAE Islam

This was aided by colour coding each sub-theme and highlighting sections of documents with the relevant colour (Bowen, 2009). It was clear that many of the sub-themes, paragraphs and keywords which I made a note of as I read, could be grouped together under wider main themes of culture of the UAE, Islam, the natural environment and curriculum and pedagogy.

Excerpts taken from the documents were pasted into a separate OneNote page for each of the sub-themes and for the main themes to assist in interpretation. This process was then completed for all government documents. Data was then grouped under the pre-determined main themes and sub-themes as seen in table 2. On further analysis of these grouped themes, I also noted new recurring sub-themes which emerged each time after several readings (Bowen, 2009; Dalglish et al., 2021), which fitted within the four main themes of culture of the UAE, Islam, the natural environment and curriculum and pedagogy. Other sub theme - titles were further refined to reflect how the data fitted the overall research questions. The final main themes and sub-themes which were used in the data analysis were tailed in a table and can be seen in table 4.

The PowerPoint document from the school, was analysed against the six FS principles, as seen in figure 4. The analysis of the section of the FS association website focused around the link in this study between FS and contextualisation and looked at how the Forest School Association addresses local contexts.

3.6 Data trustworthiness

Triangulation can add to the trustworthiness of research data through collecting information on the same subject area from different sources (Carter et al., 2014). This also increases the trustworthiness of the data (Guba, 1981). Document analysis is used in this study for triangulation, to aid rigor and to prevent against bias when coupled with other forms of data collection (Bowen, 2009; Dalglish at al., 2021; Gross, 2018). When analysing the data and writing up the thesis, direct quotations from participants were also used, as Wilson (1997) stipulates that this allows participants voices to be heard. A pilot study of the instrument helped improve clarity in the interview questions. Since the role of the researcher is also fundamental in the trustworthiness of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), bracketing the researcher's prior knowledge and calling for the researcher to be reflexive, also seeks to increase the trustworthiness of the data, alongside thick descriptions in interview transcripts (Guba, 1981). Also, by acknowledging the limitations to the study, this also adds to the trustworthiness (Glesne, 2019).

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were accounted for following the University of Strathclyde Ethics committee recommendations as well as GDPR 2018 requirements. The study was granted ethics approval from the University of Strathclyde ethics committee. There were several specific categories of risk involved in this study. Prior to the research, there was a potential that some of the participants may be from a different cultural background to myself and could have had English as a second language. This was considered, with regard to using plain English as the mode of communication during interviews, as I wanted to ensure any participants who were from a culture and language background other than that of my own, could understand what was being asked. Also, I was aware of the need to use open body language as well as to listen to the participants and give time for answers to be explained without jumping in. Due to the nature of the FS at the case study school, the initial sample of potential participants was small. However, in the end, the two participants who opted into the study both spoke English as a first language and were American and British by nationality. This final small sample size also led to considerable consideration needing to be given towards protecting the anonymity of the study participants. With only two final participants, I had to ensure that the recruitment of participants was described in the thesis in a way which would not identify those participants who choose not to participate.

Regarding privacy and confidentiality of participants who did participate, all data was transcribed by myself and was anonymised. Codes, in the form of pseudonyms, were assigned to the interview transcripts and all data was securely stored be stored on a password protected laptop, to which only myself had access to when in use and then stored securely on Strathclyde OneDrive account. Researcher notes and interview recordings were not available to anyone other than me. The PISs provided participants with information in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations regarding how data relating to them would be stored.

There was a potential for researcher bias, as well as coercion within this study. Steps were taken to minimise ‘insider’ bias, which, in this situation were the positive feelings I have towards the FS project, the knowledge regarding the background of the participants which I have gained from living in a small, close-knit community, as well as how I have seen the FS

project received within the community. Bias was minimised through the design of the interview guides, which had focused, unbiased, specific questions, allowing participants to describe their experiences. Bias was also minimised through the analysis of the interview data by myself continually coming back to the interview transcripts and checking any meanings within the context of the interview transcript, aiding the interpretation of the data. I also bracketed my personal background in the Arab world which allowed me to be more reflexive during the analysis and open to new and emerging ideas in the data. Ensuring the interviews followed the interview guides to stay on topic, as well as seeking consent (not using informed consent) from all participants, attempted to minimise some of the pitfalls which endogenous research can have and minimise coercion. Participants were given time to reflect on whether they want to take part or not and were reassured that participation is not required. I have no direct involvement with the FS staff nor do I have a management or leadership position at the school.

This research project was not intended to elicit painful or traumatic memories since it did not involve any questions about negative experiences. Prior to conducing the interview, I had planned to immediately terminate an interview if participants showed any signs of distress, and to ask the participant if they wish to be referred to the school pastoral team or for me to contact a friend or relative of their choice to support them. Participants were informed that if they disclosed any unsafe or inappropriate practices in relation to child protection, this information would be directly reported to the head of pastoral services of the Junior school or to the Headteacher of the Junior school. These concerns were not evident during the interviews which I conducted.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has provided a rationale for the qualitative, case study design and the hermeneutic approach to answering the research question. The chapter has also outlined details relating to participant recruitment and the analysis of semi-structured interviews. The selection and analysis of chosen documents was also addressed. The following chapter will present the findings of the study.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This hermeneutical study looks at the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a Forest School (FS) model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This chapter presents the findings from two open-ended semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The findings will be discussed in the context of the developed themes and sub-themes.

4.2 Findings from Interview Analysis

4.2.1 Introduction

This section presents the results from two open-ended semi-structured interviews with staff from the case study school. The extracts from the interviews have been edited to ease understanding of the text, with some minor amendments made to phrases and punctuation. However, much of the text remains the original or as close to this as possible, whilst still representing the thoughts of the participants.

4.2.2 Demographic information

Two participants, one Teaching and Learning Assistant (TLA) and the Junior school headteacher, responded to emails asking for their participation in the study (Appendices 3 & 4). The headteacher had been in school leadership in the UK since 2006 and then in the case study school, since 2016, when they became headteacher of the Junior School. They had experienced FS in the UK and had been in the UAE since 2015. The TLA had been in the position six months when the interview took place. They are a licensed teacher in their home country (United States) and had been in the UAE for a total of 4.5 years at the time of the interview.

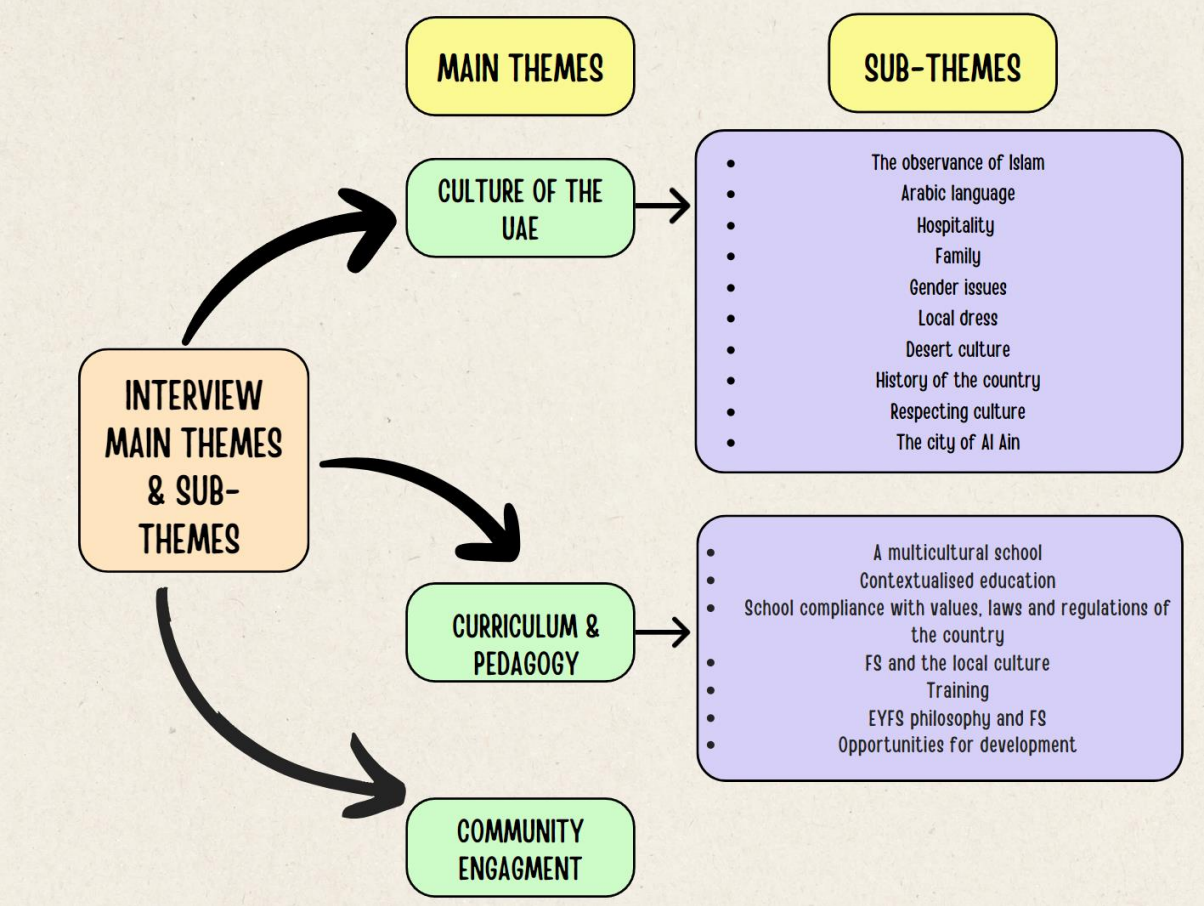
4.2.3 Interview data

The analysis of the interviews will focus on several main themes drawn out of the interview transcripts as suggested by Creswell (2002) and Kvale (1983). During the interviews, participants were asked a series of questions about their experiences living within the UAE, ways in which they have observed or experienced aspects of local culture, questions about the FS project in the case study school and their practice as educational professionals in the UAE. Several main themes emerged from the data:

1. Culture of the UAE
2. Curriculum and Pedagogy
3. Community engagement

There were also sub-themes which were drawn from the interview data under these main themes. The code book used in the analysis of data can be seen in appendix 12. The interview main themes and their related sub-themes can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Interview main themes and sub-themes



4.2.4 Theme 1 Culture of the UAE

The interview analysis clearly highlighted the importance of culture to the people of the UAE and can be grouped into several sub-themes which became apparent.

The observance of Islam

Both participants highlighted the impact and the visibility of Islam in the country. Participant 2 had seen Islam expressed in prayer times, Islamic celebrations such as Eid and Ramadan, in marriage and divorce, male and female interactions, the presence multiple wives, honour and revenge. There was also a recognition that Islam is more than just a religious pathway followed by most of the country. Participants were able to identify ways in which they perceived that Islam was integrated into daily life such as in the laws, school systems and the national anthem. Participant 1 shared how logistically the school facilitates Muslim students

through prayer rooms being available. The prominence of the Muslim community was also noted by Participant 2, who shared how this could benefit the school:

> In Islam it's very much about the community… the Umma which in my understanding, like the body of believers of Islam and so community, and I think the more that can be connected community-wise whether it's linguistically or culturally, it can really be beneficial for staff and students and parents.

Arabic language

Both participants noted how their efforts to speak Arabic were warmly welcomed by parents and Arabic speaking members of school staff. Participant 2 felt that greeting people in their national language was important and it made them feel 'valued and honoured'.

Hospitality

In addition to the Arabic language, hospitality is also a shared value of Arab culture (Nydell, 2018) and Participant 2 experienced how Emiratis were very willing to share about their culture and local traditions, such as teaching how to pour tea in the traditional way. Participant 2 describes the hosting process as 'formal'. Often Gulf Arab hospitality is accompanied by set rituals to honour the guest (Sobh et al., 2013), which Participant 2 may have experienced and articulated.

Family

The UAE is tribal in origin (Heard-Bey, 2001), where family and tribal ties remain strong. Participant 2 felt that 'respecting family seems to be both cultural and Islamic…and taking care of your family first and that follows the tribal cultural mentality as well'. Participant 1 also noted how 'Emiratis absolutely love families' but was unsure if this was linked with Islam or not. As a result of this recognition, Participant 1 explained how the school has reflected this value in the classroom:

> that sense of belonging and the family values … they only have big families …. that's that is important to them…Foundation Stage one and two without fail, have an area of the classroom where you have family photographs. Because it's about belonging and

> you've got the parents and the grandparents …you often get houses that are big and that they're extended, because there are several generations of one family living there, and that seems to be fairly commonplace.

Participant 2 describes the culture as 'rich' and 'intricate' and describes hospitality, family history and the passing on of traditions from one generation to another. They observed elders teaching younger children how to serve tea, placing family at the centre of hospitality.

Gender issues

Participant 2 noticed how they themselves do not mix with the opposite gender when in an Emirati home as they are not part of a family, thereby experiencing the gender divide in Emirati society. Interestingly, Participant 2 thought that this could potentially reflect how boys may relate to females in school: 'I think culturally in the school sometimes young boys may not know how to interact with women'.

Local dress

Both participants spoke about the importance of local dress and the positive reactions from members of the local community when they wore it. Participant 2 shared how Emirati friends saw the dress as cultural and not Islamic. Findings indicated that both participants link the idea of dress, respect and culture. There is some division between the participants with one seeing the local dress as being linked with the culture and religion and the other seeing national dress as a cultural expression rather than an Islamic requirement. This division goes some way to explaining the integral link between culture and religion within the UAE and how one is difficult to distinguish from the other. The importance of dress reflecting the local culture is also seen in how Participant 2 noticed that Emirati girls wear leggings under their school dresses, reflecting the place of modest dress in Emirati society, which filters down to even the youngest pupils in school.

Desert culture

The term ‘Bedouin’ was mentioned in relation to the way of life by both participants. Participant 1 speaks of Bedouin people in a sweeping way, lacking a distinction between Bedouin people and urbanised peoples of this region (Heard-Bey, 2008). However, Participant 2 had more distinction and shares ‘we have a lot of Bedouins here’ suggesting they perceive that not everyone is Bedouin. Therefore, there are some conflicting views amongst participants as to the history of the people, what this may mean for their lives and how they relate to certain aspects of culture. Regardless of the background, the desert is a profound part of life in the UAE. Participant 2 expresses the relationship they experienced between the desert and the Emirati people, having visited an Emirati desert farm and seen the strong affiliation and appreciation for the desert, where people are ‘relaxed’. They perceive that it is ‘part of their culture’.

History of the country

Participant 1 recognised that the country is a relatively young nation and that the founding father, Sheikh Zayed, had a focus upon building the infrastructure, which included education. Participant 1 does not expand on where they gathered this knowledge however, they note that alongside the current advancements, links to the past remain strong. This participant went on to describe the appreciation they have for the history of the nation which is evident in the museums of the UAE.

Respecting culture

Findings revealed to some degree, that Participant 1 recognises the importance of culture and how it relates to the school and the task of ensuring new members of staff know how to respect culture and act appropriately: ‘I think the most important thing is that you must have a cultural understanding of what is expected, what is polite, and also what is offensive’. They added that matters such as professional dress, etiquette, and behaviour both inside and outside school are covered in the staff handbook. They go on to share: ‘religion and the culture…just being absolutely crucial to what we do and how we plan everything from within…and how we behave within (the school) and also outside the (school)’, referring to teacher behaviour outside school hours and the need for school staff to maintain professional standards at all times. This finding demonstrates how the participant has understood some of the ways in

which expatriates can be ignorant of the culture in the city and the importance of staff being aware of cultural norms.

The city of Al Ain

Al Ain is a place of cultural importance and there has been considerable investment into preserving culture in the city (Experience Abu Dhabi, 2023). Participant 1 shares: 'I love living in Al Ain and rather than anywhere else actually because you've got more culture and history… but here the culture and traditions genuinely live on.' This participant has had interactions with the culture in the city of Al Ain and has seen how this city may be different to other more international cities within the UAE such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

4.2.5 Theme 2 Curriculum and pedagogy

A multicultural school

Due to the influx of expatriates which make up much of the UAE's population (GMI, 2020) it is not surprising that Participant 1 revealed how multicultural the school was and felt that all students should be working towards the same outcomes regardless of their culture:

> I couldn't tell you, if there was a group of pupils that came in … where they're from because it doesn't matter because we're all going towards one goal and we're learning to be respectful…and that that is all that matters.

While the idea that everyone is on the one learning journey has value, there is some discrepancy between ensuring equality for all, whilst still respecting cultures, particularly the culture of the host nation. However, the same participant later shares: 'I haven't counted recently between 50 and 60 nationalities here (at the school) and making sure that culture is embedded, and it has genuine resonance with everyone.'

Contextualised education

The findings from this study indicated the tensions between overseas curricula and the local context: 'the Victorian topic that's traditionally in the UK…you have to explain to children

what chimneys (are) … those little nuances that aren't going to mean a great deal to children' (Participant 1). However, the same participant then shares: 'when you're running a predominantly British national curriculum, it must be interlaced with things that are going to be relevant for every people.' Here we see this participant verbalising and processing what it means to be teaching an English national curriculum in a non-British context. They identify where this is problematic but also see the need for incorporating relevant content. Later in the interview, Participant 1 shared how they would like to see more Emirati pupils engaged in extracurricular activities such as performing arts, swimming and netball. However, these ideas are not traditional to the UAE but are foreign leisure time pursuits, thereby highlighting the 'foreign' nature of the school. In contrast to this, the UAE Vision 2021 highlights that traditional poetry, arts and literature are culturally important pastimes in the country (UAE Vision 2021, 2018).

There is recognition of how the UAE government has attempted to encourage schools to incorporate local values: 'ADEK have it correct in ensuring that the traditions, through the 'my identity' program in particular are preserved' (Participant 1) referencing the government educational program for promoting national identity in Emirati students (ADEK, n.d.). This closely relates to the identification by the participant of the importance of promoting the local culture within the school and also how this participant saw the need for expatriate staff to understand the importance honouring the culture both within and outside school in the community.

School compliance with values, laws and regulations of the country

The school employs an Arab community relations officer, as described by Participant 1, who ensures that the school complies with local regulations and customs. Participant 1 gave an example how culturally inappropriate books were removed from the school library and admitted they would not have known that these books are inappropriate. Despite there being cultural and religious regulations under which the school must operate, one participant shared how, they felt that there was more freedom in the curriculum in the UAE compared their home country, free from the constraints standardised assessments.

The education in the group of schools which the school under study belongs to was described by one participant as ‘holistic’. This concept of a ‘holistic education’ is interesting as the UAE government requires schools to develop students not only academically but growing pupils to become active citizens in the world around them, whilst building national identity (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014). This participant contrasts this with their home country, which again demonstrates that they can see different values being outworked in education.

FS and the local culture

To model cultural adaptations, one participant in this study identified how the school had recently changed the name of the project from Forest School to ‘Desert discovery’:

> We just saw that was quite timely and relevant really… because there's not a forest… it is desert discovery; it does describe the process very well …. I guess that's to do with moulding into the culture that we're in.

Participant 2 highlighted how the FS project in the case study school had been adapted to fit the local culture, such as using a local style grill, using local spices, local logs and local style fencing made from parts of the date palm tree. The same participant went on to describe the process as instilling a love of the desert for the pupils. Participant 2 also identified that one important part of a traditional Oasis is a Falaj; a traditional water channel and suggested that the school’s adaptation of this was to have a tap, which they perceived as an attempt to reflect local traditions.

