



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

**The Individual Education Plan (IEP) Process for Students with
Intellectual Disabilities in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Solutions**

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Abstract

This study attempts to critically explore the process underpinning the creation of Individual Educational Plans (IEP's) in the Saudi context. As such it explored the creation and implementation of IEP's for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh. The aim was to contribute an understanding of this process through the collection and analysis of qualitative data about Saudi Arabian educational policy and practice and to contribute to the broader international literature. An interpretive paradigm was adopted in meeting the research aims, with qualitative data collected by means of a case study approach. The qualitative interviews with 20 Saudi IEP team members and qualitative content analysis of documentary data from a key policy document provide rare insights into the practices and perspectives of the IEP team.

A clear discrepancy was identified between the Regulations of Special Education Institutes and Programmes (RSEIP) policy document and its implementation in mainstream boys' schools. Several issues influenced the participants' responses to the policy document which outlines the principles and practices of the IEP and its implementation. Whilst IEP teams within schools (which include teachers, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists) indicated a clear understanding of IEP and how it can be applied, the fathers of male children with intellectual disabilities, who were supposed to be important members of the team, were much less aware. The IEP team members were found to be unsure of their individual roles stipulated by the RSEIP document and therefore were not fulfilling these duties. Therefore, while teachers themselves were very committed and did most of the IEP planning and implementation, they did not understand their role in a partnership of other team members; the other staff (including fathers) who were involved did much less and sometimes almost nothing.

The study used Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory which suggests that problems involving child development need to be analysed at different levels of society: the microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; and macrosystem. These systems are seen as mutually interacting to influence the development and implementation of the IEP. This theory provides an analytical framework to explore the reflections of IEP team members on how they implemented IEP, barriers they faced and strategies used to overcome these

barriers. Bronfenbrenner's analytical framework helps to reveal the level of society at which the problems lie and provides a clear way of thinking about issues and how to address them. My study clearly demonstrates the value of this framework in analysing discrepancies between policy and practice, as well as the solutions to them. In non-theoretical terms the findings revealed four major barriers to IEP implementation: parental involvement; structural support; negative attitudes; and school level.

Analysis of team members' ideas about ways to tackle problems and resolve issues connected with implementing the IEP fell into five major topic areas: building collaborative teamwork; legal and administrative matters; appropriate assessment; curriculum development; and the coordination between the MoE, DGSE, mainstream schools and parents in relation to the IEP. Therefore, increasing knowledge of issues and solutions will be useful to inform future policy development and improve IEP practice in Saudi Arabia.

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Table of Contents

Content	Page
Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	5
Abbreviations and Terms	11
CHAPTER ONE	12
Introduction	
1.0 Introduction	13
1.1 Statement of the Problem	18
1.2 Conceptual Framework	20
1.2.1 Child Development Theories	20
1.2.2 Ecological systems theory	21
1.3 Research Aims and Rationale	23
1.4 Research Questions	23
1.5 Significance of the Study	24
1.6 Personal Reflections	27
1.7 Overview of the Study	29
CHAPTER TWO	30
Setting the Study: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	
2.0 Introduction	31
2.1 Location and Population	31
2.2 Culture and Religion	32
2.3 The Saudi Education System	33
2.3.1 Historical Overview	33
2.3.2 Educational Structure	35
2.4 The Development of Special Education in Saudi Arabia	37
2.4.1 Historical Background	37
2.4.2 Mainstreaming in Saudi Arabia	42
2.5 Disability Policy in Saudi Arabia	45
2.5.1 Background to Policies and Legislation	45

2.5.2	The RSEIP Policy Document	46
2.6	The Globalisation of Individual Education Plans	52
2.7	IEPs in the Saudi Educational System	57
2.7.1	Aims and Principles	58
2.7.2	Implementing IEPs	59
2.8	Roles of Saudi IEP Team Members	60
2.8.1	The Roles of the Special Education Teacher	61
2.8.2	The Roles of Parents of Students with SEN	62
2.8.3	The Roles of the Head Teacher	63
2.8.4	The Roles of the Psychologist	64
2.8.5	The Roles of the School Counsellor	64
2.9	Concluding Remarks	65
	CHAPTER THREE	67
	Literature Review and Theoretical Framework	
3.0	Introduction	68
3.1	Defining Special Educational Needs	68
3.2	Intellectual Disabilities (ID)	73
3.2.1	Rationale for Focusing on Students with ID	73
3.2.2	History, Definitions and Terminology	74
3.2.3	Assessment and Categorisation	77
3.3	The Right to Special Education	78
3.3.1	The Global Recognition of Rights	78
3.3.2	Legislation in the UK, the US and Saudi Arabia	81
3.4	Individual Educational Plans	83
3.4.1	Introduction	83
3.4.2	Understanding IEPs	84
3.4.3	Perceptions of the Process and Effectiveness of IEPs	87
3.5	Challenges to Successful IEP Implementation	89
3.5.1	Challenges Involving IEP Team Members	89
3.5.2	Challenges to Active Parental Participation	94
3.5.3	Addressing Challenges to IEP Implementation	97
3.6	Theoretical Framework	99
3.6.1	Child Development	100

3.6.2	The Ecology of Human Development	101
3.6.3	The Microsystem and Human Development	105
3.6.4	The Mesosystem and Human Development	106
3.6.5	The Exosystem and Human Development	107
3.6.6	The Macrosystem and Human Development	108
3.6.7	Applying Ecological Theory to the Current Research	109
3.7	Research Aims and Questions	112
3.8	Concluding Remarks	114
	CHAPTER FOUR	115
	Research Methodology	
4.0	Introduction	116
4.1	Research Philosophy	117
4.2	The Interpretive Paradigm: Ontology and Epistemology	118
4.3	Research Design	119
4.4	The Case Study Approach	121
4.5	Methods of Data Collection	123
	4.5.1 Documentary Data	123
	4.5.2 Interviews	125
4.6	Linking the Research Methodology with the Theoretical Framework	127
4.7	Data Collection Strategies	130
	4.7.1 Documentary Data	130
	4.7.2 The Pilot Interview	131
	4.7.3 Conducting the Interviews	132
4.8	Sampling Strategy	133
4.9	Data Analysis Procedure	136
4.10	Quality of Research and Trustworthiness	140
4.11	Researcher's Positionality	143
4.12	Access and Ethical Considerations	145
4.13	Limitations of the Study	148
4.14	Concluding Remarks	149
	CHAPTER FIVE	150
	Discussion and Findings: IEP Team Members' Views on their Roles and Duties towards IEP Implementation	
5.0	Introduction	151

5.1	Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers of Students with SEN	152
5.2	Roles and Responsibilities of the Head Teacher	159
5.3	Roles and Responsibilities of the School Counsellor	165
5.4	Roles and Responsibilities of the School Psychologist	168
5.5	Roles of the Fathers of Students with Intellectual Disabilities	172
5.6	Results of Interviews with IEP Team Members about their Roles and Duties in IEP Implementation	176
5.7	Analysis of the Issues Using Bronfenbrenner's Theory	177
5.8	Concluding Remarks	183
CHAPTER SIX		185
Barriers and Solutions of IEP Implementation		
6.0	Introduction	186
6.1	Barriers to Parental Involvement with other IEP Team Members	187
6.2	Barriers and Solutions to Structural Support Provided by the School and the LEA	201
6.3	Negative Attitudes towards the Implementation of IEPs and Solutions through better Communication between IEP Team Members and Students' Parents	219
6.4	Barriers and Solutions at School Level	221
6.5	Concluding Remarks	235
CHAPTER SEVEN		238
Analysis of the Issues Using Bronfenbrenner's Theory		
7.0	Introduction	239
7.1	Microsystem	240
7.2	Mesosystem	246
7.3	Exosystem	250
7.4	Macrosystem	256
CHAPTER EIGHT		261
Recommendations and Conclusions		
8.0	Introduction	262
8.1	Summary of the Study and Major Findings in Relation to the Research Questions	264
	8.1.1 Microsystem	265
	8.1.2 Mesosystem	269