The participants described the physical layout of the FS area. The school has a large 28-acre campus which allows a dedicated area for the FS. Both participants mentioned the fire pit however both did point out that it is not needed in the UAE as it is not a cold climate. There is the presence of palm trees which are native to the region and sand, with considerable amounts of sunny weather. However, blowing sand can pose its own problems which Participant 2 compared to the wind and rain which would be problematic in the UK. They have installed a shade due to the lack of natural protection from the sun, which would be provided, as Participant 1 suggested, by the forest canopy in the UK. The school have also installed artificial grass. It was shared by Participant 1 that the planting area was curtailed due

to lack of irrigation, which would be a normal response in the desert. With the lack of natural resources found in sand, Participant 1 describes having to bring in resources:

> you have to bring in things…for making shelters etc you're going to need some wood bought in, rather than picked up from the floor…so it's just adapting. You're not cheating because it's probably best to that anyway don't be chopping bits of branch from tree when you don't know how to chop and you don't know what you're doing to the tree.

This participant articulated that they feel these adaptations are not 'cheats' and is happy with the decision to do this. There is also a lack of knowledge regarding the proper methods to collect wood in the environment, suggesting further training requirements.

Both participants shared that resources, such as car tyres, pallets, small kitchens, kitchen utensils, mortar and pestle, rakes, chalks, and other items which would not be naturally found in the area, are in the FS. However, Participant 2 noted that the children stayed on task when out in this desert area.

The risks of the desert were highlighted by Participant 1 who explained how they check the area for dangerous animal life. This is a good example of assessing appropriate risks for the natural environment which they are in. One rule the school made was that children could only go into the sand area if they had trousers on to protect them from insects, which is another adaptation to the local environment.

Participant 1 reveals a desire for the children to be 'at one with nature', linking with the Forest School Association's goal for children to have a relationship with the natural world (Forest School Association n.d.a) One participant describes how their Foundation Stage 2 class went out once per week and their role was to interact with the children and challenge their learning. This would be what the FS association would describe as collaboration between children and FS practitioners (Forest School Association, n.d.b).

One participant shared how the addition of the FS project to this private case study school, gave it a unique selling point. On the one hand, schools strive to excel and provide excellent services, but on the other hand, they operate in a competitive market for educational provision.

Training

Findings from this study revealed that participants saw the benefits and importance of staff training. Participant 1 had been FS trained, but it had expired and is seeking to re-train to enable them to train others. Throughout the Covid pandemic, other staff members training expired but this participant shared the desire to continue to have a commitment to training staff to both FS level one and level three, with level three allowing the participant to lead FS. Participant 2 had no training but saw the value and benefits of training and articulated more than once that they were unsure if their ideas merged with the FS philosophy.

EYFS philosophy and FS

Participant 1 was particularly passionate that the indoor and outdoor areas of the school mirror each other and act as an extension of one another as an aspect of good practice of EYFS. Participant 1 shared how they perceived that the EYFS department follows a Reggio Emilia philosophy which incorporates lots of natural materials in the classroom for the children to interact with, as well as for display boards, which Participant 1 saw as linking with FS.

Opportunities for development

Participant 2 identified opportunities to adapt the FS project in the case study school further to align with Emirati culture. For example, to have a Bedouin tent, offer opportunities for students to interact with traditional desert animals, set up a traditional watering system (Falaj), grow more palm trees which could be ‘an amazing cultural traditional experience’ and to incorporate role playing preparing local food. Therefore, the participant recognises the important of food in the local culture. Participant 2 shares: ‘there are a few things that engage with the local culture, and I am wondering if we could do even more to have more engagement and bring out some of the best of the culture.’

4.2.6 Theme 3 Community engagement

Although this theme had no sub-themes, it was something which was highlighted by both participants. Despite minimal parental contact, Participant 2 perceived that Emirati families would enjoy FS as it explores the desert, which is part of their culture and identified ways for community development within the FS project at the case study school. They suggested asking Emirati families which aspects of the local culture and heritage they would like to share with expatriates and how this could be incorporated into the project: 'if they (Emirati families) are engaged in a way that they know they're really being honoured and their involvement is and information is really wanted, it could be an amazing experience.' One participant highlighted how, when the FS began in the case study school, the teachers presented the concept to parents face to face, as well as the benefits and reasoning behind the project. This was an example given of how the school involved the community: 'I think that whatever you do as a school you serve your community, and you serve your community as best you can, in terms of its history and its culture and interest, etc.' (Participant 1).

This participant expressed a desire that, now that Covid regulations have been lifted, parents can visit and experience the FS for themselves, however it was not clear whether the parents could then influence the outcomes of the FS. Currently, parents are required to dress children in appropriate clothes for the days they have FS and Participant 1 saw this as parental engagement. The school has previously had donations of resources for FS from the wider community, demonstrating some level of engagement.

4.3 Findings from document analysis

The following documents were chosen for analysis as they allowed for variation in different areas of the topic.

National level documents

- A Document of Conduct and Ethics of the Emirati Citizen. (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.) - highlights the responsibilities, values and characteristics of an Emirati citizen.

- National climate change plan of the United Arab Emirates: 2017–2050. (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017) – action plan to address climate change.
- UAE Vision 2021. (UAE vision 2021, 2018) – a vision for healthcare, environment, education, national identity, the judicial system and the economy, as the UAE approached its 50th year in 2021.
- United Arab Emirates School Inspection Framework (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015) – this document seeks to unify school inspections through the UAE.

Abu Dhabi emirate documents

- The Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008) – strategy and goals for economic development in Abu Dhabi Emirate.

Abu Dhabi private school documents

- Organising Regulations of Private Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013) – rules for private schools in Abu Dhabi emirate.
- Private school policy and guidance manual 2014-2015 (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014) – standards and policies to aid quality improvement in Abu Dhabi private schools.

Case study school document

- Forest School Presentation - a PowerPoint presentation which was presented to parents by the school FS lead teacher in the case study school.

Selection from the Forest School Association website

- What is Forest School? (Forest School Association, n.d.b) – expanded version of the six FS principles (Figure 4) along with criteria for good practice.

When analysing documents, the context and author of the document was considered (Dalglish at al., 2021; Gross, 2018). Most documents, other than those related to FS, were authored by a government agency, therefore they may lack outside voices and objectivity. The government works under Islamic law which would influence all government documents. Whilst there was considerable interrelatedness between the main themes and sub-themes, the analysis of these relations was beyond the scope of this study. The codebook used for data analysis can be seen in Appendix 12.

Four main themes were identified in government documents:

1. Culture of the UAE
2. The importance of Islam
3. Curriculum and pedagogy
4. Natural environment

Each main theme had several sub-themes which can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 Main themes and sub-themes identified in government documents

	National Policies					Emirate level policies				
Document name / **Theme & sub-theme**	A document of conduct and ethics of an Emirati Citizen	National climate change Plan	UAE vision 2021	UAE school inspection framework 2015/2016		Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030	Organising Regulations of Private Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi	Abu Dhabi Private Schools Policy and Guidance Manual 2014-2015		N=
Culture of the UAE										
Culture, customs & national identity	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		5
Sharing local customs and culture with others	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		5

	National Policies					Emirate level policies				
Document name / **Theme & sub-theme**	A document of conduct and ethics of an Emirati Citizen	National climate change Plan	UAE vision 2021	UAE school inspection framework 2015/2016		Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030	Organising Regulations of Private Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi	Abu Dhabi Private Schools Policy and Guidance Manual 2014-2015		N=
Family & community	✓		✓	✓			✓			4
Behaviour & moral values	✓		✓				✓	✓		4
The arabic language			✓	✓			✓	✓		4

Document name / Theme & sub-theme	A document of conduct and ethics of an Emirati Citizen	National climate change Plan	UAE vision 2021	UAE school inspection framework 2015/2016		Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030	Organising Regulations of Private Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi	Abu Dhabi Private Schools Policy and Guidance Manual 2014-2015		N=
The importance of Islam										
The observance of Islam	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓		5
Tolerance of other cultures and religions	✓		✓	✓				✓		4
Curriculum & Pedagogy										
School compliance with values, laws and regulations of the country			✓	✓			✓	✓		4

Document name / Theme & sub-theme	A document of conduct and ethics of an Emirati Citizen	National climate change Plan	UAE vision 2021	UAE school inspection framework 2015/2016		Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030	Organising Regulations of Private Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi	Abu Dhabi Private Schools Policy and Guidance Manual 2014-2015		N=
The challenge of globalisation			✓	✓			✓			3
Natural environment										
Environmental protection & conservation of natural resources	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		5
Sustainable development	✓	✓	✓			✓				4
Community engagement with environmental concerns	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		6

4.3.1 Culture of the UAE

Findings indicated that both National and Emirate level documents addressed the culture of the UAE. Six documents were identified as having content related to this theme:

- A Document of Conduct and Ethics of the Emirati Citizen. (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.)
- UAE Vision 2021. (UAE vision 2021, 2018).
- United Arab Emirates School Inspection Framework (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015).
- The Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008).
- Organising Regulations of Private Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013).
- Private school policy and guidance manual 2014-2015 (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014).

Several sub-themes were identified within the larger theme of the culture of the UAE as seen in table 4.

Culture, customs, and national identity

Emirati identity has three areas of responsibility: nation, family and nation, and general ethics and conduct (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.). As part of national identity, Emiratis are encouraged to have 'an awareness of duty towards their nation' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 9) and to develop and grow in their culture (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 27). Skills such literacy, traditional arts and poetry are seen as vital to the culture (UAE Vision 2021, 2018), and 'maintaining Abu Dhabi's values, culture and heritage' is prioritised within the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008). This also impacts the schooling system, with the curriculum in both government and private schools striving to have 'links with Emirati culture and UAE society' (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015, p. 66). School curricula should help in 'preserving the national identity of the UAE and its culture, traditions and customs.' (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014, p. 5) Schools have a responsibility to educate students in the culture. Al Ain is seen as an area of heritage and culture (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008, p. 39), therefore, the schools have proximity to cultural sites within the city.

Despite the benefits of globalisation (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 16) there is a desire to maintain the culture in the face of change (UAE Vision 2021, 2018), as the future may challenge families and national identity (UAE Vision 2021, 2018), with globalisation being described as 'value-flattening' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 12). The desire of the leaders is for the country to be 'enriched rather than threatened by their nations openness to the world' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p.12), despite potential difficulties:

> There will be challenges to family ties that bind together the strong fabric of our cohesive society, challenges to our economic competitiveness, challenges to our national identity, challenges to health, education, environment and wellbeing. (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 4)

National identity must be preserved in the face of the multicultural society and is described as a 'social stability' (Vision 2021, 2018, p. 7).

Sharing local customs and culture with others

Linked to increased multiculturalism in the country, each Emirati has a responsibility to share and promote local customs with those of other nationalities (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p. 1), whilst tourists themselves can appreciate the cultural and heritage sites which further share the history of the nation (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council, et al., 2008).

Family and community

As previously noted, family is considered essential to preserving local culture with elders seen as role models (Khansaheb, 2021), sharing traditions with younger generations UAE (Vision 2021, 2018, p. 5). Parents have the responsibility to bring their family up with an awareness of customs and traditions to maintain national identity (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p. 1), with family being integral to society:

> Families are the living fabric of our culture and the guardians of our values. They form a haven of security and a nurturing environment in which Emirati children can grow… in large extended households every family member has a role to play in educating the young on civic values and the importance of connectedness to the community (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 5).

Model citizens are described as those whose actions benefit ‘common goodwill’ (Vision 2021, 2018, p. 9), denoting the importance of community. One way to maintain culture and community is through marriage between Emiratis (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 5).

Schools also have obligations towards families: ‘the school shall encourage guardians to visit it and to learn closely about the values and trends of the school ‘(Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p.56), thereby inviting community engagement. Schools are also charged with contributing to society as well as engaging and benefitting from the wider community, who may ‘help provide additional resources… or through…students’ visits, visiting speakers to the school and work experience.’ (Dubai Knowledge, et al., 2015, p. 98).

Behavior and moral values

Arab culture is collectivist, where shame is avoided and honor is upheld (Al-Omari, 2008; Oghia, 2015). This study found that morals and appropriate behavior are an important aspect within this culture. The duties an Emirati citizen has towards ‘nation, family and community’ are outworked in their ‘characteristics, manners, values and skills’. (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p. 1). Moral behaviors extend to personal relationships in the community (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 4) with appropriate behaviors reflected in good manners, honesty, honor, patience, tolerance of other religions and the observance of Islam (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p. 1). This also impacts schools. There is a moral code which schools and school leaders should operate under, upheld by Islamic values (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 16, Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014).

The Arabic language

Arabic is central to the culture, Islam and the identity of being Emirati (Hopkyns, 2016). ‘The UAE’s distinct culture will remain founded on progressive and moderate Islamic values endowed with a rich Arabic language, to proudly celebrate rich Emirati traditions and heritage while reinforcing national identity’ (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 7). The country’s leaders have a goal to further strengthen the status of Arabic ‘as a living symbol of the nation’s Arab-Islamic values’ (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 7) and desire the UAE to be a center of research and excellence for the language (UAE Vision, 2018). The spoken and written word links the past and present: ‘Emiratis will maintain a living link with the past by

preserving and celebrating cultural anchors such as literature, traditional arts and poetry as beacons of a modern UAE.' (Vision 2020, 2018, p. 7), which would be through the medium of Arabic.

Arabic language and national identity are spoken of together and schools should foster these ideas (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 121). The teaching of Arabic must meet the requirements set by the government (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015), to both native and non-native speakers (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 45).

4.3.2 The Importance of Islam

The importance of Islam is a theme in several documents:

- A Document of Conduct and Ethics of the Emirati Citizen (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.)
- UAE Vision 2021 (UAE Vision 2021, 2018).
- United Arab Emirates School Inspection Framework (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015).
- Organising Regulations of Private Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013).
- Private school policy and guidance manual 2014-2015 (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014).

The observance of Islam

Islam is at the very core of the culture: 'The UAE's distinct culture will remain founded on progressive and moderate Islamic values…we want the UAE's Arab-Islamic roots to be treasured as a profound and sacred element of our nation's rich heritage' (UAE Vision 2021, p. 7). These Islamic values are sought to be protected in the face of globalisation: 'by preserving the core tenants of Islam, Emiratis will face the challenges of openness to the world with self-assurance, confident that the homogenising effects of globalization cannot erode their moderate religious values' (Vision 2021, 2018, p. 7). In addition, God is publicly referenced asking for his guidance in leading the country (UAE Vision 2021, 2018).

Families have the responsibility to bring their children up in the Islamic faith (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p. 1), however, it is not only the family who shoulder this responsibility: 'our educators will instill in young people the shared values of our moderate

religion' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 23) and schools should enable students to 'possess a firm awareness of Arab and Islamic culture' (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 12). In school, students learn the importance of Islam to the UAE, with Islamic education compulsory for all Muslims (Dubai Knowledge, et al., 2015). School policies should incorporate Islamic values and UAE morals, with schools working under 'the principles of the religion of Islam' (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 17).

Tolerance of other cultures and religions

The UAE is a melting pot for many different cultures and religions and Emirati citizens are encouraged to respect everyone in the community regardless of their background (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p.1), promoting the Islamic value of tolerance (Afsaruddin, 2016). UAE Vision 2021 (2018) echoes thoughts of religious tolerance and schools are encouraged to foster this (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014, p. 17; Dubai Knowledge, et al., 2015, p13), which will bring out the aspect of 'mutual understanding' in Emirati life (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 6).

4.3.3 Curriculum and pedagogy

Findings from this study have indicated the importance of community, morals and Islam in society and schools must operate under these values, which impacts the curriculum and pedagogy. Documents addressing this are:

- UAE Vision 2021 (UAE vision 2021, 2018).
- United Arab Emirates School Inspection Framework (Dubai Knowledge, et al., 2015).
- Organising Regulations of Private Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013).
- Private school policy and guidance manual 2014-2015 (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014).

School compliance with values, laws and regulations of the country.

The UAE education system strives to provide excellent education to allow students to contribute to the wider society (Vision 2021, 2018, p. 23). There is an expectation that school curricula are adapted to 'develop students' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the heritage of the UAE. This includes Emirati traditions, culture and the values which influence UAE society' (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015, p. 68). Not only should there be specific lessons linked to culture, but ALL lessons should develop an 'understanding of the UAE's culture and society' (Dubai Knowledge et al. 2015, p. 67) in students. All education should be carried out in a way which preserves 'the national identity of the UAE and its culture, traditions and customs' (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 5). To fulfill this, schools need to monitor learning materials such as books to ensure there is nothing offensive or contradictory to the county's morals, religion or culture (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 67).

Within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, schools are called to operate under 'the values, morals, customs and culture' of the UAE (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 13) and what is deemed acceptable is measured against the country's moral standards (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 13). These morals are 'a set of ethical values and principles which are in accordance with the religion of Islam and the values, ethics, identity and culture prevalent in UAE society and which respects other religions' (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 16). Staff behaviour is also addressed: 'School staff…shall exhibit good moral character, consistent with UAE society's morals, values, customs and traditions.' (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 16), as well as dress in a way which 'does not contradict with UAE society's values, morals, customs and traditions' (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 87).

Other ways in which schools should respect the local culture is by respecting national emblems, flying the national flag, singing the national anthem daily and having photos of leaders displayed in school (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 19; Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014). There are repercussions for not adhering to local values. School licenses can be cancelled for those schools not showing respect to the country, its security, or religion (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013; Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014).

The challenge of globalisation

Those in government who are responsible for policies, are acutely aware of the effects of globalisation on traditional values and they seek to protect the nation against their erosion (UAE Vision 2021, 2018). Despite this deep pride and dedication to protecting and promotion national culture, schools in the UAE are called to be inclusive and respectful to the global student body (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015), recognise their diverse pupil population (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 17) and are tasked with enabling students to 'be prepared to face global challenges' (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 12).

4.3.4 The natural environment

FS promotes respect for the natural environment and encourages students to make connections with natural surroundings (Forest School Association, n.d.b). The following documents were analysed due to their promotion of environmental concerns within the UAE:

- A Document of Conduct and Ethics of the Emirati Citizen (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.).
- National climate change plan of the United Arab Emirates: 2017–2050 (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017).
- UAE Vision 2021 (UAE vision 2021, 2018).
- United Arab Emirates School Inspection Framework (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015).
- The Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008).
- Private school policy and guidance manual 2014-2015 (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014).

Environmental protection and conservation of natural resources

There is a responsibility placed upon UAE citizens to be aware of and manage natural resources wisely (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.), as an important part of the country's future (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017, p. 5; Vision 2021, 2018, p. 25) and to create a sustainable environment (Vision 2021, 2018, p.

1). The country's growth will challenge the physical environment (Vision 2021, 2018) and school buildings should be environmentally friendly (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 195) to help address this.

Sustainable development

There is a need to balance economic growth and sustainable development which is something citizens should strive for and benefit from (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p. 1). The government highlights their commitment to climate change and sustainable development (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017, p. 19) with environmental protection and economic growth going hand in hand (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008, p. 90; United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017, p. 7). The Abu Dhabi economic vision 2030 also stresses the commitment Abu Dhabi has to environmental sustainability (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008, p. 89).

Community engagement with environmental concerns

In an effort to achieve a sustainable environment, the UAE is aware that there needs to be community engagement to achieve sustainability goals (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p. 1; United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017, p.59; UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 25). There is a responsibility upon each citizen to act responsibly towards the environment and this environmental awareness can begin in schools (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017), who have a responsibility to train students in 'environmental awareness and action' as part of their 'social responsibility' (Dubai Knowledge, et al., 2015, p. 44). This is one area which FS would address as children foster a love for the natural environment through FS and could carry this with them into adult years.

Summary

The findings from this study demonstrate that the culture of the UAE plays a key role in many documents through aspects such as national identity, family, moral values and Arabic.

Islam is closely linked with many of these facets and is central to the life of an Emirati. As the country considers these aspects, alongside environmental concerns, it is evident from these findings that international private schools in the UAE operate in a complex dynamic and should consider these aspects in all areas of school life.

4.4 Document analysis of a PowerPoint presentation provided by the case study school

The case study school provided one PowerPoint document which was analysed against the six principles of FS (Figure 4) and their expanded explanations (Forest School Association n.d.b). The PowerPoint presentation consisted of 25 slides and outlined the six FS principles at the beginning, which are from the FS association website (Forest School Association, n.d.b). Only a selection of slides will be focused upon here, however the full PowerPoint presentation can be seen in Appendix 13.

Principle 1: Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.

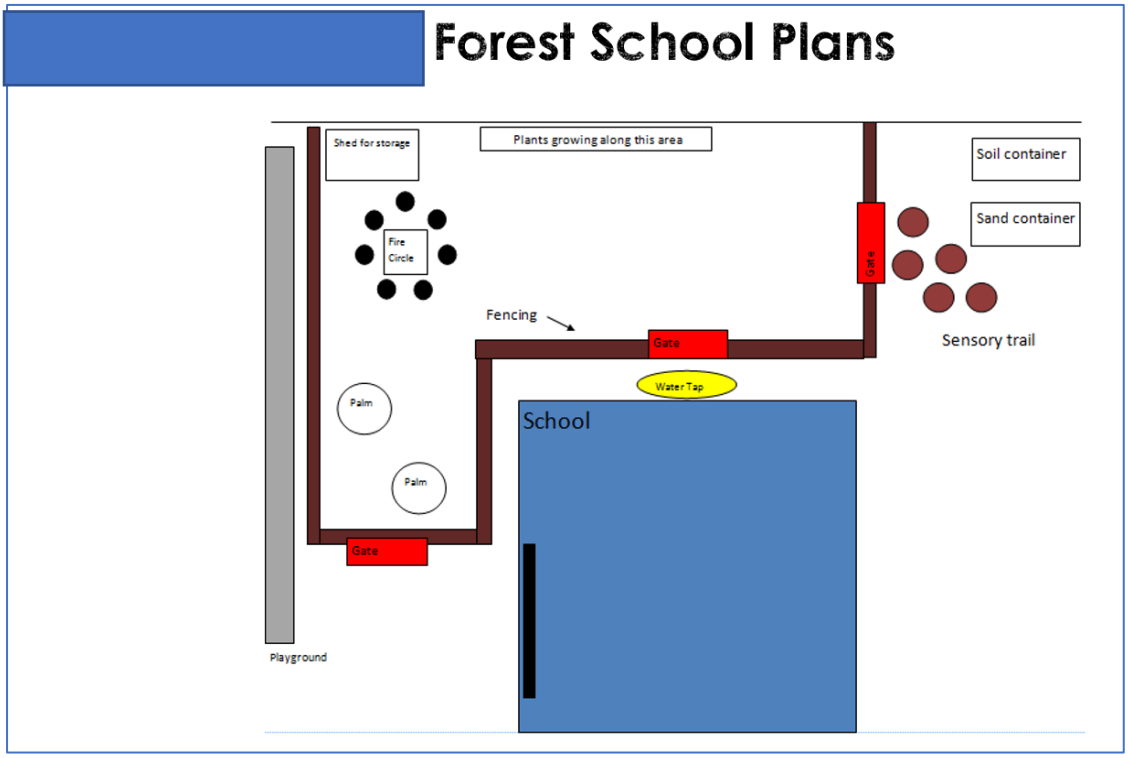
The PowerPoint does not stipulate how often the sessions will be held but it does acknowledge that ‘consistent long-term sessions’ are the backbone of this approach.

Principle 2: Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a lifelong relationship between the learner and the natural world.

Multiple times throughout the presentation, there is reference to the natural world/natural elements, however it makes little reference to what this looks like in the city of Al Ain or the desert surroundings. Slide 10 (Appendix 13) does state ‘the environmental setting is completely different for (school name) Forest School however the ethos and principles remain embedded in our teaching.’ It does not expand how the natural setting will be incorporated into the lessons. There is a diagram showing parents the FS site and the natural

elements involved which does point out the palm trees and sand, which would both be local to the area (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Slide 11

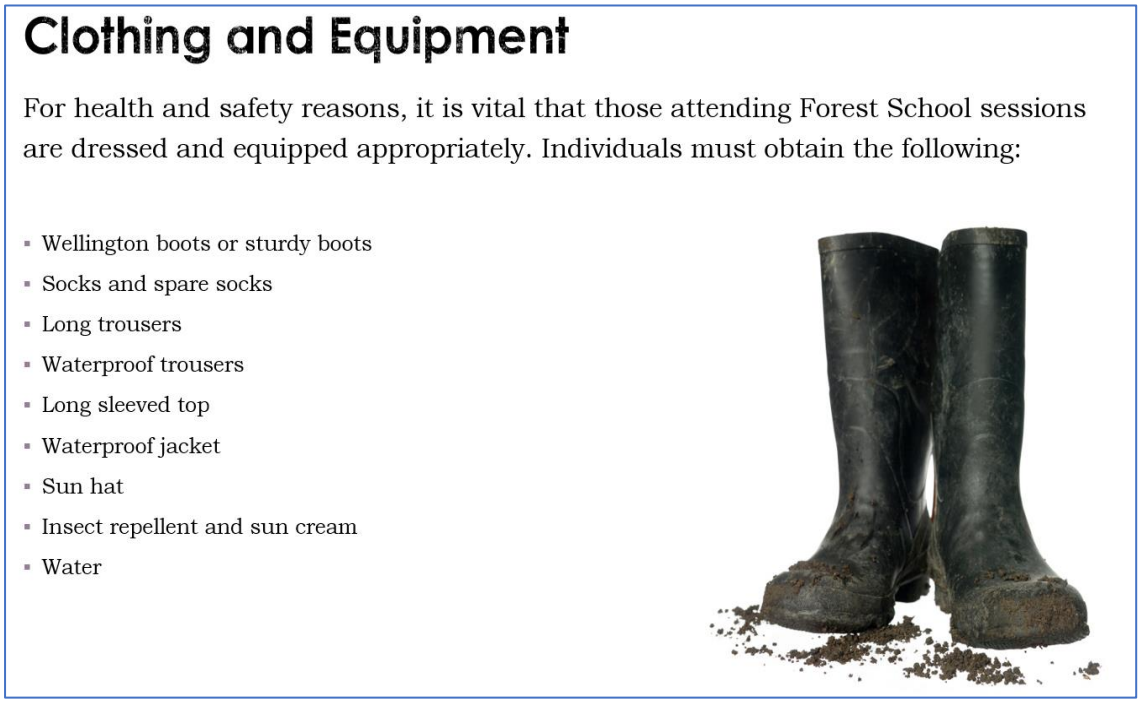


There are many photos in the presentation showing varying activities however none of these photos appear to be in natural environment of the UAE, as seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7 Slide 6

Slide 14 outlined suitable clothing and equipment.

Figure 8 Slide 14



Items such as wellington boots, waterproof trousers and a waterproof jacket are not required in an arid desert climate.

Principle 3: Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.

The PowerPoint shares that children can select their activities and take their leaning in any way they choose (slide 16, appendix 13) linking with FS principle 3 which includes 'play and choice' (Forst School Association, n.d.b). FS activities are outlined in the PowerPoint as seen in Figure 7. Learning experiences shared are 'fire safety and implementation, flora and fauna identification, tool safety and use, shelter construction and rope work' (slide 8, appendix 13). The specifics of how this would look in the desert are not expanded on. Collaborative group work is also highlighted in slide 16 (see appendix 13).

Principle 4: Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

The FS association website (Forest School Association, n.d.b) expands on this saying:

> Where appropriate, the Forest School leader will aim to link experiences at Forest School to home, work and /or school education. Forest School programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and spiritual aspects of the learner.

Slide 9 (appendix 13) does highlight that FS may be of benefit to 'those who struggle in a classroom environment, SEN and EAL' students. The above statements are repeated in the PowerPoint on slide 15 (appendix 13), however there is no explanation as to how this looks in the current context. Slide 16 (appendix 13) does highlight that students are encouraged to mentor new FS students, help with FS decision making and be creative in their activities.

Principle 5: Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

Slides 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 (appendix 13) all cover aspects of risk related to FS. The importance of appropriate risk is explored in the presentation and is focused on fire

and tools. There is no reference to risks specific to the local environment, such as the presence of scorpions in sand.

Principle 6: Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners, who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

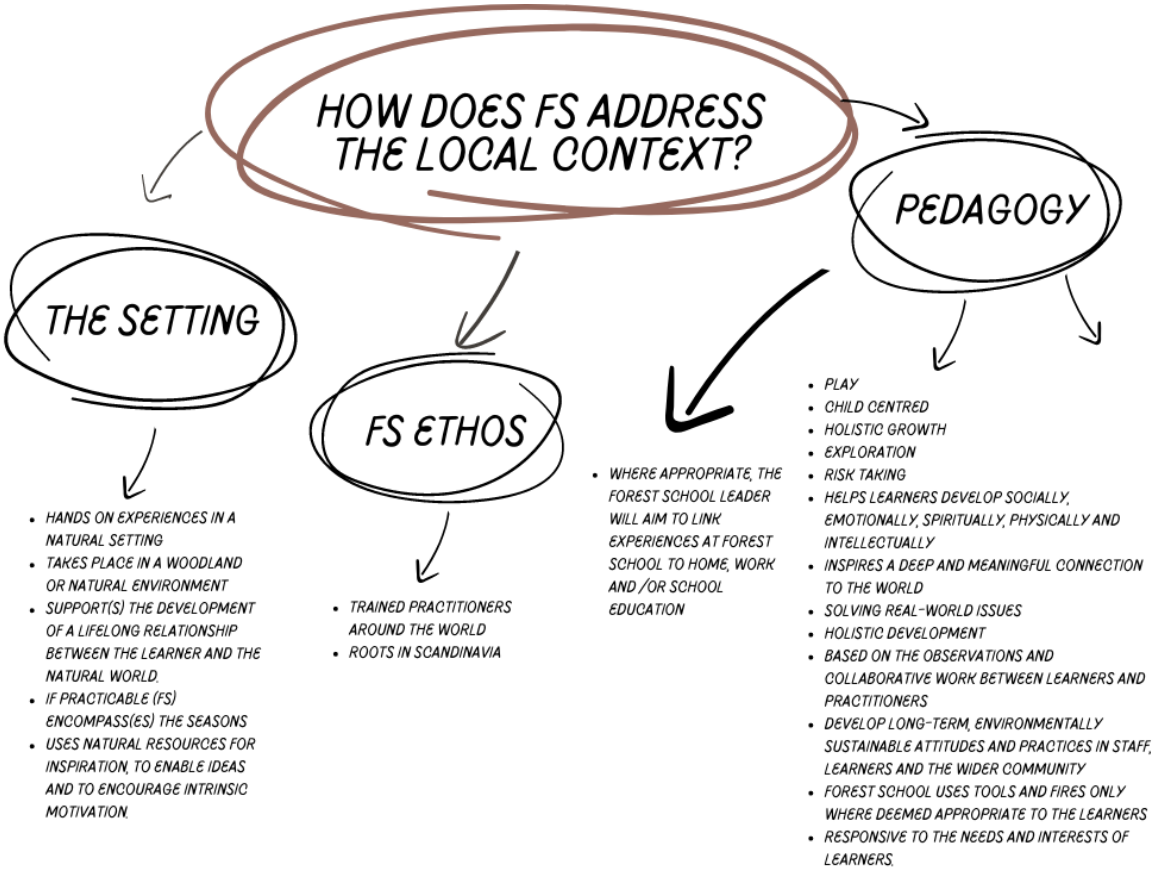
The PowerPoint does highlight that FS will be run by a member of staff trained to the FS association Level 3 qualification, which is the requirement set by the FS association (Forest School Association, n.d.b).

Summary

The presentation reflects the core principles outlined by the FS association. However, there is very little evidence of these ideas being adapted or contextualised to the UAE.

4.5 Analysis of a section of the Forest School Association website

Figure 9 How the Forest School Association addresses local contexts



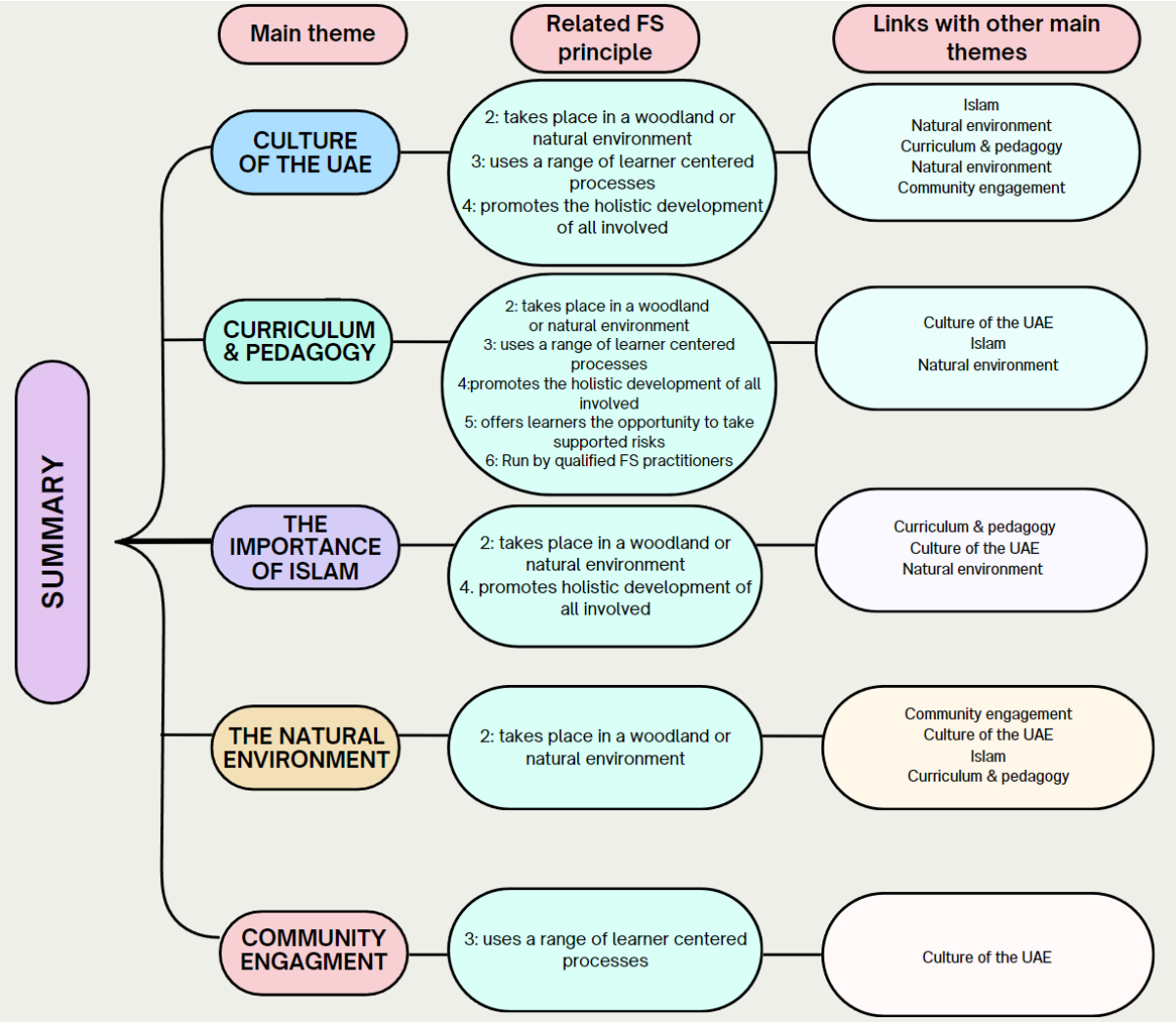
Taken from the Forest School Association Website (Forest School Association, n.d.b)

The FS Association website addresses the physical location of the FS many times. It highlights that it does not necessarily need to be in the forest, however, there is an emphasis on the ‘natural setting’ and using ‘natural resources’. The pedagogy is broad, encouraging holistic development and which is child centred. FS staff are encouraged to link FS to the child’s wider environment. Therefore, this guidance is very open to interpretation which allows for various contexts to be considered.

4.6 Links between interview and document analysis main themes and FS principles

There are several interconnections between the main themes which emerged from the analysis of both the interview data and the selected documents. These themes also relate to the six principles of FS. This highlights the complexities of the context in which the case study school operates this FS project. An initial exploration of these relations can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10 How interview and document analysis main themes relate to each other and to the six F.S principles



4.7 Summary

The findings revealed that participants had differing experiences of UAE culture and this has, to varying degrees, influenced their educational practice and outlook. One participant, who had more integration into local culture, identified many ways in which the FS project in the case study school could be developed to make it more contextualised. The other participant identified ways in which the school curriculum was not catered to the local population, however they still appeared to lack understanding as to appropriate ways to integrate local culture into the school curriculum. The FS itself had some aspects which reflect the local culture, but there were many resources which do not appear naturally in this setting used in the FS project. The government documents analysed highlighted many aspects of Emirati culture which had implications for the formal schooling system in the UAE. The PowerPoint document provided much information on FS, however it was not adapted to reflect the local context, which the FS Association website promoted. The following chapter will discuss these findings.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the findings of this study which investigated the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a Forest School (FS) model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). To answer this, the following research sub questions were addressed:

- What have been the staff members experiences of the culture and religion of the UAE?
- What adjustments have the school made to make FS in the case study school applicable to the local environment and culture?
- How do the staff view the adaptation of the FS project in the case study school?
- What are key components of a FS in the context of the case study school in the UAE?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of running a FS project such as this, from the perspective of staff in the case study school?

To address these questions, two open ended, semi-structured interviews were carried out. One with the Junior school headteacher, as well as with one with a teaching and learning assistant (TLA) at the case study school. Government documents were also analysed, as was one document from the case study school and an excerpt from the Forest School Association website, to gain a wider understanding of the topic under research.

This chapter will address each of the research sub-questions in detail. The sub-themes which emerged from both the interviews and document analysis, will be used to then fully understand the main purpose of this study. A summary of the results will be presented at the end of the chapter.

5.2 Addressing the research questions

The following section will address the research sub-questions based on the analysis of data presented in chapter 4.

5.2.1 Sub question 1 - What have been the staff members experiences of the culture and religion of the UAE?

Findings from the interviews with two members of school staff revealed that they were aware of many aspects of local Emirati culture and had various experiences of how these were outworked in everyday life within this context. Participant 2 was willing to share many experiences they had of local culture outside the school environment. Participant 1 appeared to have less of these personal encounters with Emirati people outside school. However, both participants were able to describe ways in which they encountered the religion of Islam as well as aspects of culture, the Arabic language, hospitality, family, gender issues, national identity and local dress. These sub-themes along with others which emerged during the data analysis will now be expanded on.