8.1.3	Exosystem	270
8.1.4	Macrosystem	272
8.1.5	Factors Inhibiting Change: Hierarchy, Gender and Stigma	273
8.2	Contributions of the Study	276
8.3	Recommendations	281
8.3.1	Recommendations for the Microsystem	282
8.3.2	Recommendations for the Mesosystem	283
8.3.3	Recommendations for the Exosystem	284
8.3.4	Recommendations for the Macrosystem	285
8.3.5	Summary of Recommendations	286
8.4	Suggestions for Future Research	288
8.5	Reflexive Account	291
	References	293
	Appendices	321

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 2.1	RSEIP Policy Document Framework	49
Figure 2.2	Roles of Saudi IEP Team Members	61
Figure 3.1	Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development	104
Figure 4.1	Data sources related to Ecological Systems Theory	128
Figure 4.2	Thematic analysis model of all major themes	139
Figure 5.1	MoE policy on IEP implementation	164
Figure 5.2	School practice in IEP implementation	165
Figure 6.1:	Conceptual schema of the relevant challenges and solutions of IEP implementation in Saudi mainstreaming schools	237
Figure 8.1	Model of solutions to IEP implementation barriers in Saudi Arabia	280
Figure 8.2	Improving Core IEP Practice	287
Table 2.1	Distribution of male and female students in special education and mainstreaming in the school years 1991, 2013	40
Table 2.2	Distribution of special education, mainstreaming and students in different categories 2013	40
Table 2.3	International Practice for implementation of IEPs according to policy in each country	56
Table 4.1	Methods of data collection and analysis employed, in relation to	124

	the aims and research questions	
Table 4.2	Authentication of the RSEIP document	130
Table 4.3	Semi-Structured Interviews IEP team Samples	135
Table 4.4	Triangulation of methods and sources	142
Table 5.1	Relationship of the Bronfenbrenner's Theory to the Microsystem Findings	178
Table 5.2	Relationship of the Bronfenbrenner's Theory to the Mesosystem Findings	179
Table 5.3	Relationship of the Bronfenbrenner's Theory to the Exosystem Findings	180
Table 5.4	Relationship of the Bronfenbrenner's Theory to the Macrosystem Findings	182
Table 7.1	Participants descriptions of barriers at the microsystem level	241
Table 7.2	Participants explanations of solutions at the microsystem findings	245
Table 7.3	Participants descriptions of barriers at the mesosystem level	247
Table 7.4	Participants explanations of solutions at the mesosystem findings	250
Table 7.5	Participants descriptions of barriers at the exosystem level	251
Table 7.6	Participants explanations of solutions at the exosystem findings	253
Table 7.7	Participants descriptions of barriers at the macrosystem level	256
Table 7.8	Participants explanations of solutions at the macrosystem findings	258

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Certificate of ethical research approval	322
Appendix B	Provisional Approval by MoE to carry out the study	330
Appendix C	Final Approval by MoE to carry out the study	331
Appendix D	IEP team members informed consent forms	332
Appendix E	IEP team members interview schedule	334
Appendix F	Themes and Coding Framework for Thematic Analysis	336

Abbreviations and Terms

SEN	Special Educational Needs
IEPs	Individual Educational Plans
UK	United Kingdom
EAHCA	Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975
SENCP	Special Educational Needs Code of Practice
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ID	Intellectually disabled / Intellectual Disabilities
USA	United States of America
RSEIP	Regulations of Special Education Institutes and Programmes
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
MoE	Ministry of Education
DGSE	Directorate General of Special Education
NCSE	National Committee for Special Education
EPKSA	Education Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MoEP	Ministry of Economy and Planning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
GPGE	General Presidency for Girls' Education
LD	Learning Disabilities
LEA(s)	Local Education Authority / Authorities
EHA	Education of the Handicapped Act 1975
SEN/D	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1975
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CERD	Research Ethics Committee, University of Lincoln
SIDAC	Specialist Intellectual Disabilities Advisory Committee
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
CPD	Collaborative Professional Development
KSU	King Saud University

Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Despite special education approaches having existed since ancient times, special education only emerged comparatively recently as a developing area in the field of education and psychology. The scientific study of special educational needs (SEN) goes back no further than the beginning of the last century and special education programmes are a relatively recent development. The field of education has witnessed fundamental changes in various parts of the world, particularly in the area concerned with the education of students with SEN (Brownell et al., 2005; Nougarte et al., 2005). However, the right to education has been broadly acknowledged at an international level. As an illustration of this, announcements of the rights of the students with intellectual disabilities were issued in 1981, advocating that students with intellectual disabilities have the same rights and duties as other students (Sheera, 2000). In Saudi Arabia, the specific context of this thesis, a special conference on the rights and needs of the child was held several years later, in 1989, to assert the right of individuals with disabilities to be afforded a decent life and the opportunity to enhance their abilities, potential and involvement in the community (ibid). In recognition of this entitlement to education, Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) have become an important global phenomenon in the development of special education, with the potential to become an organisational and directional force promoting an educational system that is more child-centred and diverse, and therefore more inclusive.

Perhaps due to the relative youth of SEN as a formal academic discipline, a considerable degree of controversy still exists about the history of this field, as well as its legal and moral implications (Armstrong, 2003). For example, the many types of special needs recognised in the United Kingdom (UK) by the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SENCP) (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2001) have resulted in controversy over the categories used in the identification of SEN (Farrell, 2004). This controversy has been echoed in other countries, such as the national system of Saudi Arabia, as detailed in Chapter 3. This study will therefore provide a discussion of the term SEN (see section 3.1). The most common terms used to

describe students with intellectual disabilities, both nationally and internationally, include ‘learning disabilities’ in the UK, ‘developmental disability’ in Canada and Australia, and ‘intellectually disabled’ (ID) in the United States of America (USA) (section 3.2.2). This research discusses the use of the term ‘intellectually disabled’ and its underlying rationale. In particular, it focuses on the ID field in Saudi Arabia, as this group constitutes an important segment of the overall SEN population in Saudi Arabia (section 3.2.1). The Saudi Arabian Regulations of Special Education Institutes and Programmes (RSEIP) policy document (2002) describes Intellectual Disability (ID) as

‘...a condition which involves a number of perceptible deficiencies in the existing functional performance of an individual’. The condition is characterised by a clearly less than average intellectual performance, coupled with deficiencies in two or more areas, including the following adaptive skill areas: communication, self-care, home life, social skills, self-direction, health and safety, academic career skills, leisure time and professional skills. Intellectual disabilities emerge before the age of eighteen. Educationally, intellectual disabilities are classified into three categories based on the scores obtained from the IQ tests. For example, the IQ scores for a mild intellectual disability range between 55 and 75; the score for a moderate intellectual disability ranges between 40 and 54; and finally, in a severe intellectual disability, IQ scores are less than 40’ (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2002: 7).

As briefly mentioned above, one of the most important approaches to fulfilling the educational needs of students with SEN is the IEP. These are documents and systems that establish clear, bespoke priority learning goals and inform the choice of educational methods to be applied to each individual student. The investigation of the IEP process in the specific context of Saudi Arabia is the focus of this thesis. Several types of educational methods can be applied to students with SEN, their suitability depending on the diverse personal characteristics of different students. The rationale of SEN educational practice underlines the importance of creating and implementing an IEP to ensure that instruction and curriculum design meet the needs of particular students (Gibb and Dyches, 2000). Thus, the most effective learning strategies are based on individual learning (Hawsawi, 2002). This educational approach is one of many recent innovations applied in developed countries, such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden, New Zealand and Australia, and is perhaps most commonly utilised with students who have SEN (McCausland, 2005). The IEP can be effective when viewed as a process comprising a number of activities and events that serve

specific goals. Given the combination of procedures, and emerging and changing events, some researchers use ‘product’ as well as ‘process’ in reference to this educational tool. In contrast, researchers like Kayeard (1979; cited in Aleada, 2006) have described the IEP as a ‘road map’ for the instruction of teachers and parents, which gives a focus to the actions and procedures, employed during the education process and ensures that they are appropriate to local needs. The creation of individual education plans has been referred to as ‘a systematic process’ that provides a structure that helps teachers and parents to cooperate in setting goals and support services for disabled students (Pugh, 2002: 1) (section 3.4.1).

When viewed as a product, the IEP functions as an academic and social roadmap that has the child at its centre, while as a process it involves the teacher, administrators, child and parents (Kaye and Aserlind, 1979; cited in Aleada, 2006). In this regard, Gill and Langone (1982) assert that the term ‘process’ essentially denotes continuity of performance and action, while a plan specifies the arrangement of events in a standardised manner. This distinction emphasises that the educational plan for an individual student with ID is not simply a document to be completed by the IEP team members. Instead, it attempts to serve that student in accordance with their individual needs and requirements. As the plan is determined by these distinct needs, it aims at the highest level of skills required to adequately and effectively achieve the desired goals, in order to enable all children to appropriately fulfil their potential.

An IEP is a written document developed individually for each child with special needs which specifies the special education services, kind of disability, targets and goals with the assessment and evaluations that they require (Al-Khashrami, 2001). Therefore, participation in the preparation of the plan involves an integrated team of interested parties. Many countries have sought to develop law and policy to support developing practice and its implementation, allowing those who work in schools and in special education to contribute to the development of appropriate education and to formulate new frameworks for students with SEN.

Mainstreaming is a key concept in the field of special education. According to Al-Mousa (2010), it improves our comprehension of the individual differences between students, while Fiscus and Mandell (1983) state that the integration of students with

disabilities in mainstream schools and the problems arising from such inclusion may be seen as the main reasons for the emergence of IEPs. This is especially important when the systems in place have been found wanting in the provision of suitable additional support services for a number of students with SEN in mainstream schools. The relationship between IEPs and the concept of mainstreaming situates this area of study at the heart of SEN research, addressing the provision of special educational services for students with SEN. As it has been deemed necessary to intervene to address gaps in existing provision, many developed countries have promulgated new laws and regulations under which mainstream schools are obliged to prepare an IEP for each child requiring special education and support services (Al-Wabli, 2000). In the Saudi context, it should be noted that there have been significant changes in educational provision for special needs students: traditionally, students with SEN attended one of three kinds of what the government of Saudi Arabia calls special schools: for hearing impaired, visually impaired and intellectually disabled students (MoE, 2002). More recently, the MoE has implemented a policy to promote mainstream public schools as the most suitable educational setting for students with SEN. This policy is intended to promote more integrated and less segregated schooling.

The current study provides a general overview of the right to special education to education as the context in which IEPs are used, and the way in which individual planning provisions are designed and implemented for students with SEN at both the national Saudi Arabian and international level (section 3.3). An example of this is the enactment in the United States of Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975), which is underpinned by three key elements. The first relates to the follow-up and assessment of individuals in a manner suitable to the circumstances of the disability; the second pertains to the provision of special education services within the framework of an IEP; and the third describes the provision for students with SEN of the additional support services necessary to meet their educational needs (Al-Herz, 2008). Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, since the second half of the 20th century, the Ministry of Education has made intensive efforts to issue a number of pertinent policies and regulations for special educational programmes (Al-Mousa, 2010). Among these is the Royal Decree 244 dated 15/09/1421 AH (11/12/2000) approving the Provision Code for Persons with Disabilities in the Kingdom. The Code seeks to safeguard the rights of individuals in all areas of life and so includes the provision of additional support

services appropriate to the special abilities and needs of persons with disabilities (Eastern Province Association for the Disabled, 2001).

There have been unprecedented developments in many areas of the Saudi education system in recent decades. Perhaps the most significant of these relates to the education of students with SEN (Al-Otaibi, 2012). Special education has been recognised as distinct from the education of mainstream students, in terms of the many strategies, methods and ideas involved, perhaps the most positive of which is the concept of IEPs (Al-Wabli, 2000). As a result, the Saudi Arabian government has sought to develop legislation and policy to uphold and highlight the importance of IEPs, as stated in the regulations issued by the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE). These were issued to organise the educational process, improve the level of services provided, determine the tasks and responsibilities assigned to the school staff members, and put in place the IEP team, bringing together special education teachers, parents, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists. These measures were intended to reflect positively on the upbringing and education of all students with SEN (MoE, 2002).

The DGSE commissioned the National Committee for Special Education (NCSE) to prepare and implement a model for the IEP, after which feedback was requested from mainstream schools. Suggestions and recommendations were received and studied in order to modify the guide and programme in the light of those proposals. The final draft was adopted and approved by the members of the NCSE, requiring disclosure of the roles and duties of the IEP team in IEP implementation, as stipulated in the regulations. The draft also identifies the major obstacles to IEP implementation from the standpoint of the team in the Saudi context and makes proposals to further this aim. In 2002, Saudi Arabia approved the application of IEPs as referred to by the DGSE in the regulations issued regarding the organisation of work in special and mainstream schools (MoE, 2002).

The importance of these regulations lies in managing the education process, enhancing the level of services provided, determining the responsibilities and roles to be assigned to individual members of school staff and engaging the IEP team members. Essentially, these regulations are intended to be reflected positively in many aspects of the teaching and education of students with SEN. The services provided by the DGSE are of

paramount importance, including a directory and models pertaining to the IEPs and their practical application for a full academic year. Nevertheless, Hanafi (2005) claims that IEPs were not applied in the most professional manner and in keeping with the stipulations of the DGSE as set out in the RSEIP policy document. This is consistent with the researcher's personal experience of dealing with students with intellectual disabilities, supported by field visits to mainstream schools (as a teacher in mainstream schools for approximately nine years and as a lecturer at King Saud University in Riyadh for another two).

The following sections state the problem identified, the conceptual framework, the research aims, the rationale and the research questions along with a discussion of the significance of the study. These are followed by sections on the personal reflections of the researcher and the overview of the thesis as a whole.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The IEP is recognised as being a crucial milestone in the development of special education, particularly with regard to intellectual disability, as it constitutes the basis of all educational and teaching activities for students with disabilities (Al-Otaibi, 2012). From an educational perspective, an IEP can be defined as 'a written statement of all educational and support services required to meet the needs of each student with disabilities on the basis of diagnosis and analogy, and prepared by a team working in the educational institution' (MoE, 2002: 79).

As mentioned in the previous section, the RSEIP policy document (MoE, 2002) explains the nature of IEPs, their components and how IEP team members should engage in their preparation and implementation (further details are given in section 2.7). The experience of the researcher in this field suggests that a decade after the publication of the policy, IEP implementation within the Saudi educational system is presently undertaken solely by the teachers of students with intellectual disabilities in the absence of clear definitions of the roles and contributions of other team members who should be involved, such as head teachers, psychologists, counsellors and fathers (MoE, 2002). Therefore, there was a need to conduct research in order to ascertain whether these observations could be verified on a wider scale and to consider the potential impact on

the educational process. Articles 54 and 55 of the Education Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (EPKSA) refers to providing appropriate educational care for students with ID within the framework of knowledge and taking account of individual differences among them (MoE, 1995: 14). Al-Wabli (2000) states that notwithstanding a general belief that adopting and applying IEPs have become priorities for decision makers and people interested in the field of special education in Saudi Arabia; there is no concrete practice in terms of how the Special Education Policy enshrined in the above articles is actually implemented in the country. Al-Khashrami (2001) concurs that many special education schools in Saudi Arabia do not adhere to policy recommendations on IEP practice, although the regulations stipulate clear rules for their implementation (section 2.7.2).