The observance of Islam

Islam within the country is built into almost every part of life, from the education system to the constitutions and laws and is a moral and ethical system (Al-Mansoori, 2004; Al-Rimawi, 2011; Cook, 1999; Nydell, 2018). Several documents which were chosen for analysis also highlighted the place of Islam within the UAE (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, 2014; Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015; Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.; UAE vision 2021, 2018). Unsurprisingly, both participants reflected on their experiences with this in the interviews. The findings demonstrated that Islam was seen by both participants as something which is visible within the community. Participant 2 shared many ways in which they saw Islam outworked in the society such as prayer times, family life and celebrations. One participant shared how prayer rooms are available within the school for Muslim pupils to pray in. Both participants have some awareness of the all-encompassing nature of Islam within the UAE, as they have seen the manifestations of this in daily life and which Al-Mansoori (2004, p. 44) and Maksoud (1997, p.8) describe.

The Arabic language

Both interview participants also experienced how members of the local community reacted positively when they attempted to speak Arabic. This may be due to how interwoven culture

and language are for many (Oxford & Gkonou, 2018). On a global scale, Arabic is seen as a point of union between other Muslims and Arabs (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2020; Findlow, 2008; Heard-Bey, 2001; Hurreiz, 2002; Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011; Partrick, 2012). In the UAE, Hopkyns (2016) found that there is an inextricable link for Emiratis between the language of Arabic and their cultural identity. Furthermore, in the UAE, there is also a connection between Arabic and the religion of Islam (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2020), strengthening the desire for Emiratis to keep Arabic prominent in the community. The English language has been heavily promoted within the Arabian Gulf (Denman & Al-Mahrooqi, 2019; Di Al-Qahtani & Al Zumor, 2016) with Al-Issa and Dahan (2011) noting that there is a threat to the Arabic language within many Gulf nations due to the prominence of English in society. In modern times, the Arabic language has acted as a symbol of 'tradition and religiosity' (Findlow, 2008, p. 349). Similarly, Hopkyns (2016) found that students perceived Arabic as the language linked with culture and religion, with English being seen as the language of education and the global world. Many other studies have also noted the increased use of English over Arabic in general (Al-Qahtani & Al Zumor, 2016; Denman, & Al-Mahrooqi, 2019; Hopkyns, 2016). Clearly, there are tensions between the use of English and Arabic in the UAE. The foundational place Arabic plays within society is highlighted in the UAE Vision 2021 (2018), with other documents from this study highlighting the requirement for it to be taught to a high level in schools, to both native and non-native pupils (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 45; Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014, p. 21; Dubai knowledge et al., 2015). Thereby, through participants making an effort to learn and speak Arabic, they are acknowledging the place of Arabic within the local community. However, the study was caried out in an English-speaking school, therefore there would be minimal Arabic in the formal school day outside Arabic language lessons and Islamic studies.

Hospitality

Hospitality is an extremely important part of Arab culture (Fox et al., 2006; Nydell, 2018, Sobh & Belk, 2011; Sobh et al., 2013), is mandated in Islam (Sobh et al., 2013) and is another opportunity for family honour to be promoted (Al- Omari, 2008; Nydell, 2018). Although hospitality practices between Emirati nationals and expatriates are a rare occurrence (Sobh et al., 2013), Participant 2 shared how they experienced hospitality and how older members of the family taught younger children to serve tea, aligning with findings

from Khansaheb, (2021) who notes how traditional cooking skills have been passed down through generations. The same participant also described the formality of the hosting process, which agreed with findings from Sobh et al. (2013).

Family

Several authors have noted the importance of family life to Gulf Arabs (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014; Crabtree, 2007; Farrell, 2008; Fox et al., 2006; Heard- Bey, 2008; Nydell 2018; Wang & Kassam, 2016). Interview participants also spoke on this topic and observed how family life and extended family was important to the local population of the UAE, with one participant adding how the school tries to acknowledge this through family photos in the classroom. This demonstrates how both participants have come to understand that Emirati citizens place family high on their list of values. In fact, Fox et al. (2006) noted the vast differences between Gulf Arab culture and American culture and placed the priority of family as number one of the top fifteen core values in the Arabian Gulf. Several analysed government documents further supported this idea that families and extended families have a role to play, even in the modern environment of the UAE (Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d; UAE Vision 2021, 2018) and how families act as 'guardians of…values' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 5). This idea of the passing of traditions and values from one generation to another is echoed in Vision 2021 (2018) and something Participant 2 observed in younger children being taught how to pour tea.

Culture and gender issues

There are distinct gender roles within the culture of the UAE which results in gender segregation in many contexts (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014; Crabtree, 2007; Fox et al., 2006). Much of this has to do with the Islamic idea that women should be modest and should not be seen uncovered outside members of her immediate family (Sobh et al., 2011). This preservation of modesty, the resultant gender segregation and therefore the preservation of family honor in the UAE (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014; Crabtree, 2007; Fox et al., 2016) is something that children would be accustomed to from a young age. Studies have shown how children demonstrate the cultural norms which they are familiar with (Chen & Eisenberg, 2012; Gauvain, 1995, 2009). Chen (2012) noted that culture influences how children interact

with each other, but in this study, Participant 2 saw how culture may also have played a role in child-adult interactions in the school setting. They shared how they perceived that this cultural norm of gender segregation was brought into the school: ‘I think culturally in the school sometimes young boys may not know how to interact with women’. This demonstrates this participant’s thinking of how cultural gender roles are adopted by young children early on, which is a view supported by Baker (2018), who found that young Emirati girls often played to role of the mother in traditional Emirati games.

National identity

National identity was addressed in many of the documents analysed (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014; Dubai knowledge et al., 2015; Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d.; The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008; Vision 2021, 2018). Documents encouraged Emiratis to adhere to their responsibilities (Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d.) and act to the advantage of their nation whilst maintaining the culture (Vision 2021, 2018).Studies have pointed out the integration between dress and culture in the Arabian Gulf and one way in which citizens highlight their national identity is through wearing traditional local dress (Akinci, 2020; Sobh et al., 2011).

Local dress

In the interviews, both participants discussed the topic of local dress and shared how members of the local community enjoyed seeing them wear local dress. For women, this would be wearing a traditional abaya and a scarf head covering, which is one way, Bouvier (2018, p. 188) says ‘that Islamic identity can be signified’, linking dress with Islam. Participant 2 saw how the requirements for modest dress in women (Al-Qasimi, 2010; Bouvier, 2018) spilled over into girls wearing leggings under school dresses. This finding revealed that this participant is making the connection between the religious obligation of covering, preserving modesty and avoiding shame (Al-Qasimi, 2010) that is placed upon Emirati nationals, and how this is being implemented by parents in a school setting, where the girls typically wear knee length dresses.

Desert culture and the city of Al Ain

For many, especially if the Emirati people are of Bedouin descent, the desert has formed their very ways of life (Matsumoto, 2019). Both interview participants referenced the Bedouin people, who were the nomadic, desert roaming people of the area (Heard-Bey, 2008), who have a deep appreciation for the desert. Participant 2 experienced how Emiratis love the desert. With approximately 93% of the country being desert (Luomi, 2014), it is no surprise that there is this bond. The desert areas are more suited to the date palms and camel herding (Heard-Bey, 2017) and Participant 2 identifies this when they comment how Emiratis still enjoy being with their livestock in the desert and also how they appear more 'relaxed' there. Clearly this participant has identified this bond between their Emirati friends and the desert. Also, with the city being located geographically inland and surrounded by sandy desert, there is close proximity to the desert from any location in the city of Al Ain. However, not all people of the UAE are Bedouin (Akinci, 2008), and Participant 2 also noted this, demonstrating insight into the cultural background of those living in the Al Ain region.

Behaviour, moral values and respecting culture

Honour is highly esteemed in Arab societies (Al-Omari, 2008; Nydell, 2018) and how one behaves not only reflects upon the individual but also on others they are associated with. Such ideas are common in a collective society like the UAE (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014; Al-Omari, 2008; Hofstede et al., 2005), with honour constantly being maintained and shame avoided (Fox et al., 2006; Nydell, 2018; Prager, 2020). Appropriate moral behavior was addressed in many analysed documents (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, 2014; Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d. p.1; Vision 2021, 2018), which could be interpreted as a way to avoid shame. Document analysis also revealed that schools are required to operate under values which uphold the country's morals (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 16; Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014). Any inappropriate behaviour inside or outside school by a staff member, not only reflects on the individual member of staff, but also upon the school and those associated with it, due to the collective nature of the culture (Kamp & Zhao, 2016). There needs to be a certain element of cultural awareness on the part of school staff, as shared by Participant 1 and findings from this study demonstrate that one way this is addressed is through the staff handbook, which outlines appropriate dress and behaviour. This acknowledges the importance of appropriate moral behaviour and avoidance of shame for those related to the school.

Sharing local culture and customs with others and the city of Al Ain

Participant 1 shared how they had interacted with the culture and history in the city, reflecting how Al Ain has been identified as a city which promotes the culture of the country through its historical sites (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008, p. 39). This participant went on to describe how they have a deep appreciation for the history of the nation which is evident in the museums in the UAE, pointing towards the increase in the promotion of cultural sites and experiences, in an effort to promote the Emirati nation and preserve history and tradition (Khansaheb, 2021; Ledstrup, 2019). Findings indicated that this idea of promoting the culture and preserving heritage is in line with the desires of the UAE's leaders (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2013, 2014; Dubai Knowledge et al. 2015; UAE Vision 2021, 2018). This could be in response to a continual undercurrent in the UAE in which some feel that globalisation is threatening traditions of the past (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014; Al-Khazraji, 2009; Partrick, 2012; Stetter, 2012). This study found that whilst families are called to be responsible for maintaining Emirati culture (UAE Vision 2021), this responsibility also falls upon schools (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014; Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015; The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008).

Whole school adaptations: school compliance with values, laws and regulations of the country

Despite the multicultural face of the Arabian Gulf, tradition 'serves to filter what is acceptable' (Fox et al., 2006, p. 3). Therefore, there is a very strong undercurrent of culture and religion which directs how these countries operate. Culture is multifaceted and incudes many elements (Hofstede et al., 2005; Nuqul, 2014), which makes it a complex topic for expatriates. Interviews revealed that the school has had to adapt in many ways to the local culture, such as providing prayer rooms for Muslim students. This was seen by participants as a way in which the Islamic requirement to pray five times per day could be catered for. Several government documents analysed placed various requirements upon schools in order to reflect and respect local culture (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013; Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015).

Document analysis found that government documents not only placed a responsibility upon the family to teach their children local customs (Vision 2021, 2018) and the Islamic faith (Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d. p.1) but also the education system too must play a role the in religious and cultural growth of children (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2013, 2014; Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015; Vision 2021, 2018). Schools must teach Islamic studies to all Muslim students (Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015) and have a responsibility to encourage the Islamic values in schools (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 12; UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 23). With globalisation challenging traditional values (Baker, 2018; Cooke, 2014; Farrell, 2008; Raven & O'Donnel, 2010), this is one way to counter any negative effects of globalisation on the culture and religion (UAE Vision 2021, 2018). This is also in line with thoughts from Findlow (2008), who recognises that the desire for countries to spiritually develop their citizens fares a lot higher for Arab nations, than it does, in the UK for example. This may be due to a tension throughout the Muslim world, where, due to globalisation, there is an increased divide between the secular and the religious. This is a tension linked with the concept of oneness (Tawhid) which is foundational to Islam, where all aspects of life are intertwined and converge in Islam (Cook, 1999), is being pushed aside. Cook (1999) highlights that this has been felt in the educational sector, where Western, secular ideas have been brough in to meet the needs of Islamic nations, but at the expense of the Tawhid. Participant 2 shared that the Muslim community could be of benefit to the school and should be drawn upon.

Previously, authors have identified how overseas educational ideas often lack the understanding of the local culture when entering the Arab world (Dickson, 2013; Raven, 2011). Other studies have highlighted the importance of school curricula and materials being relevant for the culture they are being used in and warn about foreign or inappropriate ideas within curricula which may be contrary to the values of a country (Al-Rimawi, 2011; Godwin, 2006; Heard-Bey, 2017). Belhiah and Al-Hussien (2016) found that an English medium curriculum which was adopted in the city of Abu Dhabi, not only brought the language, but also Western culture. The current study revealed how the case study school addresses this. Participant 1 noted how the community relations officer of the school censors materials such as textbooks and removes anything deemed inappropriate, in line with government requirements (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014, p 67), which would be aligned with Islamic principles.

Surprisingly, despite the apparent restraints placed upon schools, one participant described the education in the case study school as holistic, which not only links into one of the six FS principles (Forest School Association, n.d.a; Figure 4) but would also sit alongside the Islamic outlook on education, with previous literature having identified how Islamic education caters for not only the advancement of intellectual knowledge, but seeks to develop good character and the building of moral, spiritual and communal values (Al-Rimawi, 2011; Bakar & Abdullah, 2015). Harris (2017) highlights the holistic benefits which FS brings, such as environmental education, social skills, relationship skills, self-esteem and assessing risk. Many of the activities described in the PowerPoint document (Figure 7; appendix 13) would also seek to develop these skills. In addition, Figure 9 also notes that the FS association states that FS develops 'holistic growth (and) helps learners develop socially, emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually' (Forest School Association, n.d.a), which would overlap with these Islamic educational values. However, to make it applicable, the teaching and learning does need to be carried out in a meaningful and contextualised way.

Contextualised education and the challenge of globalisation

Participant 1 also shared the difficulties of explaining the British concept of a chimney to children who would not be familiar with this concept, as no home in the UAE has a chimney. This is the educational 'replication rather than…innovation' which Kirk (2015, p. 92) speaks about, when Arabian Gulf countries aim to fulfill national objectives, through imported educational curricula, where the relevance to the context has not been taken into account (Raven, 2011). This does not go as far as an educational idea going against Islamic and cultural principles, which several studies speak about (Baker, 2018; Dickson, 2013; Kirk, 2015; Mrabet, 2010; Al-Rimawi, 2011), however it does not allow students to fully understand the topic, as it is so far removed from their current context. In many multicultural settings, school curricula can be somewhat removed from the experiences of the local population (Al-Rimawi, 2011; Baker, 2018; Heard-Bey, 2017; Ridge et al., 2017). Here, there is an awareness that what is being taught in some lessons is difficult for the children to grasp, due to the cultural irrelevance and does not draw upon the 'cultural uniqueness' of the local culture (Kirk, 2015, p. 88) or does not 'check for relevancy to the local context' (Raven, 2011, p. 19). The same participant also desired for pupils to be engaged in what could be

considered traditional British school extracurricular activities such as netball and swimming, which again, would not reflect traditional values, particularly of modesty in local girls.

Tolerance in a multicultural school

Participant 1 described the tension between not needing to be aware of the cultural background of individual pupils, whilst also attempting to embed culture, in such a multicultural environment. This lack of distinction between cultures could be this participant's outworking of tolerance. However, this may make it difficult to fulfill some of the government requirements to promote and establish the local UAE culture, if school staff are not aware of who is an Emirati and who is an expatriate. Documents analysis also revealed the importance of tolerance within the UAE (Government of the United Arab Emirates n.d; UAE Vision 2021, 2018) and highlighted it as a virtue which schools should foster (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 17; Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015, p. 13), as it is encouraged in Islam (Afsaruddin, 2016).

5.2.2 Sub question 2 - What adjustments have the school made to make FS in the case study school applicable to the local environment and culture?

Forest School adaptations: contextualised education

The participants described the physical layout of the FS area. The natural environment of the UAE is reflected in the presence of both sand and local palm trees on the FS site. The palm trees are marked out on the school PowerPoint presentation (Figure 6) and this slide also acknowledges that the physical environment is different to a traditional FS. Due to the strong sun for most of the day in the UAE, the school has installed an artificial shade over the area, despite Participant 1 noting that shade is normally provided by the trees in a traditional FS. With more trees, shade could also be given naturally by date palms within this context. Therefore, there does seem to be some level of contextualisation, but further adaptations such as artificial grass, artificial shade and wood from outside sources are not in keeping with the local natural environment. Participant 1 highlights a lack of knowledge about wood collecting and that wood is brought into the site from outside. This points towards a need for more

context specific training. This study found that the FS association encourages practitioners to focus on the natural surroundings and although FS was originally set up in a woodland environment, there is an acknowledgement that any natural setting could be incorporated (Forest School Association, n.d.b; Figure 9). The FS association speaks about holistic, child centered growth, and the potential to link FS with home life and the use of natural resources (Forest School Association, n.d.b; Figure 9). All these facets are very specific to the context in which they are used, thereby giving freedom for much contextualisation which Harper (2017) and Lloyd et al. (2018) call for in FS.

Whilst the PowerPoint presentation shared by the school identified the site at the case study school and the educational approach used on the site as FS (Appendix 13), the approach could be seen as a combination of outdoor learning and FS. The FS school project in this case study school does not truly occur in a natural desert setting. Rather, it is held in a man-made environment within the school grounds, as can be seen in figure 6 (p. 87). Local resources such as fencing, palm trees, as well as sand, have been brought to the site in an attempt to reflect the natural surroundings. Elliot (2015) described a similar situation in inner city England where an area adjacent to the school was transformed into an area which could be used for FS. Other studies have shown similar concepts, where the local natural environment is reflected in an outdoor area of the school on the school grounds, to encourage children to interact with local and natural resources in their play (Cumming and Nash, 2015).

This hybrid approach of FS and outdoor learning is a response on behalf of the school to many of the local regulations which make it difficult to regularly transport young children outside the school setting, within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. In addition to this, many within the country are risk averse and there is a negative attitude to risk, which the children could be exposed to in a natural desert setting. Therefore, an on-site setting is easier to control the level of risk which children are exposed to and is therefore one way in which the school is adapting to the local context.

FS and the local culture

However, there are other adaptations which have been made to the FS project in the case study school. Lowenthal (2005) highlights the place of the natural environment in the heritage of a country. The desert is an aspect of the natural environment, which is intertwined with culture in the UAE, allowing for camel herding, growing date palms and falcon hunting, which are part of the heritage (Aspinall, 2001; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Heard-Bey, 2017; Ledstrup, 2019). Participant 2 identified how the desert was part of Emirati culture and Emirati friends were more relaxed in the desert environment. The school has also recognised the place of the desert in this culture. Therefore, one adjustment which the school made was to rename the FS 'Desert Discovery' and Participant 1 saw this as 'molding into the culture'. This name change definitely begins to align outdoor education to the culture in which it sits, at least in name. Local UAE studies by Baker (2018) and Al-Qinneh and Abu Ayyash (2020), both call for an awareness of the local Emirati culture to be taken into account when considering education, with Alhosani (2022) highlighting the impact which schools in the UAE can have on young children with regards to culture. Even something as simple as a name change not only makes the idea more relevant but may signal something of a change in mindset on behalf of the staff.

Local health and safety concerns are considered by school staff. Scorpions are common in the desert in Al Ain, and Participant 1 shared that they check the sand for wildlife, in addition to taking precautions for blowing sand. Both examples demonstrate some degree of understanding of the natural context in which the FS is situated, and the risks involved. Children are asked to wear long trousers to enter the FS, thereby allowing the children to take supported risks by going into this environment, which is advocated by the FS association and is addressed in one of the six FS principles (Forest School Association, n.d.a; Figure 4).

Other adaptations have been the incorporation of local resources. Participant 2 identified the use of local logs, spices, grills and fencing as ways in which adaptations have been made, as well as a water source, which was seen as an attempt to mimic a traditional falaj. This concurs with several government documents which encourage schools to promote and strengthen local culture (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2013, 2014; Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015), as well as studies which show that there does need to be a level of contextualisation to the curriculum (Heard-Bey, 2017; Kirk 2015; Raven 2011). Artefacts of the culture carry meaning and children develop an understanding of this meaning through interaction with

fellow members of the culture and can thereby respond in a culturally appropriate way (Gauvain, 2009). Even the choice of toys in a setting can reflect which children will interact with them (Trawick-Smith et al., 2015). Baker (2018, p. 122) directly addressed the use of natural materials in educational settings within the UAE: ‘teachers may use Emirati ‘playthings’ such as sand and water in the classroom, not only as a tool for play, but also as an inspiration for knowledge of the UAE’s rich heritage and culture’. Therefore, the adaptations which the school has made are a link to and reflection of the culture. However, other non-local artifacts were also used in the FS area such as tyers and play kitchens, thereby highlighting the tension between adapting to the local context and a desire to incorporate other resources. This was also reflected in photos within the PowerPoint (Appendix 13) showing non-native resources (Figure 7). The activities in this slide (Figure 7) were generic and could be applied to any situation but details on how they would be outworked in this context were not provided. The slide on protective clothing (Figure 8) was also not adapted for the UAE context.

Activities mentioned in the PowerPoint document (Figure 7) such as construction, teamwork, crafts and creating could all be incorporated into a constructive learning framework, which previous studies have attributed to FS (Harris, 2017; O'Brien, 2009), as well as contributing to the government’s desire to move towards 'critical thinking and practical abilities' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 23). Despite the range of local and non-local resources used in the FS, these activities would allow for the ‘range of learner centered processes’ which the Forest School Association call for (Forest school Association, n.d.a). However, Romanowski et al. (2018) point out that in the Arabian Gulf, learning has traditionally not been taught through active engagement and reflection, but rather through a more formal approach. Therefore, there may be some modifications required to constructivist approaches to education in this context. In fact, Baker (2018, p. 122) advocates that ‘non-Emirati teachers of the KG community should learn about Arab-Islamic perspectives on play, so the rich cultural heritage of the UAE can thrive’.

Findings from the interviews revealed that both participants pointed out that a fire pit is not needed in the UAE as it is not a cold climate, despite the FS having a fire pit in the case study school. Although a fire pit is frequently a part of FS within the UK, it is not a necessity which is stipulated by the Forest School association who say, ‘Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners’ (Forest School Association, n.d.b). This may be an example of replicating educational practices from another country without adapting

them to the needs of the pupils partaking in the Forest School. This practice of implementing educational ideas without thought for the meaning of context in which the educational ideas were initially created, is consistent with previous studies addressing this topic (Baker,2018; Matsumoto, 2019; Raven, 2011; Ridge et al., 2017). Interestingly, Lloyd et al., (2018) also specifically addresses the inappropriate use of fire in outdoor education. They noted that in Australia, lighting a fire is not always appropriate due to the fear of bushfires and that the use of fire in outdoor education needs to be carefully considered in light of the local context.

The PowerPoint document analysed (appendix 13) also echoed this idea of replication without contextualisation, which is consistent with previous literature stating that there is a fear that the formal idea of FS is being commercialised and standardised, which does not allow cultural adaptations, which will influence how children play in the environment (Leather, 2018). This lack of contextualisation reflected in both the interviews and PowerPoint document (appendix 13) are in stark contrast with the data which this study found when analysing a section of the Forest School Association website (Figure 9). This analysis revealed a pedagogy which is very flexible and encourages practitioners to be child focused, adapting to the natural environment and local context of the children involved.

5.2.3 Sub question 3 - How do staff view the adaptation of the FS project in the case study school?

EYFS philosophy and FS

There was a desire by participant 1 to share how the outdoor environment mirrored the indoor environment with ‘areas of active learning’. They saw FS as good EYFS practice, linking with the early years Reggio Emelia philosophy. This is an interesting concept, as it extrapolates a very specific Italian curriculum, which was developed in a very specific cultural and environmental area in Italy, to a new context and area of the world. Whilst the topic of Reggio Emelia was not the focus of this research project, it is interesting that this participant brought it up in relation to natural materials in the classroom and how they viewed the links with the FS project in the case study school. Sanders-Smith and Cordoba (2022) adds that Reggio Emilia is more than classroom displays, in that this educational philosophy is based on place and surroundings being used as educational opportunities. Baker (2015) notes the aesthetic nature of Reggio Emilia, which is something which Participant 1 touches on during the interview, however this is saturated in the aesthetic appreciation which the

Italian culture promotes (Sanders-Smith & Cordoba, 2022). Reflecting on the context in the UAE, Baker (2015) shares that after her visit to the area of Italy famous for the origins of the Reggio Emilia approach, she would desire for a similar, 'organic' approach to early childhood education in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. She noted how this approach was very research based and how it was not a superficial philosophy but rather a complete way of thinking about education and the educational space. Baker (2015) notes the contrast between the Reggio Emilia educational approach and the didactic technology driven, performance driven approach to education in Abu Dhabi. Hewett (2001) adds that Reggio Emilia elevates the role of the child in their learning to take an active role. There is an opportunity for this style of hands-on learning, potentially in the FS, to reflect the traditional learning through apprenticeships which were used as ways to learn skills in the past, throughout the Arab world (Alhebsi et al., 2015; Morrison, 2021), however this deep understanding was not expressed in this study.

Opportunities for development

Although one of the participants had minimal experience in the setting of the FS, they perceived that many aspects which are important to culture within the UAE, such as desert animals, Bedouin tents, growing palm trees and traditional cooking opportunities, could be incorporated into FS to help it have more synergy with the culture. Participant 2 specifically mentioned a potential role play of making luquaimat (a traditional donut), demonstrating their knowledge of the importance of food and hospitality in the culture, which agrees with previous research which highlights the prominent place of food in Gulf Arab hospitality (Al-Omari, 2008; Khansaheb, 2021; Sobh et al., 2011; Sobh et al., 2013).

Community engagement

This participant also thought that community engagement was important. They could see ways for community development, particularly within the Forest School project in the case study school. An idea from this participant was asking Emirati families which aspects of the local culture and heritage they would like to share with expatriates and how this could be incorporated into the project, thereby honouring the opinion of Emirati families. It is interesting that this participant recognises the importance of honouring members of the local

community, as honour is an important aspect of Emirati life (Baker, 2018; Fox et al., 2006; Nydell, 2018). Document of conduct and ethics of an Emirati Citizen (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.), encourages Emirati nationals to share their traditions with non-nationals and this could be something which could link local values with education.

5.2.4 Sub question 4 - What are key components of a FS in the context of the case study school in the UAE?

Contextualised education

Findings from the PowerPoint analysis (Appendix 13) indicated that the FS desires to offer a range of activities (Figure 7) which include ‘caring for the environment, sustainability, teamwork, games, confidence, leadership, trust, fire, tools’ all of which would tie in with the FS principles (Forest School Association, n.d. a; Figure 4). However, from the analysed PowerPoint (Appendix 13) there is no explanation of how this will look in the UAE. Although the focus here is the formal schooling system, historically in the Islamic Middle East education was often in the form of learning skills such as the 'use of the bow and arrow, to swim, how to work the land (and) to be…hospitable' (Morrison, 2021, para. 2). Therefore, the country context of the UAE would lend itself to hands on, skills-based learning in an outdoor environment, although this idea was not shared by participants in this study.

Supported risk is one of the components of FS (Forest School Association, n.d.a) and was generally spoken about many times within the PowerPoint presentation (appendix 13) analysed, but it did not address context specific risks.

Environmental protection and conservation of natural resources

However, the need to promote care for the environment, which FS encourages (Forest School Association, n.d.b), does fall into line with the findings from the document analysis, which demonstrated how the government are aware of environmental concerns (Government of the United Arab Emirates, n.d; The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008; UAE Vision 202, 2018; United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017) and the PowerPoint (Appendix 13) analysed also addresses this in a general way. This echoes a study conducted by Burns and Manouchehri (2021) on outdoor education in another

Islamic country, which adds that ‘nature schools’ could fit well into Islamic nations: ‘in many ways it is equally possible within an Islamic worldview that recognition of divine care of nature is coupled with humankind’s appropriate behaviour and learning within nature’ (Burns & Manouchehri, 2021, p.10), further confirming the place a FS has within an Islamic context.

Training

Not directly addressing a FS lesson, but something which is seen as foundational to FS, (Case Study school, n.d.) is that it is always run by trained leaders (Forest School Association, n.d.b). This was also highlighted in the interviews and the school PowerPoint (appendix 13). Both participants reported the importance of staff training. One participant had been previously trained and was seeking further training, whist the other, being a relatively new member of school staff, had no training and articulated that they were unsure if their ideas fitted with the FS philosophy. Appropriate training would equip practitioners to further understand how the FS philosophy and principles could be applied in the context of the UAE. However, this would need to be expanded to include some intercultural competencies, as many expatriates may not have had a chance to interact with the Emirati community and gain understanding about their culture (James & Shammas, 2013).

5.2.5 Sub question 5 - What are the positive and negative aspects of running a FS project such as this, from the perspective of staff in the case study school?

Both participants were positive about the FS project in the case study school, and this reflects literature by Barfod and Bentsen (2018) who identify the need for school leadership to be on board with outdoor learning. One of the interview participants saw the FS as giving the school an added dimension when it came to private schools, who compete for affluent families who are able afford the high fees (Ridge et al., 2015). Mohamed and Morris (2021) warn that Gulf countries often ‘purchase’ educational ideas which are more of a ‘commercial’ transaction, and do not consider effectiveness. Therefore, the findings in this study differ from the thoughts from Mohammed and Morris (2021) in that one participant had the desire for children to be ‘at one with nature’ and saw FS as a way of fostering this. Another participant felt that children were on task whilst in the FS, thereby making it not only a point

of difference between other private international schools but also something which the children engage with.

Community engagement

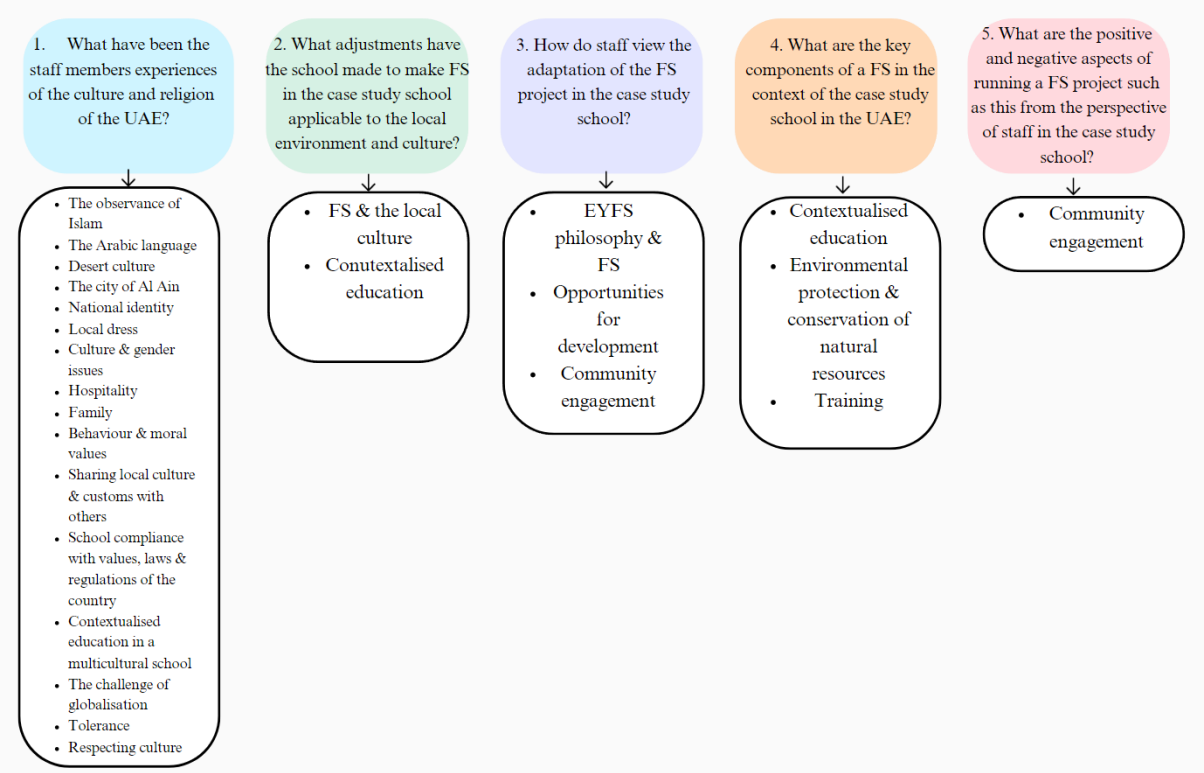
Another positive aspect which was shared through the interviews, was the intention to have more community involvement. Participant 1 added that pre-Covid, parents were invited to attend a FS presentation in the school and the school would now like to have parents visit to project on site again. This would sit alongside findings from the document analysis which found that parental visits to schools should be encouraged (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 56).

Very few negative comments were made by participants other than the need to be mindful of blowing sand (Participant 1).

5.3 Summary

The aim of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the UAE. The sub-themes which emerged from the data analysis went on to answer each of the sub-questions and this can be summarised in figure 11.

Figure 11 Research sub-questions and corresponding sub-themes from data analysis



Results found that although there had been some adaptations made to the FS, these did appear to be minimal, with the FS PowerPoint document (Appendix 13) also reflecting little of the UAE. This is in contrast to the flexibility afforded by FS, as seen in the section of the FS association website analysed in this thesis. Lived experiences of staff were investigated and results found that one participant has more local cultural interactions than the other. Various aspects of culture were shared through the interviews which were also reflected in government documents. It was also clear through the analysis of government documents related to schools, that there were various ways in which the school had to adapt to the context and had the responsibility of ensuring that staff were also aware of expectations placed upon them by the culture. The following chapter will outline conclusions and recommendations from the study.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents a conclusion of the findings from this study along with recommendations for stakeholders involved in adapting a Forest School (FS) model to new contexts. It will then go on to describe potential areas for further research. This study investigated the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the UAE.

6.1 Summary of the findings

Data was collected through the analysis of two semi-structured interviews as well as the analysis of several documents. The findings revealed that the case study school had made several adaptions to the FS project to make it applicable to the local environment and culture. The FS had local palm trees, sand, local spices and logs incorporated into the area to make it an applicable outdoor learning context. This begins to align the FS with findings in many of the government documents analysed, which encouraged the promotion of local culture and heritage in schools. One of the most notable adaptations which the case study school implemented was the change in name from ‘Forest School’ to ‘Desert Discovery’ to reflect the local setting. However, despite staff members having had experiences of the local culture and living in proximity to many cultural sites, the adaptions to the FS project were limited and the project had some non-local resources such as an artificial shade, tyres and pallets. There was also a fire pit despite the warm weather in the UAE, signalling the replication of a traditional FS in Europe, where fire would have been needed for warmth. Similarly, the PowerPoint document from the school revealed little contextualisation to the presentation to make it relevant for the UAE. In contrast, through the analysis of a section of the Forest School Association website, it was found that FS offers a very flexible approach, allowing FS staff to adapt to the local environment. Several findings from interview data pointed towards the need for further staff training to understand fully, the values of FS. Staff felt positively towards the FS, with one participant sharing many ways in which they thought, it could be further contextualised.

The study also found that staff members had varying degrees of interactions and experiences with Emirati culture and religion. Document analysis highlighted the foundational role which Islam plays in the country, which was also reflected in the case study school. The community reacted positively to participants attempting to speak Arabic, with documents analysis also echoing the place of Arabic in this context. Interviews identified the place which national identity has in the culture, along with modest dress and gender roles. Participants and document analysis reflected on the role of family. Participants also identified many ways in which they experienced whole school adaptations to being a British school in the UAE, however, one participant gave an example of how the wider school curriculum was not adapted to meet the local population.

6.2 Conclusion

The study identified ways in which the FS model was adapted to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the UAE and a number of conclusions have been drawn**.** The FS itself had palm trees, local fencing and sand which reflected the local natural surroundings, however, this was juxtaposed with artificial grass underfoot in a non-sandy area and an artificial shade over the FS. Therefore, some local adaptations have been made. There was an awareness of the dangers of the desert with the area checked for dangerous wildlife and children encouraged to wear long trousers to enter the FS. One of the most obvious efforts to contextualise the project was the name change from Forest School to Desert Discovery.

The FS program had a fire pit which was not necessary for the function of providing warmth and is not stipulated as a necessity in FS (Forest School Association, n.d.b). However, a fire pit is common in some FS contexts, indicating a replication of an overseas idea without taking the local context into account (Kirk, 2015, p. 92). The PowerPoint (appendix 13) also reflected this 'replication', echoing thoughts of Leather (2018) who has concerns that the FS model is becoming standardised and commercialised. This was contrary to the analysed section of the FS Association website, which reflected a pedagogy which was flexible and open ended (Figure 9). In fact, the FS association is adaptable with the location and resources which are used for FS (Forest School Association, n.d.b; Figure 9), therefore there could be more contextualisation of the current project, whilst still aligning to the FS ethos.

The educational approach of the school was described as holistic by one participant which links well with FS (Forest School Association, n.d.a; Figure 4; Figure 9), as well as an Islamic educational philosophy (Al-Rimawi, 2011; Bakar & Abdullah, 2015), however these connections were not made by participants. The school PowerPoint (appendix 13) also highlighted holistic activities (Figure 7) although these were not contextualised for the UAE. The FS association encourages links with home life and also spiritual life if appropriate (Forest School Association, n.d.b; Figure 9), therefore, leaving any adaptations made open for local cultural connections. However, these connections were not made in the current study. The focus on natural surroundings, learning skills, and care for environment does fit into an Islamic educational model and also links with a skills-based education which was prevalent in the Arab world through traditional apprenticeships many years ago (Alhebsi et al., 2015; Morrison 2021).

One participant identified training needs and also ways in which this FS could be further adapted and gave an example of role playing the preparation of a traditional sweet dish. This participant had shared many firsthand experiences of Emirati culture, and this is a demonstration of expatriates having cultural experiences, meaning being made and this being outworked into contextualising educational experiences. With the city of Al Ain being identified as a city of cultural relevance (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008, p. 39) the case study school and staff are in proximity of cultural sites, from which staff would have opportunities to explore Emirati culture. The findings indicate that although both participants had seen the outward expressions of Islam from living in the UAE, neither shared how Islam encourages followers to take responsibility in care for the environment (Sarkwi et al., 2016) despite this aspect of Islam being a direct connection to FS.

Based upon the findings of the study, there were several adaptions to living in an Arab, Islamic context which impacted the school as a whole. Interviews revealed that staff had observed ways in which adaptations naturally occurred due to cultural influences, such as girls wearing leggings under school dresses and the relationship between young boys and how they relate to women outside their immediate family. The importance of moral behaviour was highlighted in the document analysis and was reflected through the interviews in how the staff handbook outlined moral behavior. This is one step which the school has

taken to ensure the school staff are made aware of appropriate moral behaviour in the context of the UAE. Surprisingly, one participant felt that they did not need to distinguish between students and their ethnicity, despite schools being required to promote Emirati culture (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014; Dubai Knowledge et al., 2015; The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008), which may require staff to know which students were from that background. This highlighted a lack of knowledge from this member of staff regarding the concern which Emiratis have, that their culture is threatened due to globalisation (Ahammed & Cherian, 2014; Al-Khazraji, 2009; Partrick, 2012; Stetter, 2012).