In particular, the RSEIP policy document (2002) affirms the need for implementation of the IEP by a team. Article 22 of the policy states:

‘All members of the special education programme in mainstream schools should carry out the assigned tasks and responsibilities and co-operate effectively to ensure the goals of the educational process, as declared in the Education Policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’ (MoE, 2002: 44).

Thus, the DGSE stresses the importance of collaboration to ensure that IEPs are developed in a manner that best serves the educational process and the interests of students with special needs. The literature suggests that cooperation and coordination among IEP team members are essential for the effective delivery of IEPs for students with SEN in mainstream schools (Ysseldyke et al., 2000; Gargiulo, 2003; Yell, 2006; Hulett, 2009). The involvement of a team can facilitate the learning process and present the best special education services for students with SEN (Tod et al., 1998). In the Saudi context, Hawsawi (2002) believes that the IEP is used to meet the needs of students with SEN in special and public schools. It is considered to be the essence of the special education process, ensuring the provision of appropriate special educational programmes and other relevant support services for students with SEN and their families. Additionally, the plan enables students with SEN to be included in special and mainstream schools (Al-Mousa, 2005), including such considerations as the actions required in order to make the environment more accessible for all students.

However, the experience of the researchers and Saudi literature in this field (e.g. Abdullah, 2003; Hanafi, 2005; Al-Herz, 2008), shows that the existing practice does not meet the required standards, indicating the existence of a research problem and of potential obstacles to the implementation of IEPs as stipulated in the policy. This area therefore needs to be investigated. The difficulties which face IEP teams in mainstream schools may have a range of adverse effects upon the performance of the teams, such as affecting their work flexibility and team spirit, with a corresponding reduction in the effectiveness of special education provision. Furthermore, if team members lack knowledge of and commitment to the relevant rules, regulations and related tasks assigned to them, there may be a detrimental effect on the quality of education delivered to students in those schools. This study is predicated upon the premise that solutions to these issues may lead to a smoother learning process and the provision of better services for students with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, the current study describes the main roles of Saudi IEP team members, including SEN teachers, head teachers, psychologists, counsellors and fathers of (male) students with SEN. It should be noted here that this focus on fathers is necessitated by the strictures of Saudi culture and religion, which prohibit mothers from interacting directly with the school staff and therefore with the (male) IEP team, as explained in detail in Chapter 4. It explores the challenges faced by IEP team members in the implementation of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh and endeavours to propose solutions to these challenges. The next section outlines the theoretical framework within which this endeavour has been undertaken.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

1.2.1 Child Development Theories

Human development theories can contribute to a better comprehension of how to work most effectively with students who have special needs. Bijou and Baer (1978: 12) discuss the extent to which psychological developments are 'progressive changes in interactions between the behaviour of individuals and the events in their environment'. As a child's development is based upon his or her experiences and interactions with the environment, it can be argued that the development of an individual with special needs must be shaped in part by his or her interactions with societal factors. As a result, in order to appropriately and practically care for students with special needs, certain

psychological factors and developments must be examined, identified and analysed further.

In order to best assist the development of students with special needs, their psychological needs must be considered by examining how psychological factors can affect these students. Psychology, according to Schmidt (1973), is the most critical factor to take into account in the provision of educational facilities and services. He also argues that the psychological requirements of students with special needs are integral to the overall development process (ibid). Many human development theories posit the importance of interactions between nature and nurture. Rogers (2001) lists these child development theories as stressing the importance of nature, the influence of nurture or the interplay between them. One which falls into this third category is the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979), who primarily considers child development in terms of a nested set of environments and their qualitative effects. Ahuja (2006) explains the context of this theory thus:

‘As a child develops, the interaction within these environments becomes more complex. This complexity can arise as the child’s physical and cognitive structures grow and mature. So, given that nature continues on a given path, how does the world that surrounds the child help or hinder continued development?’ (2006: 3).

The following subsection explains the application of ecological systems theory to the development of SEN students and hence to the present study.

1.2.2 Ecological systems theory

The needs of students with disabilities should be taken into account when designing the special education services that they require (Kupper, 2000). In response, there are several important approaches involved in improving services for students with SEN. Recommendations for best practice frequently encompass a number of complicated skills that involve the teacher and other service providers in the field (Anderson and Chiasson, 2012). Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is a crucial framework for understanding students with special needs (Al-Rubiyea, 2010). According to Richardson (2008), ecological models can be sensitive to contextual influences such as environment, family arrangements and residential settings. The

application of ecological systems theory to special education is particularly helpful because ‘the situation is complicated by the need to clarify the complex relationships among diversity, deficit and disability and the need to see how all the pieces fit together’ (Anderson and Chiasson, 2012: 2). Dogaru (2008) asserts that the ecological model is necessary, as it allows for a better understanding of a specific phenomenon.

The present researcher’s choice of Bronfenbrenner’s theory was informed by its focus on describing the circumstances and context in which an individual develops throughout life (Lang, 2004). Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that child development does not take place in a vacuum, but is shaped significantly by external factors such as children’s family life, education, the community to which they belong and the society in which they are brought up. Thus, these dynamic and multifaceted settings in which child development occurs are vital for understanding the specifics of this development (Lang, 2004). A number of authors have promulgated the notion that an individual’s various environments, together with the interactions between these and the individual, are of substantial importance in terms of child development (Bridge, Judd and Mook, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1970, 1977, 1979, 1989).

It is apparent that ecological theories provide a concept of human development that posits this development in the context of people’s interaction with their environment (Arditti, 2005). According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), such understanding of human development represents an attempt to investigate scientifically the complex and dynamic factors that affect both the individual and his or her environment and which stem from their mutual interaction.

The current study draws on ecological systems theory in its attempts to identify specific barriers to IEP implementation for students with intellectual disabilities in Saudi Arabia and to propose solutions to these challenges, in the context of the stipulations of the RSEIP document. Ecological systems theory supports the research by informing and guiding the data collection and analysis. Further details of Bronfenbrenner’s approach to the ecology of human development are given in Chapter 3 (section 3.6.2).

1.3 Research Aims and Rationale

This study seeks to explore extensively the strengths of IEP policy in Saudi Arabia and obstacles to its implementation, in order to contribute to the effectiveness of educational policy and practice in that country. In order to achieve this aim, the investigation seeks to:

- To investigate the experiences and perspectives of key agents (teachers, head teachers, psychologists, counsellors and fathers) regarding their roles and duties in developing and implementing IEPs designed for students with intellectual disabilities at mainstream schools;
- To explore key agents perspectives on the effectiveness of existing practice and key challenges faced;
- To explore the findings through the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

This study explores the respective roles of the various team members in the implementation of IEPs, specifically for intellectually disabled students at mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. It explores the reflections of team members on IEP practice and what they see as barriers to it, and then endeavours to generate some possible solutions. The main reason for setting the study in Riyadh is that this is where the policy of mainstreaming for students with ID was first implemented in the Kingdom.

1.4 Research Questions

This research was informed by the following three salient questions, which have emerged from gaps in the literature in the Saudi context and are rooted in the experience of practitioners within the field:

1. How do the following IEP team members describe their roles and duties as regards the implementation of the plans for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh?

- Teachers
- Fathers
- Head teachers
- Psychologists
- Counsellors

2. What do the following team members consider to be the barriers to implementing IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities within mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh?

- Teachers
- Fathers
- Head teachers
- Psychologists
- Counsellors

3. What do the following IEP team members consider to be possible and reasonable solutions to overcome barriers to implementing IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh?

- Teachers
- Fathers
- Head teachers
- Psychologists
- Counsellors

1.5 Significance of the Study

A qualitative approach has been chosen for this study of current IEP practice in Saudi Arabian schools. This interpretivist paradigm has been used to great effect by other researchers studying the real impact of legislation in education, according to Al-Jadidi (2012: 95), who argues that qualitative research is 'more appropriate to personal and social reality'. Creswell (1998: 15) describes the qualitative approach as

‘...an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting’.

This study is significant for the fact that qualitative studies of mainstream schools are exceedingly rare in the Saudi context, even in the capital city of Riyadh. Gaining access to those working in schools with students with SEN has enabled an exploration of the IEPs in terms of constraints and solutions as perceived by Saudi IEP team members, relayed through in-depth discussion of their experience. As this study is the first qualitative study of special education needs and IEPs to be conducted in Saudi Arabia, its outcomes may be used to inform future research into related lines of enquiry. A review of the literature shows that the majority of existing research on IEPs in Saudi Arabia has been quantitative, relying heavily on the use of descriptive statistics. The findings of such studies suggest that teachers of the intellectually disabled and educational supervisors at the MoE believe that neither mainstreaming nor special education schools in Saudi Arabia are fully committed to implementing IEPs (Al-Khashrami, 2001). This is seen as a failure to translate legislation and policy into practice in schools. This study uses qualitative data to enrich these existing findings, by examining in depth the perceptions of IEP team members on the practice of IEP implementation and challenges to its success.

In one earlier quantitative study, Abdullah (2003) investigated significant issues regarding the provision of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities in the south of Saudi Arabia. He reports that identification of the potential educational support needs of such students, formal evaluation of the child and the achievement goals in the IEP were usually carried out, at both special and mainstream schools, by teachers of students with intellectual disabilities, without the effective involvement and collaboration of the parents and other school professionals. This complex web of interactions will be investigated in this study through the use of the ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

It should be pointed out that IEPs and barriers to their implementation have been more comprehensively studied in the developed world than in less developed countries, due to factors that include greater funding and the greater importance given to policies for

children with special needs (Al-Wabli, 2000). Nevertheless, barriers in both mainstream and special schools, as determined by special education teachers in Saudi Arabia, have been investigated by Hanafi (2005) and Al-Herz (2008). Hanafi (2005) found that teachers of hearing impaired students faced specific difficulties in the implementation of IEPs, compounded by a lack of diversity in the IEP teams for deaf students. However, his study did not examine IEP team members' roles and duties regarding the implementation of the plans for students with ID. Therefore, this study investigates the perspectives of IEP team members regarding their primary roles and duties with regards to IEP implementation. According to Al-Herz (2008), who evaluated the achievement of aims of the IEP in special education and mainstream schools in Riyadh, teachers of students with intellectual disabilities had a wide range of views on IEP strategies and their implementation. However, her study did not involve any empirical exploration of the individual roles of special education teachers in implementing IEPs, nor did it examine the perceptions of IEP team members regarding key challenges and solutions. Crucially, none of these studies set in Saudi Arabia has investigated IEP practice with regard to the implementation of the RSEIP policy document. Indeed, contrary to the stipulations of the RSEIP, these studies have reinforced the idea that the teacher has the key (or sole) responsibility for IEP implementation in mainstream schools.

Because of the existing predominance of Western-based studies in the IEP field, the results of the present research will contribute to the literature by broadening its base, taking into account the sensitive issue of attempting to relate experience, policy and research findings from developed countries to very different geographical and cultural contexts. It is hoped that the findings of this academic endeavour will raise knowledge and increase understanding of the roles and tasks of IEP team members in the Saudi context. As noted above, qualitative research into any aspect of education set in Saudi Arabia is relatively rare, which highlights the value of conducting such research in this region. Indeed, given the relative paucity of studies conducted in Arab-Islamic contexts (Al-Jadidi, 2012), this research may therefore provide a major contribution to this field. Furthermore, it aims to increase the global knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting the application of IEPs and the broader topic of mainstreaming schools. It will also necessarily contribute to the ongoing debate about SEN, ID and IEPs. At a national level, it is hoped that the findings of this research will be useful in helping Saudi educational policymakers to develop more formal and binding guidelines to support

better IEP practice in Saudi Arabia. It is further hoped that its findings will help all concerned in mainstream schools (parents, teachers, specialists and professionals) to gain more knowledge of how their individual roles can contribute to a better IEP process and improved educational outcomes.

In short, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on IEP implementation, to inform the work of Saudi educational policymakers and to suggest ways to improve participation by individual IEP team members in implementing IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities.

1.6 Personal Reflections

This section reflects on my personal interest in special education and learning, which began when I discovered that my brother-in-law had an intellectual disability. This interest led me to join the Department of Special Education Needs at King Saud University in Riyadh as a student teacher and then as a lecturer, where I was introduced to the fundamental aspects of special education needs learning and teaching methods. Five years after graduation, I obtained a master's degree in Special Education.

During my professional career at King Saud University, I taught a number of practical modules in the Special Education Department on how to educate students with intellectual disabilities, including one entitled Methods of Teaching Students with Intellectual Disabilities, which student teachers took in the fourth year of their bachelor's degree. The module was mandatory, to ensure that the student teachers gained practical training in the teaching of students with ID at mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia. The training period lasted for almost a full term. At the fieldwork stage, I would require each student teacher to collaborate with the class teacher to implement an IEP for each student with a disability. This responsibility for SEN training was part of my job description, in addition to my being responsible as a lecturer for this module.

During the initial visit to observe each student teacher, I would write comments about the use of the IEP. During subsequent visits, I would continue to assess the performance of each student teacher in its use. At the end of the fieldwork assignment, I would ask each of them to deliver an IEP with a report on the plan adopted for the student. This

report included information on how the school administration staff would interact with student teachers to develop the IEP, and on the perceived strengths and challenges of using such an IEP. At that time, on the basis of the student teachers' reports, supplemented by my own experience as a teacher in mainstream schools in Riyadh, I sensed that the IEPs were not being appropriately developed in accordance with the RSEIP document.

Drawing on my experience of mainstream schools, one of the most notable difficulties facing people working in special education and particularly the education of intellectually disabled students appears to be a lack of academic knowledge about the implementation of IEPs, potentially leading to less efficient educational outcomes. There is some evidence to suggest that this difficulty is exacerbated by a lack of commitment to the stipulations of relevant education policy in Saudi Arabia (Al-Wabli, 2000). There was also evidence to support my view that many schools in Saudi Arabia misapply IEPs (Al-Khashrami, 2001). Al-Herz (2008) supports this assertion through the identification of a number of barriers to the application of IEPs, such as the failure to operate multidisciplinary teams.

According to Al-Otaibi (2012), teachers of intellectually disabled students play a key role in the preparation and implementation of IEPs in mainstream schools. From my perspective, the failure to introduce an IEP team approach will probably hinder the development of a more inclusive approach to education in Saudi Arabia, as is the case for other developed countries, since what is currently implemented in Saudi schools is only partial inclusion (mainstreaming programmes). However, with a recent trend towards mainstreaming programmes in Saudi Arabia, IEP implementation is gaining increasing momentum and a higher profile (Hanafi, 2005). This issue will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

I became increasingly keen to investigate obstacles to IEP implementation in Saudi Arabia in relation to the issuance of the RSEIP policy in 2002. Consequently, a core aim of the present study is to provide concerned parties in the educational field with more comprehensive information about these obstacles, as well as to provide ideas for preparing tools and mechanisms to overcome them.