Previous authors have noted the place of Arabic within Islam (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2020), as well as the government's requirement for it to be taught in schools (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2013, p. 45; Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2014, p. 21; Dubai knowledge et al., 2015). Both interview participants made some efforts to speak Arabic and this was appreciated by members of the Arabic speaking community, however, it was not determined if the teaching of Arabic spilled over into the FS project or if any adaptations were made to include the Arabic language in FS, as the case study school was an English-speaking school.

In terms of wider community impact, one participant advocated for having more community involvement in the future by asking Emirati parents what aspects of culture they would like to see reflected in the FS. This would negate many of the cultural barriers which expatriate staff face and would enable cultural adaptations to be put in place in an appropriate way.

6.3 Contribution to knowledge

Research has identified how the FS method has often not been contextualised to the situation in which it has been placed (Harper, 2017; Leather, 2018; Lloyd et al., 2018). With considerable research having been undertaking in many other settings around the world on how FS is used in various contexts, (Austin et al., 2013; Barfod & Bentsen, 2018; Burns & Manouchehri, 2021; Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Masters & Grogan, 2018), this study begins to address the gaps in knowledge regarding contextualisation of the FS approach within the UAE. This study is one of the first to consider the lived experiences of staff in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain, in the

UAE. The findings add to an understanding of what steps can be taken to adapt a FS approach to the context of the UAE, in particular, the need for the physical landscape to reflect local surroundings, as well as the use of a contextualised name for the project. It also revealed ideas to adapt the FS further, such as community involvement and the incorporation of more local resources.

6.3.1 Key contribution

This study finds that the lived experiences of staff in one school involved in adapting a FS model to fit with the local culture and environment in the city of Al Ain does impact the way staff members approach pedagogy. Staff members who took part in interviews were able to highlight their experiences of culture and religion in the UAE. Staff members had experienced Islam, the Arabic language, desert culture, gender issues, hospitality, Emirati's views on family, behaviour and moral values, as well as other aspects of the local culture. They were able to identify ways in which the wider school had been adapted to reflect the local culture and environment of the UAE. This ranged from providing prayer rooms for Muslim students to use, censoring reading materials to being aware of non-local concepts which may be used in teaching topics in a British school. They were also able to identify ways in which the FS was adapted to the local context.

In addition, this study revealed that FS offers a very flexible pedagogy which can in fact be adapted to fit with the local culture and environment of the UAE. The promotion within FS pedagogy of developing the child in a holistic manner as well as care for the local environment is also reflected the religion of Islam. The focus within FS on the use of a local environment which, in this case, could be the desert environment but also within the city of Al Ain could be a local date palm oasis, sits side by side with the desires of the Emirati government to promote and preserve local culture and heritage. The adaptations which the case study school made in order to adapt the FS to the local environment were through the use of traditional fencing, the presence of date palm trees, the use of natural herbs, as well as a more contextualised name.

Interviews revealed that staff experienced the implementation of this non-traditional FS within the case study school in a variety of ways. The member of staff who had more

interactions with the local community could identify ways in which the project could be further adapted to fit with the local culture and environment. They were also able to identify ways in which items which were present within the FS, such as a water source and herbs, could be a reflection of the local environment. The staff member with the least local cultural interactions outside the school setting was able to identify fewer ways in which the project was adapted. However, both members of staff spoke positively about the implementation of the FS project within a non-traditional setting. Both see the value of it within the local context, with the change of name being described as 'moulding' into the surrounding culture and the FS project as a whole was seen as encouraging children to love the desert.

6.4 Implications of the research

These results build on existing evidence which demonstrates that a FS approach is being used effectively in a variety of non-traditional contexts. Practically, this study found that FS can be adapted to the dry, desert context of the UAE. The findings suggest that FS is an educational activity which could align itself closely with many of the values of the UAE and sit alongside the promotion and preservation of UAE culture. The lived experiences of staff in this study were reflected in how they viewed the project and its links to the local culture and heritage. Therefore, staff with increased cultural awareness can see how the local culture can be reflected in an outdoor setting. The results should be considered when schools within the UAE desire to fulfil the government's objectives to promote and preserve local culture through outdoor learning.

6.5 Recommendations

6.5.1 Recommendations within the wider field of research

In the wider context, there are implications for FS staff who work in non-traditional FS settings. Through the analysis of a section of the FS website, FS was shown to offer a very flexible approach to learning. FS staff need to be aware of this and refrain from replicating practices from other countries, but rather embrace the FS principles and contextualise them to the location in which they work. To implement this effectively, FS leaders need to have

advice and input from a member of the local community, or considerable knowledge of the local culture, to manage resources correctly and implement artefacts in an appropriate way. In line with FS principles, this study recommends that staff training for FS should be a priority, to empower staff to fully understand the FS concept to lead or assist lessons appropriately.

6.5.2 Recommendations for FS staff in the case study school

In the case study school, to improve the current situation, a recommendation would be that natural shade could be provided through the planting of more local palm trees, as well as increasing the number local artefacts placed in the FS area to facilitate play which replicates the local culture and heritage. In the context of the UAE, the connection between Islam and man's care of the environment was something which FS practitioners in the case study school should be made aware of, to acknowledge the potential links FS could have within an Islamic context. The concept of holistic education was revealed in this study, which ties closely with FS principles as well as Islamic education. School staff should be made aware of these connections to plan lessons which focus not only on the academic aspect but rather in developing the pupil as a whole.

6.5.3 Recommendations for wider school staff

The results indicated a deep level of intricacy which the Emirati culture possesses. This study recommends intercultural training for staff in the case study school, to allow all staff members to appreciate the cultural aspects which may spill over into schools and accommodate these appropriately. Government documents highlighted the deep need to promote and preserve Emirati culture through school life. Therefore, the school leadership team need to be aware of this and encourage the cultural ties within the curriculum, ensuring the curriculum is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all students.

6.5.4 Recommendations for school management in the case study school

Analysis of the school PowerPoint along with interview analysis revealed that those staff from the case study school who were interviewed, did not show an awareness of the policies which emphasise the need for promotion of the culture, heritage and religion of the UAE and

the implications of this for day-to-day practice in a whole school and FS setting. Therefore, those who administer these policies in a school setting need to take this into account and encourage knowledge of the requirements at a classroom level.

6.6 Limitations of the study

It is undeniable that COVID-19 had an impact on this study. Within the UAE, schools were shut for all pupils for a considerable length of time, from mid-February 2020 to a staggered, gradual return, with only selected lessons in January 2022. Teachers had to quickly switch to 100% distance learning. This led to high levels of stress within the teaching profession as well as increased workloads, as teachers and school administration developed their skills in distance learning. I feel that this was one of the reasons why there was low participation within the study, as individuals in all aspects of school life had little extra time to take part in a study.

In addition, due to the school being closed in the COVID-19 pandemic, the FS project had only been open for a short time when the interviews took place. This may have played a role in the views and opinions which were shared during the interviews, as they may not have been recent experiences.

Due to the restrictions placed on the study as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, all interviews were carried out through Zoom. This limited the non-verbal feedback which I as was able to glean. This feedback can be helpful when conducting an interview face to face (Kvale, 1983). One disadvantage to the Zoom interview which I experienced was the lag which often occurred due to temporary disruptions to the internet connection, as well as the picture periodically freezing. This interrupted the flow of the conversation, as well as the pace. These both are factors which Oliffle et al. (2021) described as 'concessions' of Zoom interviews. Another limitation was the availability and accessibility of policy documents. Policies become outdated quickly, and accessing the most up to date documents was a challenge.

In this hermeneutical study, my traditions and ideas as the researcher played a part in constructing the meaning (Howarth, 1997) therefore there is the limitation of researcher bias,

as my previous experiences living and working in the UAE played a role in the interpretation of the data. If this research were to be repeated, I would delve into the positive aspects of researcher bias and explore my own thoughts more, as although this bias can be negative, it can also have a positive role in adding depth and understanding to the topic under research (Howarth, 1997). In addition to this, whilst the documents analysed were uninfluenced by the researcher (Gross, 2018), they were not without their own level of bias. Each of the documents were written by a specific entity for a specific purpose. The majority of the documents analysed were written by government entities and therefore had their own level of bias and their own intentions and purposes. If the project were carried out again, it would be of interest to explore this bias more and gain a wider distribution of documents written by non-governmental sources to further minimise this bias.

The study findings cannot be generalised to other situations, as it was undertaken in one very specific cultural setting, based in one case study school. This study did not focus on providing definite answers, but rather aimed to illustrate meanings (Greenwood & Lowenthal, 2005; Kvale,1983).

Further to this, only two participants chose to partake in the study, which limited the data collected from interviews. In the hermeneutical interview, the experiences and understanding of the researcher are developed as the research progresses, however with the small sample in this study, I only had two interviews and was constrained in my ability to develop more understanding as the interviews progressed. One participant was a relatively new member of staff at the school and had limited experience of and influence in the FS project under study. Therefore, it made it particularly difficult to answer the sub question ‘what are the main components of a FS lesson?’ Due to the limited nature of this study, it was not possible to return to the interview participants and interview them a second time to gain more clarity and depth of data.

For the document analysis, pre-defined themes and sub-themes were initially chosen, however if this study were to be repeated, I would not use these pre-defined themes but allow themes to emerge as the document analysis progressed.

6.7 Recommendations for future research

Due to the small sample size of this research, it would be of interest to interview other members of staff involved in this project to gain a wider distribution of data and to interview these participants more than once in order to build upon ideas gleaned from initial interviews. Further research could analyse the FS lesson plans within this school, to determine if links are made to the local culture and context. Similarly, FS lessons within this context could be observed for links and connections to the context. Another study could survey Emirati parents of children partaking in this project in order to gather their opinions on the links between the FS and the local culture.

In a wider context, this study has taken the stance that, in accordance with literature, education should be tailored to the context in which it is taught. However, in a country like the UAE, it would be of interest to ask Emirati parents if they desire for the curriculum to be more contextualised or do they choose British schools for the children because the curriculum is imported directly from England?

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Appendices

Appendix 1 A table of Emirati proverbs which use the natural environment to convey meaning.

Proverb Translation	Meaning
He who has his hands in dates is unlike the one who has his hands in fire	The lack of empathy or understanding displayed by those who live in comfort towards those who are undergoing great adversary
You eat the date and I count its seeds	This proverb highlights the disparity between those experiencing a dilemma or a form of adversity, and those who feel far removed from it
Like an animal that ate dates and drank meris (beverage made of dates soaked in water)	In rendering a service he unintentionally did an injury. To make things worse
Keep the quilt on the back of the she-camel	Keep the issue hidden
A friendship of camels	In the Emirates, camels come together when they are fed, but move apart when traveling with their owners. This proverb describes a person whose friendship never lasts since he travels around and isn't able to sustain relationships.
He fell in the valley	This expression describes an old person who starts losing their memory.
Like a palm tree which gives fruits to the outside	This proverb describes someone who is good and generous to strangers and stingy when it comes to his or her own family members
Honor the guest even if-you can only offer him dates and coffee	The importance of hospitality
He gets the camel with its load	He quit while he was ahead
When the camel falls down, the butchers are abundant	A proverb said when someone makes a mistake or gets into trouble, and consequently faces blame and severe criticism from others.
(He is) like the baby camel, if he looks up, he will find the breast, (of his mother) and if he looks down he will find the grass	He lives happily and he enjoys his wealth. Someone who enjoys luxury and health
He is unaware of what the difference is between sh7aam and nghaal (two kinds of dates in the UAE)	He is completely lost!
The true good of rain is when we see trees' fruits	The blessing of rain is the fruit
No one admits his dates molasses is sour	Everyone likes his own things best. The trader praises his goods in order to sell them
Rather cutting the noses than abandoning the customs	Emirati people highly values its customs and values

Taken from the book ‘Popular Proverbs An Entrance to Emirati Culture’ (Isleem, 2017).

Appendix 2 E-mail asking permission to use the school as a case study for the Junior School Headteacher

Dear (headteacher name),

I am writing again to you to kindly ask if you would give your permission for the Junior School of (case study school) Al Ain to be used as a case study for my masters dissertation in Education at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. The study aims to understand how living in a foreign culture and teaching in an international school, results in staff members making changes to the Forest School curriculum to contextualise the Forest School model in Al Ain. The study will also look at how staff members in (case study school), Al Ain seek to adapt to the culture of the UAE and Al Ain.

As part of this project, I wish to interview (anonymised for privacy and ethical reasons). All interviews will be over zoom at a time convenient to the participant. In the interviews I will ask questions about participants' views on the Forest School project in (case study school) Al Ain, as well as on the culture generally in Al Ain and the UAE, and how these two interact.

I would require yourself to forward an e-mail to junior school teaching and learning assistants along with consent forms and participant information sheets. They can then decide independently if they wish to take part of not. The project has received ethics approval from the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde.

If you think this would be possible, do let me know by e-mail before Friday 22nd April 2022.

Yours faithfully

Elaine Wright

Appendix 3 Invitation E-mail for Teaching and Learning Assistants

Dear Teaching and Learning Assistant at (case study school) Al Ain.

I am writing to you to kindly ask if you would be interested in taking part in a research project I am conducting as part of my Masters course of study in Education at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow.

The study aims to understand how culture impacts international schooling. Specifically, how this results in staff members making changes to the Forest School curriculum in Al Ain. The study will also look at how staff members in (case study school), Al Ain seek to adapt to the culture of the UAE and Al Ain.

As part of this project, I wish to interview you, over Zoom, at a time convenient to you, if you have been involved in the Forest school project, for at least 5 weeks over the past 3 years or have Forest School Level 1 training. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and I will ask questions about your views on the Forest School project in (case study school), Al Ain, as well as on the culture generally in Al Ain and the UAE, and how these two interact.

If you are interested in taking part in the project, please find more information in the attached participant information sheet and privacy notice. Feel free to e-mail me with any queries or questions about the study. The project has received ethics approval from the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde.

If you think you would like to take part in an interview, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me at (removed for confidentiality) before Friday 6th May 2022.

Yours faithfully

Elaine Wright

Appendix 4 Invitation E-mail for the Junior School Headteacher

Dear (name removed for confidentiality)

I am writing to you to kindly ask if you would be interested in taking part in a research project I am conducting as part of my Masters course of study in Education at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. The study aims to understand how living in a foreign culture and teaching in an international school, results in staff members making changes to the Forest School curriculum to contextualise the Forest School model in Al Ain. The study will also look at how staff members in (case study school), Al Ain seek to adapt to the culture of the UAE and Al Ain.

As part of this project, I wish to interview you, over Zoom, at a time convenient to you, as the Junior School Headteacher. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and I will ask questions about your views on the Forest School project in (case study school) Al Ain, as well as on the culture generally in Al Ain and the UAE, and how these two interact.

If you are interested in taking part in the project, please find more information in the attached participant information sheet and privacy notice. Feel free to e-mail me with any queries or questions about the study. The project has received ethics approval from the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde.

If you think you would like to take part in an interview, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me at (removed for confidentiality) before Friday 6th May 2022.

Yours faithfully

Elaine Wright

Appendix 5 Participant information sheet for the Junior School Headteacher

Name of department: School of Education

Title of the study: The lived experiences of staff involved in adapting a Forest School model to fit with the local culture and environment in one private school in the Middle East.

Introduction
My name is Elaine Wright and I am a MPhil student at the University of Strathclyde, UK. I am British by background and have been living in Al Ain for over 5 years. As part of my programme of studies, I am interested in Emirati culture and how this interacts with education here in the United Arab Emirates. The masters dissertation which I will write from the data collected in the interviews will count towards my MPhil degree.

What is the purpose of this investigation?
This study aims to understand how living in a foreign culture and teaching in an international school, results in staff members making changes to the Forest School curriculum to contextualise the Forest School model in Al Ain. The study will also look at how staff members in (case study school), Al Ain seek to adapt to the culture of Al Ain. There is very little research into how an educational model, such as the Forest School, is being used within the United Arab Emirates.

Do you have to take part?
Participation in this investigation is entirely voluntary. You are free to ask the researcher any questions about the study to help you decide if you want to take part or not. If you do agree to participate in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will be able to keep this participant information sheet for future reference. If you do not wish to take part in the study, you will not be penalised. You can also withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and can request the destruction of any and all personal data collected to that point at any time, up until the completion of the fieldwork.

What will you do in the project?
As the Junior School Headteacher, if you do decide to take part in the project, you will participate in an in-depth interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes over Zoom, at a time convenient for you. If you agree, the interview will occur in January/February 2022. You will be asked about your views on the Forest School project in (case study school) Al Ain, as well as on the culture in Al Ain and the UAE in general, and how these two interact. I am interested to hear how this plays a part in your role as a headteacher in Al Ain. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in hearing your opinions and thoughts.

I will video record the interview to allow me to transcribe the interview. If you would rather the video be turned off, this can be arranged.

There are no incentives or rewards for taking part in this study.

Why have you been invited to take part?
You have been invited to take part in this study as you are the only headteacher in the city of Al Ain who has been involved in a Forest School on the school grounds in this desert environment and have a unique experience to share.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?
This interview is not designed to cause any discomfort to yourself as the participant. However, if there are any distressing topics uncovered, the interview can be immediately terminated and signposted towards the school pastoral team or the researcher will offer to call a family member.

What happens to the information in the project?
The results from the study will be analysed and used to write the thesis project for my MPhil degree and potentially to write articles for academic journals or for conference presentations. All data will be anonymised to protect your identity.

The digital recording and the written transcript of the interview will be stored securely on my password protected laptop and also on the University of Strathclyde's secure storage server. The data will only be accessible to the researchers in this project. All data will be destroyed after 5 years.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.You will also receive a privacy notice along with the consent form.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?

If you do decide that you would like to take part in the project, you will be asked to sign the consent form and return it to me.
After the thesis has been completed, you can contact me at any time to receive a summary of the findings.
If you do not wish to take part in this project, I thank you for your time.

Researcher contact details:
If you wish to find out more information about the project at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me (Elaine Wright). My e-mail address is (removed for confidentiality).

The university of Strathclyde School of Education can be contacted at:
(removed for confidentiality)

Chief Investigator details:
Dr Eugenie Samier (first supervisor)
(further details removed for confidentiality)

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.
If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Prof David Kirk
(contact details removed for confidentiality)

Appendix 6 Participant information sheet for Teaching and Learning Assistants

Name of department: School of Education

Title of the study: The lived experiences of staff involved in adapting a Forest School model to fit with the local culture and environment in one private school in the Middle East.

Introduction
My name is Elaine Wright and I am a MPhil student at the University of Strathclyde, UK. I am British by background and have been living in Al Ain for over 5 years. As part of my programme of studies, I am interested in Emirati culture and how this interacts with education here in the United Arab Emirates. The masters dissertation which I will write from the data collected in the interviews will count towards my MPhil degree.

What is the purpose of this investigation?
This study aims to understand how living in a foreign culture and teaching in an international school, results in staff members making changes to the Forest School curriculum to contextualise the Forest School model in Al Ain. The study will also look at how staff members in (case study school), Al Ain seek to adapt to the culture of Al Ain. There is very little research into how an educational model, such as the Forest School, is being used within the United Arab Emirates.

Do you have to take part?
Participation in this investigation is entirely voluntary. You are free to ask the researcher any questions about the study to help you decide if you want to take part or not. If you do agree to participate in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will be able to keep this participant information sheet for future reference. If you do not wish to take part in the study, you will not be penalised. You can also withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and can request the destruction of any and all personal data collected to that point at any time, up until the completion of the fieldwork.