1.7 Overview of the Study

This introductory chapter has outlined the key themes of this study. It has sketched the background to the research, stated the study problem, the conceptual framework of the study, and its rationale and the research questions. The significance of the study has been explained and a description given of the contribution that it makes to knowledge within this discipline. It has also alluded to the challenges facing the application of IEPs pertinent to the Saudi context. The next chapter discusses in detail the context and background to the study, and then Chapter 3 reviews the relevant literature and establishes the theoretical framework. Chapter 4 ends the first part of the thesis by considering in detail the research methodology that was followed in gathering qualitative data from IEP team members in a series of face-to-face (semi-structured) interviews and documentary data.

The second part of the thesis presents and discusses the empirical findings. Chapter 5 considers interviewees' views of their roles and duties in IEP preparation and implementation, Chapter 6 turns to their perceptions regarding barriers to successful IEP implementation. Chapter 6 also presents and analyses the interview data regarding potential solutions to these problems. Chapter 7 highlights the findings presented in Chapter 6 using the model of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Chapter 8 completes the thesis by summarising the research, setting out its contributions to theory and practice, and providing a comprehensive model for the improvement of IEPs in the Saudi context, which was based on the findings of this research. In addition, Chapter 8 offers a set of recommendations for the more effective implementation of the RSEIP policy on IEPs and makes some suggestions for future research and concludes with a reflexive account of the researcher's experience in conducting this investigation.

Chapter Two

Setting of the Study:

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Chapter Two

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2.0 Introduction

This chapter establishes the context of the study by providing relevant information on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), where the fieldwork was conducted. One of the key functions of this overview is to underline the distinctive features of the education system in Saudi Arabia, particularly its thorough compliance with Islamic religious and cultural customs, which are seen to affect both the conduct of this research and the way IEPs are implemented for students with ID. To this end, an outline is provided of the geography, population, culture and religion of the KSA, after which a brief historical account is given of the educational system, with special reference to SEN. Next, there is a discussion of disability policies in the Kingdom, followed by details of the RSEIP document. The two subsequent sections deal with IEPs, first from a global perspective and then IEPs in Saudi Arabia. After an explanation of the roles of IEP team members in mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia, the chapter concludes with a summary.

2.1 Location and Population

Saudi Arabia encompasses most of the Arabian Peninsula, bordered by Iraq, Jordan and Kuwait in the north, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and the Arabian Gulf in the east, Oman and Yemen in the south and the Red Sea in the west. The KSA thus occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of the Asian, African and European continents. It is roughly 2,000,000 square kilometres, making it the largest country in the region. It is also the native land of Islam and the home of its two most holy sites, namely Makkah and Madinah (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2011).

The 1974 census reports the population of the KSA as a little above 7 million; since then, however, the country has seen significant growth, which can be ascribed more to the remarkably high birth rate among Saudis than to the influx of immigrants, although this has also been considerable. By 1992, the total population had more than doubled, to 16.9 million, of whom 12.3 million were Saudis and almost 4 million non-Saudi nationals. Twelve years later, the equivalent figures were 23 million and 5.4 million respectively (Long, 2005). Unsurprisingly, given its rapid expansion, the Saudi

population is young: the 2004 census showed that among Saudi citizens, those under 15 years old (49.23%) outnumbered those in the 15-64 age group (47.50%) (Ministry of Economy and Planning [MoEP], 2012).

2.2 Culture and Religion

The KSA is one of the key countries in the Middle East for two main reasons: its very large reserves of oil, and its position of leadership in the Islamic world. The Saudi government's policies are based upon Islamic law (Sharia), which constitutes a whole system that governs all aspects of the Saudi peoples' lives including, but not limited to the topics of life, dignity and education (World Factbook, 2012).

Arabic is the official language and is widely used in government communications, education and other official domains, including the mass media. Constitutionally, the Kingdom is a monarchy whose executive and administrative bodies, the government and the Council of Ministers respectively, are headed by the King. However, the constitution draws extensively on the sources of Sharia Law, principally the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah (Al-Ghamdi and Abd-Jawad, 2008), and the culture of Saudi Arabia is largely dependent on Islam. Throughout the country, all aspects of social and cultural life are focused on Islam and how Muslims should act. For the Saudi community, religious values come first and extend from personal relations to family, tribal and social values, all of which are interlinked in a complex network of obligations specified in the Qur'an. Indeed, the Islamic religion highlights all features of peoples' lives and places particular emphasis on education, which is regarded as being a religious obligation for all males and females. Thus, whilst the Saudi education system is based upon gender division, with separate schools for boys and girls, under Sharia law this is not seen as an issue of inequality, as explained by Oyaid (2009: 17):

'Islam dictates that learning is an obligation for every Muslim, man or woman. This obligation, which gives education the status of a religious duty, is the cornerstone of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is the foundation upon which the state builds its educational responsibilities, and in light of which the citizen performs duties towards himself, his community, and his religion. The roots of education in Saudi Arabia, therefore, go deep into the Islamic education which started in the mosques and led to the establishment of schools and universities around their pillars'.

It is also important to note that religious beliefs and the Islamic code of conduct permeate every aspect of education. It is therefore not possible to discuss educational matters in the context of Saudi Arabia without considering religion. Also significant to understanding the place of IEPs for students with ID is that Islam ranks education very highly for all people, including those with SEN. In fact, religion and education are viewed as inseparable. Thus, the aims of education in Saudi Arabia and the reverence shown to those working in the field originate from the teachings of religion, while the rationale for separating males and females has its roots in Sharia, the aim being to prevent temptation and sin (Al-Aqeel, 2005). Accordingly, education has a strict policy against mixing boys and girls at all stages, whether in terms of school buildings or in terms of members of the teaching staff.

2.3 The Saudi Education System

This section offers a broad overview of the historical development and present structure of general education in Saudi Arabia, while the next focuses on the special education sector.

2.3.1 Historical Overview

As noted above, one of the major teachings of Islam is to encourage learning. The Holy Qur'an itself places great emphasis on education and the pursuit of knowledge. Reciprocally, Saudi education focuses on the study, memorisation and understanding of the Qur'an and on the Islamic heritage based on the teachings or Sunnah of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) 14 centuries ago (Al-Sunbol et al., 2008). Also central to education in the Kingdom are the narratives of Prophet Mohammed's companions and early followers. In this, the mosque has played a pivotal role in educational development and expansion, as it was and is still viewed not only as a place of religious practice, but also as a provider of religious education.

State-funded education started officially in 1924 with the establishment of an Education Directorate, which undertook to build schools and employ teachers from outside the Kingdom, especially from Egypt (Kabli, 1999). The creation of the Education Directorate was viewed as a crucial step in educating students about Islamic beliefs, practices and socio-cultural morals (Al-Baadi, 1994). In 1935, the Directorate published

the first ever curriculum for primary education to be adopted nationally. With the increasing demand for education, it was deemed necessary in 1953 to upgrade the Directorate, which became the Ministry of Education. By then, there were as many as 306 modern schools in Saudi Arabia, with 39,920 students and 1472 teachers (MoE, 1985). The creation of the Ministry ensured the onset of a new phase of quantitative and qualitative growth in education, stimulated partly by growing concern over widespread illiteracy; in 1950, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) estimated that 92% to 95% of people in Saudi Arabia were unable to read (Al-Salloom, 1995). The role of the MoE in the early years thus involved initiating and supervising an education programme with a strong emphasis on primary education and vocational training. At the end of the 1950s, the programme was extended to include secondary education, while District Education Offices were established to monitor and manage education locally.

Due to the conventional view endorsed by some religious authorities, it was not until 1960 that females began to receive a formal education. During that time, the government acknowledged that the desired economic, social and cultural growth of the Kingdom could be achieved only with the contribution of educated women. Nevertheless, to alleviate the apprehensions of the religious organisations, schools for females were kept under their supervision, ensuring that segregation would be maintained. In recent years, women have benefited from the opportunities availed by the development of the KSA, especially in the field of education. According to Al-Jadidi (2012), women in modern Saudi society play a pivotal role in teaching. The Saudi government seeks to promote equality of opportunity between males and females through an ambitious education policy largely based on major reforms to bridge the gender gap.

The 1970s witnessed a period of rapid growth in the number of schools and students, in keeping with the government policy of enhancing the human resources required for a wide-ranging economic expansion. By the end of the century, there were more than 17,500 educational institutions in the Kingdom (Al-Rasheed, 1996). As a result, the percentage of illiterate people was estimated in 1997 to have dropped to as low as 14.78% for the male population and 25% amongst women, while the Deputy Minister of Education asserted that there were no illiterate students left in the Kingdom (MoE,

1997). However, some critics (Al-Sayed, 2002) have doubted the truthfulness of these figures, as no official in-depth survey has been carried out by the MoE.

Indeed, despite the striking quantitative success of the expansion of education provision in Saudi Arabia, some scholars have alluded to a number of consequent challenges to the quality of that provision. Quality issues include a shortage of qualified teachers, slow reform from conventional syllabi and teaching methods to contemporary ones, poor supervision and a lack of well-developed teaching programmes (Al-Thubaiti, 1989). Over the last few decades, however, with the quantitative expansion almost complete, there has been increased interest in qualitative developments such as the upgrading of curricula and teaching methods. As to special education, several service delivery patterns have been established in Saudi Arabia to provide additional support services to meet the various needs of students with SEN, such as residential schools, day schools and resource room programmes. The implementation of the relatively new mainstreaming concept ensures the integration of students with SEN in public education (Al-Mousa, 2010).

2.3.2 Educational Structure

A number of distinctive features characterise the education system in Saudi Arabia, including a focus on Islamic teachings, a highly centralised education system, gender segregation in schools and universities, and financial help from the Saudi government (Al-Hano, 2006). The duties of the MoE include maintaining an overview of educational policy, establishing procedures that educational authorities and schools (both public and private) must follow in accordance with the national (Islamic) constitution, and taking informed policy decisions to reflect the general aims and principles declared by the Higher Committee for Education Policy, chaired by the King. The MoE (1996) states that educational policymaking and provision in the Kingdom seeks to take into consideration the physical and psychological features of students during the various phases of their progress.

Girls' education was originally administered separately, by the General Presidency for Girls' Education (GPGE). However, in 2003 the MoE was given responsibility for the management of all female-only educational institutions and colleges, in addition to

direct control over nurseries, kindergartens and literacy programmes for girls. Also overseen by the MoE are special and mainstream schools for both male and female students with SEN (Al-Mousa, 2007). Since learners have to be gender segregated in compliance with Saudi religious and cultural beliefs, old resources and course books had to be revisited according to the gender of the students. Nevertheless, the recently reviewed course books are utilised to teach both males and females, although students and teachers continue to be segregated by gender so that only male teachers work in boys' schools.

Education in Saudi Arabia is offered free of charge to both Saudi and non-Saudi nationals in all state-owned pre-university educational establishments. There are six main levels of public education: kindergarten, elementary or primary, intermediate, secondary, university and postgraduate. When children reach the age of six, it is obligatory for them to join school by registering for the first grade of the elementary level. Once the elementary and intermediate levels are completed at 12 years of age, students usually move on to secondary school, where they opt for either the arts or sciences pathways. The former is based on social science, psychology, geography and history modules, the latter on mathematics, physics, geology and biology.

The tasks of curriculum planning, design and development are entrusted to the Directorate for Curriculum Development within the MoE. A number of wide-ranging term and annual exams serve as the major determinant of students' progression through the levels of education. Once the third stage of secondary school is successfully completed, students are awarded the General Secondary Education Certificate in either arts or sciences, entitling them to progress to higher education and choose an appropriate institution according to their grades.

With a similar structure to the state school system, private (non-governmental) education also has six major stages. Private schools, which may be entitled to some financial contribution from the government, follow the same curriculum as public (state-funded) schools, by arrangement with the MoE, but also provide extracurricular classes. There are also some foreign international schools, whose main purpose is to educate the children of foreign nationals such as diplomats. The MoE does not supervise this type of school, in which English is the prevailing language. Nonetheless,

they must still adhere to all of the MoE's standards and regulations (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in the USA, 1991).

It should be noted that the MoE has made its intentions clear in terms of providing equal access to basic education for all the Kingdom's citizens, as a minimum requirement, while taking into account the improvement of educational quality in its overall objectives and approaches to national education policies. The next section examines the provision of special education in this context.

2.4 The Development of Special Education in Saudi Arabia

2.4.1 Historical Background

Prior to 1952, the Saudi education system did not provide for students with disabilities, whose parents had the responsibility of teaching them (Ajmi, 2006). Special education in the KSA can be said to have begun in 1958, when a Saudi citizen who had learnt the Braille system in Iraq assumed the individual responsibility of teaching a group of fellow students with visual impairments to read and write using this method in Riyadh. Thus, visually impaired men started to learn using Braille during evening classes held in public schools (Al-Salloom, 1995; Al-Mousa, 1999). Al-Sunbol (1998: 394-395) reports that 'a major turning point' came in 1960, when the MoE established the Al-Noor Institute in Riyadh, 'providing education for 40 blind (visually impaired) male students' and leading to 'immediate growth and interest, as well as a rapid development involving all categories of students with disabilities'.

A year later, King Saud visited the Al-Noor Institute and donated a permanent headquarters, while the MoE provided financial support and special equipment (MoE, 1996). In 1962, the Department of Special Education was founded for the purpose of extending the provision of educational, professional and social services for three categories of disabled students, namely the visually and hearing impaired, and the intellectually disabled (Al-Mousa, 1999). This was followed between 1962 and 1971 by the establishment of institutes for boys and girls in the cities of Riyadh, Makkah, Al-Madinah and Jeddah.

In 1972, the Department of Special Education became the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE), with separate departments for each of the abovementioned three categories of disability (MoE, 1996). In 1984, the DGSE gained two new departments, for planning and for the preparation and printing of textbooks for students with disabilities. The tasks assigned to the Directorate included the development of the necessary plans and programmes not only to serve those with visual and hearing impairments or intellectual disabilities, but also to continue efforts to provide specialised human resources to provide education for a wider range of special needs such as giftedness and talents, health impairment, multiple disabilities and autism (Al-Mousa, 2007).

There are two distinct special education programmes for boys and girls, under the supervision of the MoE and the GPGE respectively. In 1992, Ministerial Order No 131 transferred the terms of reference for special education institutes for girls to the GPGE, whose structure comprises a number of internal departments and divisions similar to those within the DGSE (Al-Mousa, 2007). Also in 1992, the Educational Supervision Office of Special Education for Girls was also joined with the DGSE after the GPGE was merged with the Ministry of Education (MoE, 1995).