What will you do in the project?
As a teaching and learning assistant, if you do decide to take part in the project, you will participate in an in-depth interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes over Zoom, at a time convenient for you. If you agree, the interview will occur in January/February 2022. You will be asked about your views on the Forest School project in (case study school) Al Ain, as well as on the culture in Al Ain and the UAE in general, and how these two interact. I am interested to hear how this plays a part in your role as a teaching and learning assistant in Al Ain. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in hearing your opinions and thoughts.

I will video record the interview to allow me to transcribe the interview. If you would rather the video be turned off, this can be arranged.

There are no incentives or rewards for taking part in this study.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study as you are a teaching and learning assistant in the city of Al Ain who has been involved in a Forest School on the school grounds in this desert environment and have a unique experience to share.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?
This interview is not designed to cause any discomfort to yourself as the participant. However, if there are any distressing topics uncovered, the interview can be immediately terminated and signposted towards the school pastoral team, or the researcher will offer to call a family member.

What happens to the information in the project?
The results from the study will be analysed and used to write the thesis project for my MPhil degree and potentially to write articles for academic journals or for conference presentations. All data will be anonymised to protect your identity.
The digital recording and the written transcript of the interview will be stored securely on my password protected laptop and also on the University of Strathclyde's secure storage server. The data will only be accessible to the researchers in this project. All data will be destroyed after 5 years.
The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.You will also receive a privacy notice along with the consent form.
Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?
If you do decide that you would like to take part in the project, you will be asked to sign the consent form and return it to me.
After the thesis has been completed, you can contact me at any time to receive a summary of the findings.
If you do not wish to take part in this project, I thank you for your time.

Researcher contact details:
If you wish to find out more information about the project at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me (Elaine Wright). My e-mail address is (removed for confidentiality).
The university of Strathclyde School of Education can be contacted at:
(details removed for confidentiality)

Chief Investigator details:
Dr Eugenie Samier (first supervisor)
(details removed for confidentiality)

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.
If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Prof David Kirk
(removed for confidentiality)

Appendix 7 Consent form for the Junior School Headteacher

Name of department: University of Strathclyde School of Education

Title of the study: The lived experiences of staff involved in adapting a Forest School model to fit with the local culture and environment in one private school in the Middle East.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- 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. If I exercise my right to withdraw and I don't want my data to be used, any data which have been collected from me will be destroyed, up until the completion of the fieldwork
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study any personal data (i.e. data which identify me personally) at any time, up until the completion of the fieldwork. I understand that any information recorded in the investigation 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 and/or video recorded as part of the project

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Appendix 8 Consent form for the Teaching and Learning Assistants

Name of department: University of Strathclyde School of Education

Title of the study: The lived experiences of staff involved in adapting a Forest School model to fit with the local culture and environment in one private school in the Middle East.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- 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. If I exercise my right to withdraw and I don't want my data to be used, any data which have been collected from me will be destroyed, up until the completion of the fieldwork I understand that I can withdraw from the study any personal data (i.e. data which identify me personally) at any time, up until the completion of the fieldwork.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation 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 and/or video recorded as part of the project

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Appendix 9 Privacy notice for participants in research projects

Introduction

The University of Strathclyde is committed to transparency and to complying with its responsibilities under data protection legislation. This privacy notice sets out important information regarding how we use your information and your rights under the legislation. This privacy notice relates to individuals participating in research projects led by the University of Strathclyde.

Please note that this standard information should be considered alongside information provided by the researcher for each project, which is usually in the form of a Participant Information Sheet (PIS). The PIS will include further details about how personal information is processed in the particular project, including: what data is being processed; how it is being stored; how long it will be retained for, and any other recipients of the personal information. It is usually given to participants before they decide whether or not they want to participate in the research.

Data controller and the data protection officer

The University of Strathclyde is the data controller under data protection legislation. This means that the University is responsible for how your personal data is used and for responding to any requests from you in relation to your personal data.

Any enquiries regarding data protection should be made to the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@strath.ac.uk.

Legal basis for processing your personal information

If you are participating in a research project, we may collect your personal information. The type of information that we collect will vary depending on the project. Our basis for collecting this information is outlined below:

Type of information	**Basis for processing**
Personal information and associated research data collected for the purposes of conducting research.	It is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest.
Certain types of personal information such as information about an individual's race, ethnic origin, politics, religion, trade union membership, genetics, biometrics (where used for ID purposes), health, sex life, or sexual orientation are defined as 'Special Category' data under the legislation.	It is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest and It is necessary for scientific or historical research purposes in accordance with the relevant legislation (Data Protection Act 2018, Schedule 1, Part 1, Para 4).

Criminal conviction / offence data	It is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest and is processed in accordance with Article 10 of the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018, Schedule 1, Part 1, Para 4.

Details of transfers to third countries and safeguards

For some projects, personal information may be processed outside the EU. This will normally only be done when research is taking place in locations outside the EU. If this happens, the University will ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place. You will be fully informed about any transferring of data outside the EU and associated safeguards, usually in the Participant Information Sheet.

Sharing data

If data will be shared with other individuals or organisations, you will be advised of this in the PIS.

Retention of consent forms

If you participate in a research project, you may be asked to sign a participant consent form. Consent forms will typically be retained by the University for at least as long as the identifiable research data are retained. In most cases they will be retained for longer, the exact time frame will be determined by the need for access to this information in the unfortunate case of an unanticipated problem or a complaint. 5 years after the research is completed will be suitable for many projects, but beyond 20 years will be considered for any longitudinal or 'high risk' studies involving children, adults without capacity or a contentious research outcome.

Data subject rights

You have the right to: be informed about the collection and use of your personal data; to request access to the personal data we hold about you; you are entitled to request to have personal data rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete; you have the right to request to object to your data being processed and you can request to restrict the processing of your personal information. To exercise these rights please contact dataprotection@strath.ac.uk.

However, please note - in some research projects, it may **not be** possible to provide these rights because doing so would prevent or seriously impair the achievement of the research purpose. For instance, if you are participating in a focus group with multiple participants, if the research has progressed to a later stage of analysis, or findings have been published, it may not be possible to remove any one individual's personal data without having an adverse effect on the entire dataset.

Right to complain to supervisory authority

If you have any concerns/issues with the way the University has processed your personal data, you can contact the Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@strath.ac.uk. You also have the right to lodge a complaint against the University regarding data protection issues with the Information Commissioner's Office (https://ico.org.uk/concerns/).

Appendix 10 Interview guide for the Headteacher

***** = key questions**

- **Theme: Personal information**

  - Take a moment to introduce yourself. Where are you originally from?
  - Tell me about how you came to arrive in the UAE?
  - How long ago was that?
  - How have you found living in Al Ain?
  - Where in town do you live? What is the general make up of the population there? Expat? Emirati?

- **Theme: Country context.**

  - I am curious to know your thoughts about the culture here.
  - What aspects of culture have you encountered in the UAE? What do you think about these?
  - Have you had much opportunity to experience Emirati culture?
  - What aspects of Islam have you encountered in the UAE? What do you think about these?
  - *** Have you noticed any differences between Islam and the traditional local culture here in the UAE?
  - *** What does the culture here mean for you? Is there anything you have had to change in yourself since you came to this country?

- **Theme: Curriculum and Pedagogy**

General background to the project

- ***Tell me about how the school runs within the cultural context of the UAE and Al Ain.
- ***How have aspects of culture impacted the school? (Could you give me an example of this.)
- ***How have principles, values and practices of Islam impacted the school? (Could you give me an example of this?)

- Tell me how the forest school came about.
- What were the driving factors for this project.
- Who was involved? What training was involved?
- How long did the project take to set up?
- When did the forest school at (Case Study School name) open?

- As a headteacher, what has your part been in the Forest School project here in Al Ain?
- ***Have you noticed any culturally different ideas or approaches to education? Do you have any examples?
- How has this affected Forest School here in Al Ain?

Changes the headteacher has had to make to their practice.

- ***What has the culture here meant for you as a headteacher, being in this role in the UAE?
- ***Have there been any Islamic practices which have impacted you specifically as a headteacher in your leadership?
- Is there anything you have had to change in yourself since you came to this country?
- ***How has your leadership changed in this cultural context?
- How does the culture here impact how you lead the school and your involvements in FS?
- How do you find that?
- ***Are there any aspects of Emirati culture which you feel have shaped the Forest school project and the school as a whole?

➢ **Theme: Community/ social engagement**

- What have been the reactions of parents/ wider community which you have seen as a headteacher?
- Do you use the community as resource for teaching?
- How do you feel parents have perceived the 'learning' opportunities?
- ***What values have you seen that parents hold in high regard?
- ***How have these values, held by local parents, impacted what you do and how you lead?
- And what about the values from the expat parents? How have they impacted your leadership?
- How well do you think FS is working for Emiratis?
- Have there been any challenges when engaging parents? How have these been overcome?

Close

- Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix 11 Interview guide for Teaching and Learning Assistants

***** = key questions**

- **Theme: Personal Information**

- Can you introduce yourself and tell me how long you have been in Al Ain?
- What is your role in the FS project?

- **Theme: Country context.**

- What are the key components of Emirati culture which you have experienced?
- What do you think about these?
- What aspects of Islam have you encountered in the UAE?
- What do you think about these?
- ***Have you noticed any differences between Islam and the traditional local culture here in the UAE?
- ***How have these had an influence on the school?

- **Theme: Curriculum and Pedagogy**

- *** What are the key components of a FS in this context?
- ***What changes have been made specifically for the project to work in this setting in Al Ain? Could you give me an example of this.
- Have there been any barriers in your opinion to FS here in Al Ain?
- How do you see Forest school contributing to the overall education of children here in Al Ain?

- **Theme: Community/ social engagement**

- In your opinion, how has this project been received by parents and the community at (case study school)?
- How have the parents perceived the learning opportunities?
- Have there been any challenges when engaging parents? How have these been overcome?

Close

- Before we finish, is here anything else you would like to share?

Appendix 12 Codebook used in data analysis

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
Culture of the UAE	The observance of Islam	The official religion of the UAE. Practiced by Muslims. Followers are not necessarily but can be Arab. Observance & practice of Islam. Islamic values. Respect for Islam. Celebrations and practices related to the religion of Islam.	'General ethics and conducts…A citizen should…abide and work according to Islamic values and principles' (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d.) 'Islamic nature and the religion, you know, maybe more than other religions in other countries needs to be utterly respected, and so it should be' (Participant 1) 'Ramadan and Eid is something I've experienced' (Participant 2)
	Tolerance of other cultures & religions	Respect for and tolerance of religions other than Islam. Tolerance for other cultures within the UAE.	'All Schools must show respect to all religions and encourage respect, tolerance and understanding for cultural diversity' (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p.17)
	The Arabic language	Arabic is the official language of the UAE. Arabic has a central place in Islam. Arabic is closely linked to Emirati culture & heritage. Promotion of the Arabic language. Speaking Arabic.	'Arabic will reemerge as a dynamic and vibrant language expressed everywhere in speech and writing as a living symbol of the nation's progressive Arab Islamic values' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 7)

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
			‘And I’ve noticed if I interact in Arabic with parents…they seem to appreciate it their face lights up and they talk to me a little bit in Arabic again I’m trying to learn and I love to greet people in their national language.’ (Participant 2) ‘My Arabic after seven years here is dreadful, but the words I can say when you try it and even if you get it badly wrong the Arabic speaking staff or parents love it they say “oh fantastic”’ (Participant 1)
	Hospitality	The practice of being welcoming to others, both friends and strangers. Can include offering food to guests in a home. Practices of hospitality.	‘The hospitality has been huge. Part of that has been drinking tea and coffee and learning the ritual that goes along with that. How to receive it, and also how to serve it’ (Participant 2)
	Family	Can include both the nuclear family and the wider family circle. Cultural outlook on family. Importance of family in Emirati culture	‘Families are the living fabric of our culture and guardians of our values.’ (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p. 5) ‘There's a high regard in my understanding in Islam, of your family and taking care of your family, family first and that's that

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
			follows the tribal cultural mentality as well' (Participant 2) 'That sense of belonging and the family values…And they only have big families...that's that is important to them and I like the fact that the family values… houses that are big and that they're extended, because there are several generations of one family living there, and that seems to be fairly commonplace.' (Participant 1)
	Gender issues	Differences between male and female roles within Arab culture. Islam and gender roles. Lack of mixing between non-related males and females. Culture and gender	'There is a pretty stark difference in between men and women interactions' (Participant 2) 'But I'm not sure - the male and female dynamics, I don't believe it says in Islam, you cannot look at a woman in the eye, there are certain parameters for men and women in Islam.' (Participant 2)
	Local dress	Traditional clothing for Gulf Arabs - Kandora, Abaya, head covering, Islamic dress, modesty in dress, clothing and culture.	'You wear a Kandora on certain days, yes, wonderful because it is respectful and you are sort of obviously being very respectful to the culture as a whole, very important and

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
			religion.' (Participant 1) 'The dress is fairly conservative for local Emiratis, but they've actually told me that is not Islamic that's cultural.' (Participant 2)
	Desert culture	Natural sand deserts of the UAE, desert & culture, Bedouin.	'Everybody loves the birr (desert) everybody loves the deserts and going to the azbah (desert farm)' (Participant 2)
	History of the country	Reference to past leaders, the formation of the country, the trucial states, forts and other historical sites, museums in the UAE, history of the UAE, learning about the local history.	'But you know 1971, it's such a young country but it's got such a rich history and such I love to go to the particular museums' (Participant 1)
	Respecting culture	Showing respect to local heritage, culture and customs. Acting in culturally appropriate ways. Maintaining honor and preventing shame when dealing with the local culture.	'I think the most important thing is that you must have a cultural understanding of what is expected, what is polite, and what is what also what is offensive'. (Participant 1)
	The city of Al Ain	Al Ain as a city, Al Ain as a place of cultural significance within the UAE.	'And I love living in Al Ain and rather than anywhere else actually because you've got more culture and history…. but here it the culture and traditions genuinely live on.' (Participant 1)
	Culture, customs &	Culture of the UAE. Customs which reflect the heritage and	'There will be…challenges to

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
	national identity	culture. How national identity is viewed. Facets of national identity. Heritage.	our national identity' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, p 4). 'The Government has identified nine pillars that will form the architecture of the Emirate's social, political and economic future…Maintaining Abu Dhabi's values, culture and heritage' (The Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008, p. 5) 'The education system will prepare graduates to enter the workforce and be competitive in the global society, while preserving the national identity of the UAE and its culture, traditions and customs' (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, p. 5).
	Sharing local customs with others	The promotion of local customs, culture & heritage to other nationalities.	'A citizen should…Be careful to define the Emirati customs and traditions and highlight their genuine traditions to people of other nationalities with respect to form and substance'. (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d., p. 1)
	Community	The local community. The Emirati community and the wider population of the UAE.	'We want well knit communities to remain as central pillars of a vibrant

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
			society. As well as providing an essential safety net against social exclusion, communities are the collective space where children reach out beyond their families and take their first steps into society.' UAE Vision 2021. (2018. p. 6). 'The school makes significant and sustained social contributions to the local, national and international communities'. (Dubai Knowledge et al. (2015, p. 97).
	Behavior & moral values	How an individual acts towards another. The values and beliefs a person holds which affects their actions, particularly in Emirati culture. Characteristics of morality in Emirati culture.	'The document of Conduct and Ethics of the Emirati citizen…aims at bringing up a new Emirati generation that is aware of its responsibilities and duties towards its nation, family and community. This document comprises the most important characteristics, manners, values and skills which Emirati citizen should be distinguished with.' (Government of United Arab Emirates, n.d. p. 1) 'All educational practices and school operations shall be governed by a moral

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
			obligation. School staff in the field of education shall exhibit good moral character, consistent with UAE society's morals, values, customs and traditions. Schools must develop a clear statement of guiding moral principles and communicate it to staff.' (Abu Dhabi Education council, 2014, pp. 16 & 17).
Curriculum & pedagogy	A multicultural school	A school which has a range of nationalities. An ethnically and culturally diverse school.	'I couldn't tell you, if there was a group of pupils that came in…where they're from because it doesn't matter because we're all going towards one goal and we're learning to be respectful you know effective adults and that that is all that matters' (Participant 1) 'I haven't counted, but recently between 50 and 60 nationalities here at (case study school)' (Participant 1)
	Contextualised education	Education which reflects the local context. Adapting the curriculum to fit the cultural/religious/geographical situation. Education which takes into account pupil experiences. Can also include examples of non-contextualised education.	'With the Victorian topic that's traditionally in the UK, in year 4, you have to explain to children, what chimneys are because they don't have them here so again it's just those little nuances that

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
			aren't going to mean a great deal to children.' (Participant 1)
	School compliance with values, laws and regulations of the country	Legal requirements for schools to follow locally set guidance and operate under this. Schools to offer a culturally appropriate curriculum. Schools respecting and culture and heritage of the country.	'There's some books behind me here which we've taken out of the library because I wouldn't have known but they're not appropriate for the culture and faith' (Participant 1)
	FS & the local culture	Ways in which the FS has been OR has not been changed to fit the local culture.	'Most of the time that I've been there we've had spices for spice painting and they're normally local spices.' (Participant 2) 'The fence that goes around the desert discovery area that kind of sets it off apart, it sets it apart from the rest of the playground, That looks very local style, fencing, by the way, I think it comes from date palms the branches so things I've seen that set it apart.' (Participant 2)
	Training	FS training, the need for training, training opportunities, lack of training	'We are putting money into the training' (Participant 1) 'I have not had official training… I wonder if it might be even more of an enriching experience if we knew a little bit more of the

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
			philosophy' (Participant 2)
	EYFS philosophy & FS	EYFS philosophy, EYFS ways of teaching, EYFS pedagogy.	'You're thinking about not just academic subjects you're thinking about desert discovery active learning.' (Participant 1) 'The main thing that (the lead EYFS teacher) and her team and bought in, in the last four years has been the Reggio Emilia inspired curriculum which again is all about, particularly with Reggio Emilia…the natural use of material (Participant 1)
	Opportunities for development	Ways to further develop the FS project, ideas for the future of the FS.	'I would love to see maybe a tent a small tent put up somewhere, because we have a lot of Bedouins here, and I think that would be amazing….(it) would be pretty amazing if we could figure out how to put a falaj in there.' (Participant 2)
	The challenge of globalisation	Other cultures and ethnic groups coming to and living in the UAE and the challenges associated with this.	'By preserving the core tenets of Islam, Emiratis will face the challenges of openness to the world with self-assurance, confident that the homogenising effects of globalisation cannot erode their moderate religious

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
			values' (UAE Vision 2021, 2018, P. 7)
Community engagement (interview analysis only)		Including the wider community in school events.	'I've been wondering, could we engage the parent community and go, "what do you want your children to know what do you think it would be good for others from other nations to know"' (Participant 2)
Natural environment (document analysis only)	Environmental protection & conservation of natural resources	The protection and preservation of the natural environment and its resources, strategies to promote environmental protection	'Our goal is clear: to build an economy that protects the environment and an environment that supports the growth of the economy' (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017, p. 7)
	Sustainable development	Acting responsibility towards the environment and encouragement of sustainable development within the UAE.	'Infrastructure Development and Environmental Sustainability - Developing appropriate infrastructure, while preserving the environment, forms the third priority area' (The General Secretariate of the Executive Council et al., 2008, p. 6)
	Community engagement with	The encouraging of the wider community within the UAE, both nationals and expatriates,	'The UAE's awareness raising

Main theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme Definition	Example & reference
	environmental concerns	to be aware of and involved in the consideration of environmental concerns.	and communications campaign on climate change will be based on an aspiration to create an informed society that is supportive and willing to take action on climate change. It will be achieved through the following objectives: • Enhance public awareness and understanding of climate change, and instil the need for action and responsibility to act' (United Arab Emirates Ministry of Climate Change & Environment, 2017, p. 59).

Appendix 13 PowerPoint document from the case study school

Slide 1

Slide 2

Slide 3

Fresh Air Life

The origin of Forest School can be traced back to Scandinavia, the Norwegian expression 'Friluftsliv' meaning 'fresh air life' is deeply embedded within their culture and curriculum. The outdoor environment provides a greater degree of freedom to investigate and explore without the restrictions experienced within an indoor environment. Forest School encourages kinaesthetic learning by using the human body to explore the world through direct contact with the natural elements.

Slide 4

An introduction to Forest School

Forest School is a long term holistic outdoor learning approach conducted within a natural environment. Consistent, long term sessions encourage individual led learning; a catalyst is provided which ignites this pedagogic approach.

Forest School is supported by scientific research which celebrates and proves the impact on physical, personal, social, emotional development and mental health.

Sessions are conducted by two trained Level 3 Forest School Practitioners and provide opportunities for individuals to discover their preferred learning style through creative, holistic, logical and hands on experiences.

Forest School is conducted in all weather conditions excluding high winds and weather deemed unsafe. In these cases, Forest School will be accommodated through indoor activities correlated to the outdoor theme.

Slide 5

Forest School Principles

In 2011, the UK Forest School community agreed six core principles clarifying the ethos of Forest School.

The six core principles which represent the ethos of Forest School are:

- Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
- Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- Forest School uses a range of learner-centered processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
- Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

Slide 6

What do we do in Forest School?

- Games
- Construction
- Teamwork
- Crafts
- Identification
- Learning
- Skills
- Fire
- Tools
- Friendship
- Leadership
- Confidence
- Trust
- Sustainability
- Caring for the environment
- Creating
- Knot work

Slide 7

What are the benefits?

- Increased self esteem
- Building confidence and independence
- Feeling empathy for others and nature
- Teamwork
- Resilience
- Health benefits
- Physical fitness
- Exposure to manageable risk
- Learning by experience
- Improving mental health
- Better sleep and mood

Slide 8

Learning Experiences Gained

Individuals will gain essential survival and life skills which can be implemented in everyday life.

Fire Safety and Implementation

Forest School teaches safe sitting, lighting and management of a campfire. Individuals learn the components necessary for a successful fire, effective tinder material, how to safely extinguish a fire and the safe handling and removal of debris formed by a fire.

Flora and Fauna Identification

Individuals will acquire identification skills to correctly asses and name a variety of flora and fauna.

Tool Safety and Use

Confident knowledge and understanding of safe checking, cleaning, maintenance, storage and use of tools will be achieved. From this, individuals will learn how to make a range of items using natural woodland materials.

Shelter Construction and Rope Work

Forest School teaches survival skills and the ability to assess a situation and use the knowledge gained to collect appropriate materials, erect a shelter and implement a variety of knots appropriate for the situation to survive in all weather conditions.

Slide 9

Who would benefit from Forest School?

- Individuals interested in and/or accepting of the outdoors
- Those who struggle to conform to the classroom environment
- BSED
- Individuals who would benefit from understanding boundaries
- SEN
- EAL

Slide 10

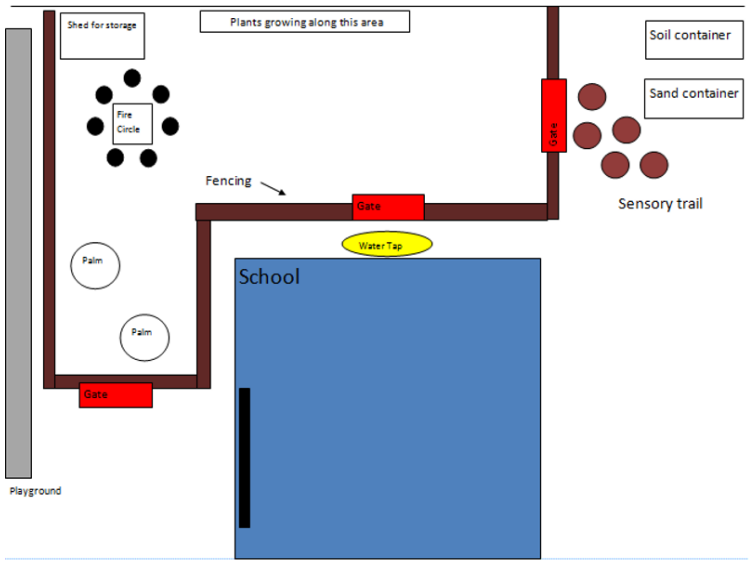
UAE Forest School

The environmental setting is completely different for [redacted] however the ethos and principles remains embedded in our teaching.

- Forest School is a long-term process of regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.
- Forest School takes place in a natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.
- Forest School uses a range of learner-centered processes to create a community for being, development and learning.
- Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.
- Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.
- Forest School is run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

Slide 11

[redacted] Forest School Plans



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Slide 13

Forest School Training

- "All our Forest Schools courses are an ideal opportunity for people who work with children, young people or adults to use the outdoor environment as a valuable learning tool. You will develop strategies, through the application of accelerated learning principles to create a safe environment in which to develop play, personal development, and education. Research has demonstrated the therapeutic benefits of the outdoor environment, especially woodlands." FSE

- **Entry Level: Forest Schools Entry Level**
- **Level One: Forest Schools Skills Award**
- **Level Two: Assistant Forest Schools Practitioners Award**
- **Level Three: Forest Schools Practitioners Award**

Slide 14

Clothing and Equipment

For health and safety reasons, it is vital that those attending Forest School sessions are dressed and equipped appropriately. Individuals must obtain the following:

- Wellington boots or sturdy boots
- Socks and spare socks
- Long trousers
- Waterproof trousers
- Long sleeved top
- Waterproof jacket
- Sun hat
- Insect repellent and sun cream
- Water

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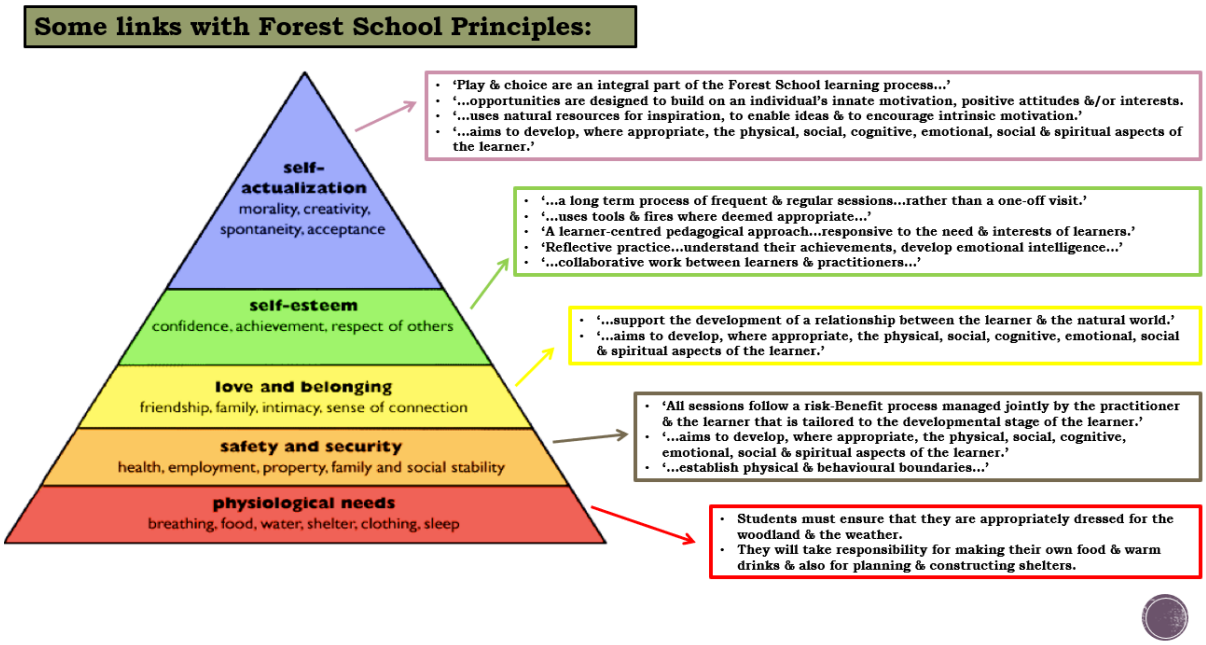

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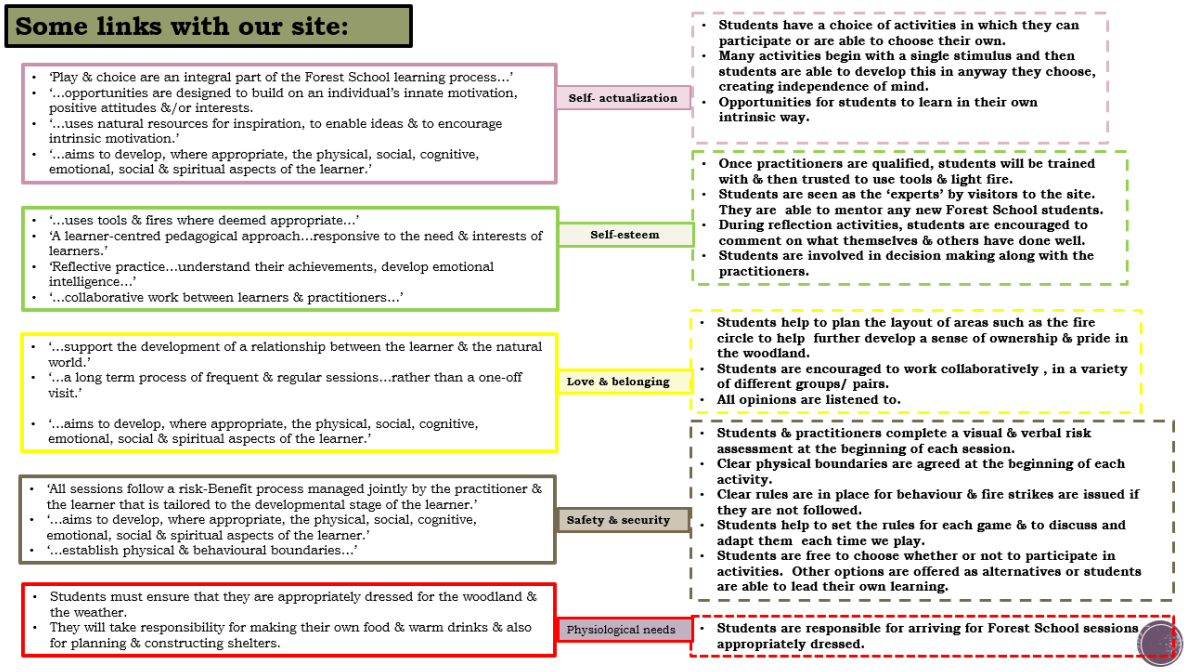
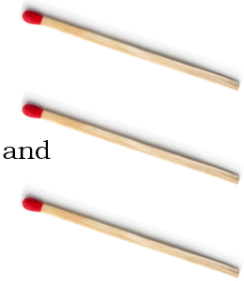


Slide 17

FIRE STRIKE

YOU ARE PRIVILEGED TO BE PART OF FOREST SCHOOL SESSIONS

- To enjoy your experience in Forest School you must follow rules that are given to you by the Forest School Leaders. If you do not follow the rules given you will be given the following
- **A warning** - this can be about your behaviour, your language or not following instructions given.
- **A fire strike No. 1** – this will be shown to you on a behaviour board
- If you behaviour does not improve, **Fire strike No.2** will be given.
- Again if you behavior does not improve, **Fire Strike No. 3** will be given and you will not partake in Forest School the next week.



Slide 18

Supporting and Managing Risk

Any form of outdoor learning involves aspects of risk, for a child and/or young adult to develop they must explore and take appropriate risk, this is part of a process which aids cognitive thinking through assessing a situation and taking appropriate action to manage the dangers and or hazards involved.

All Forest School learners are actively involved in the risk management process, this involves analysing and understanding what risk is, what elements within the session could cause harm or risk to the group, how risk can be managed, risk –benefit and the policies and procedures implemented to support and where possible control risk.

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Risk Management

- a **hazard** is anything that may cause harm.
- the **risk** is the chance, high or low, that somebody could be harmed by these and other hazards, together with an indication of how serious the harm could be

Step 1: Identify hazards, i.e. anything that may cause harm.
Forest School Leaders and staff involved have a duty to assess the health and safety risks faced by all. Forest School Leaders and staff involved must systematically check for possible physical, mental, chemical and biological hazards.

Step 2: Decide who may be harmed, and how.
Forest School Leaders and staff involved must identify who is at risk, and from this, conduct regular reviewing of work routine in the various locations and situations.

Step 3: Assess the risks and take action.
Forest School Leaders and staff involved must study how likely it is that each hazard could cause harm, this will determine whether or not the level of risk should be reduced. Once precautions have been made, some risk remains, a decision must be made for each remaining hazard whether the risk remains high, medium or low.

Step 4: Make a record of the findings.
Forest School Leaders must record in writing the main findings of the risk assessment, the record should include details of any hazards and action taken to reduce and/or eliminate risk. This record provides documented proof that the risk assessment was conducted and will then be used as the basis for future reviews. As this is a working document, this should be easily accessible.

Step 5: Review the risk assessment.
All risk assessments must be reviewed to ensure the safe working practice for all is maintained. Reviewing ensures all new polices, procedures, laws and protocols are understood and adhered to.

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Slide 21

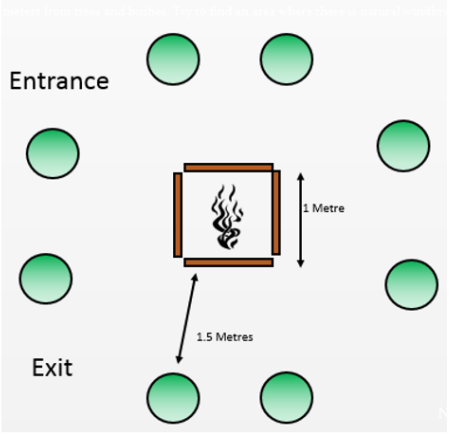
Fire and Tools

The use of fire and tools are introduced gradually within Forest School sessions and is done in a controlled and safe environment which qualified Forest School Leaders. Learners will only be allowed to use tools and/or fire under direct supervision from a Forest School Leader who has gained their level 3 accreditation.

This is a diagram of a fire circle, there must be an entrance and exit to the circle and the seating used to frame the fire circle must be at least 1.5 meters away from the fire square. The fire square provides a protective wall to the fire and each side must be at least 1 meter in length.

The practitioner must ensure that surrounding area has enough opened canopy to avoid smoke staying within the central area of the fire square. A container of water, fire blanket and fire gloves must be located within the campfire area at all times. The fire must be supervised continuously be a Level 3 Forest School Practitioner.

The fire must be sited at least 10 meters from trees and bushes. Try to find an area where there is natural windbreak , this will avoid spread of flames and hot embers.



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Tool	Care & Carrying	Use & Uses	Passing	Safety & Storage
Bow Saw 	Carry the bow saw by your side with the blade pointing downwards. Hold the top part of the frame in the middle like a handbag The blade detaches by releasing the clamp and undoing a wing nut. When carrying the tool, ensure the protective cover is over the blade.	The bow saw can be used individually or with a partner. Before using the tool, ensure you are a safe distance away from others. Begin by resting the blade on the wood; make a groove in the wood by only cutting in one direction for three strokes. Once a groove is formed, begin a push and pull stroke and continue this until the object is cut. Two people operate the bow saw by placing their gloved hand through the gap in the middle and crossing over to sturdy the wood. This technique uses the arm as a barrier and avoids the possibility of the blade falling and harming those using the tool. When working with a partner, the leader of the task must direct the movement of the bow saw. Used for cutting branches or wood up to 6 inches in diameter.	Keep the blade facing down; turn the handle to offer to the other person. or Place the bow saw on the ground with the protective cover on to allow the other person to pick up the tool.	Do not wear a glove on the hand operating the bow saw. A glove must be worn on the non-saw hand. When not in use for a short period of time or when adjusting the object being cut, place the bow saw on the floor with the blade facing inward to your knee. If not in use for a longer period of time, place the protective cover on the blade, place on to the ground with the blade facing inward to your knee. Keep blade covered when in storage. Once not in use, return to the designated tool box or area.

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Loppers 	**Carry loppers close to your side, with your hand on the bottom handle to avoid them opening during transporting.** **Make sure the beak is facing down and both handles are tucked under your arm like a clutch bag.**	**Requires only one person to use this tool.** **Before using the tool, ensure you are a safe distance away from others.** **Anything smaller than the circumference of your thumb is suitable for the loppers to cut.** **Do not force the loppers to shut as this may bend or break the metal.**	**Place the loppers on to the ground with the beak closed to allow for the next person to pick the tool up.**	**When finished with the tool, return to the designated tool box or area.**
Folding Saw 	A folding saw is a portable saw which has a locked blade. Treat the blade with gun oil to prevent rusting. Store in a dry place.	Requires only one person to use this tool. Before using the tool, ensure you are a safe distance away from others. Hold the handle and press the button to release the blade. Begin by resting the blade on the wood; make a groove in the wood by only cutting in one direction for three strokes. Once a groove is formed, begin a push and pull stroke and continue this until the object is cut. When folding the saw away, always ensure the blade has locked in. Used for cutting small branches and twigs	Keep the blade facing downwards, hold the top of the tool and turn the handle towards the other person. or Place the folding saw on the ground with the blade locked to allow for the next person to pick the tool up.	Do not wear a glove on the hand operating the folding saw. A glove must be worn on the non-saw hand. Once closed and locked, return to the designated tool box or area.

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Peeler 	**Keep the blade facing downwards and hold by your side when transporting this tool.** **Check that the blade is attached firmly to the handle.** **Ensure the blade is rust free and clean.**	**Requires only one person to use this tool.** **Before using the tool, ensure you are a safe distance away from others.** **Whittling or peeling bark.** **Sit in the respect position when using this tool.** **Use this tool by the side of your body.** **Always cut downwards and away from the body, with your hand in the hammer hold position.**	**Keep the blade facing downwards, hold the top of the tool and turn the handle towards the other person.** **or** **Place the peeler on the ground to allow for the next person to pick the tool up.**	**Do not wear a glove on the hand operating the peeler.** **A glove must be worn on the non-tool hand.** **Once task is complete, return to the designated tool box or area.**
Sheath Knife 	Sheath until hearing a click, place in pocket The shape of the sheath shows which way the blade is pointing. Treat the blade with gun oil to prevent rusting. Store in a dry place.	Requires only one person to use this tool. Before using the tool, ensure you are a safe distance away from others. Used for whittling, peeling bark or for cutting string. Sit in the respect position when using this tool. Use this tool by the side of your body. Always cut downwards and away from the body, with your hand in the hammer hold position.	Holding the sheathed part, offer the handle to person wanting the tool. or Place the sheath knife on the ground to allow for the next person to pick the tool up.	Do not wear a glove on the hand operating the sheath knife. A glove must be worn on the non-tool hand. Once task is complete, return the sheath knife to the designated tool box or area.

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