The introduction of a modern education system was intended to offer all Saudi citizens, including students with SEN, the minimum basic education required for their development, in accordance with Islamic teachings. Thus, Article 56 of the EPKSA states that special education should be offered ‘to students with physical or mental disabilities’ (MoE, 1995: 14). Following the initial attempts to develop special education services, growth in their provision was achieved by regulating the sector through legislation and regulations that ensured that the rights of people with special needs were met. This raised the quality of additional supporting services and the availability of educated professionals to deliver them. In 1996, the notion of Learning Disabilities (LD) was also formally introduced into the educational system of Saudi Arabia. Al-Hano (2006: 2) defines LD as:

‘Disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken and written language ... manifested in disorders in listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing spelling or arithmetic and ... not due to factors related to mental retardation, visual or hearing impairments or educational, social and familial factors’.

This built on developments in the early 1990s, when the Special Education Department at King Saud University introduced a teacher training package which provided a number of courses culminating in a bachelor’s degree in LD (Al-Hano, 2006). The substantial increase in the number of special education institutions and of enrolled students resulted in the majority of students with special needs in the country being in receipt of segregated schooling (Al-Khashrami, 1995).

UNESCO (1995; cited by Matawi, 2003) commended the status of special education in Saudi Arabia at that time, noting the following:

- Official policies governing the domain of special education focused on the significance of integrating students with SEN together with other students and promoting their role in society.
- The increased involvement of the Kingdom in providing care for special categories, as evidenced by official MoE statistics, indicated an increase in the number of students assigned to these categories.
- Policymakers were promoting the development of staff skills in all categories of special education, particularly with regard to their responses to the needs of students with SEN in public schools.

An analysis of the origins and evolution of special education in Saudi Arabia reveals a number of stages through which it has passed. The first was characterised by individual efforts, followed by a phase during which state-run special schools were established for students with visual and hearing impairments and those who were intellectually disabled. As for the final phase, this is concerned with diversifying the models of special education services provided for students with SEN; for example, expanding the application of mainstreaming programmes (explained and defined in section 2.4.2) as a central strategy (Al-Mousa, 2010). In an earlier study, Al-Mousa (2005) noted that the main reason to develop special education in Saudi Arabia was to provide students with

SEN with further attention and cares in order to overcome their problems and to help them become contributing members of the community. This resulted in the number of institutes and mainstreaming programmes rising from 47 in 1991 to 3,928 in 2013, while the number of students rose from 39,030 to 56,476, with a much less uneven gender balance, as Table 2.1 shows (MoE, 2013). Table 2.2 illustrates the distribution of students by category of special need for the academic year 2013.

Table 2.1: Distribution of male and female students in special education and mainstreaming in the school years 1991, 2013

	1991		2013	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Number of institutes/ programmes	31	16	2855	1073
Number of students	36,949	2081	39,745	16,731

Source: MoE (2013)

Table 2.2: Distribution of special education, mainstreaming and students in different categories 2013

Benefitting category	Number of institutes and programmes	Number of students
Hearing impaired		
a) deaf	12	501
b) hard of hearing	125	2,426
c) multi-impaired	240	1,732
Visually impaired		
a) blind	170	1,042
b) multi-impaired	13	51
Intellectual disabilities		
a) mild	746	13,657
b) multi-impaired	27	324
Autism	70	725
Learning difficulties	1,617	17,842
Total	2,847	38,300

Source: MoE (2013)

Importantly, the large increase in the number of students with SEN cannot be ascribed to increased rates of disability in Saudi Arabia, but to the expansion in the provision of additional support services to include categories that had not previously been in receipt

of such services (including gifted and talented, multi-disabled and physically disabled students) and to developing practice in identifying additional needs (Al-Mousa, 2007). The number of students receiving special education services in mainstream schools now greatly exceeds the number receiving those services in special education institutes and programmes: 93% boys and 73% of girls receiving special education were in mainstream schools in 2007 (Al-Mousa, 2010). It should be noted that as the numbers of male students benefiting from additional support services rise, more female students also benefit from them. Table 2.1 nonetheless reveals that more than twice as many males as females were receiving such services in 2013, a discrepancy which can be explained by two important factors. First, the prevalence of disability appears to be greater among male than female students. Secondly, there are more mainstream schools, mostly public, providing education for male students than for female students (ibid).

The improvements noted above appear to reflect laudable efforts by those working in the educational field in Saudi Arabia and the positive influence of culture, in terms of the care given to students with SEN and the additional support services provided. These efforts are also apparent in the provision of facilities intended to raise the level of special education in the Kingdom and to ensure that students with SEN obtain free and appropriate education in the same way as their peers. There have nevertheless been some criticisms, such as that reported by Al-Fahili (2009): the recent spread of special education programmes to remote rural areas, where there may be very few students with special needs, has been seen as wasteful, given the limited number of suitably qualified teachers. Another criticism, apparently made by top officials in the MoE (Al-Mousa, 2007), is that the expansion of special education has come at the expense of general education. These difficulties also seem to apply to developed countries. In the USA, McCurry (2007) reports growing concerns about the consequences of successful inclusion to rural areas, including lack of resources, limited training for teachers and lack of state-regulated childcare facilities, all of which are likely to impact on the quality of special education services. In the UK, Hodkinson (2008; cited in Aldaihani, 2010), found that one major barrier to inclusion in schools was the inadequate training of SEN teachers. Therefore, Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009; cited in Aldaihani, 2010) assert that it is of vital importance that student teachers receive formal training in higher education institutions in order to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching in heterogeneous classrooms.

In Saudi Arabia, the MoE responded with a number of recommendations, including the importance of training professionals and teachers in schools and closely monitoring the course content for trainee special education teachers, such as information and training skills (Al-Kahtani, 2008). He also makes a number of recommendations of his own for involving students with special needs in certain educational programmes and activities to facilitate their integration in the community without having to integrate them within the classroom. These include providing opportunities for students with SEN to be active members of society, guaranteeing them the right to work independently, move freely and enjoy all services generally available in the community and improve the role of the media in promoting the rights of students with SEN. Other recommendations were to revive the use of existing institutions for students with intellectual disabilities, given the inappropriateness of including some autistic students and those with multiple disabilities in special programmes attached to mainstream schools. The educational needs of such students should instead be met by existing special institutions for intellectually disabled students in those cities where places were available in those institutes. In fact, it appears that these suggestions have not been fully implemented on the ground. For example, in the school year 2008, the participation of many mainstream schools was cancelled while others were included. This led the families of a large number of SEN students to demand the resumption of inclusion in mainstream schools where it was previously practised and the provision of special education services near the students' places of residence, regardless of the human and material costs. This indicates that further research is necessary to establish the extent to which the recommendations remain to be implemented, which justifies the current study's in-depth examination of the views of parents and professionals at the school level.

2.4.2 Mainstreaming in Saudi Arabia

In recent years, the MoE, represented by the DGSE, has sought to promote the term 'mainstreaming' in order to raise the profile of services provided to special groups in Saudi Arabia, despite the country having a relative lack of experience in this field (Al-Mousa, 2010). Therefore, the term is used in the present study to refer to special education programmes delivered to SEN students in mainstream schools. The main rationale for choosing to include mainstream schools in this research is that integration for students with SEN is still at an early stage of development in Saudi Arabia. These

new mainstreaming practices indicate that mainstream schools are still at the primary phase in this respect. The current research therefore assesses progress towards the goal of mainstreaming students with SEN within general education schools in Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that several definitions of mainstreaming have been offered over the last few years. According to Kauffman, Gottlieb, Agrad, and Kukic (1975, as cited in Al-Mousa, 2010:17):

‘Mainstreaming refers to the temporal, instructional, and social integration of eligible exceptional students with normal peers based on an ongoing, individually determined, educational planning and programming process, and requires clarification of responsibility among regular and special education, administrative, instructional and supportive personnel’.

The mainstreaming schools in the Saudi context take two distinct forms: full and partial. Al-Mousa (2010: 26) explains that partial mainstreaming is ‘accomplished through the establishment of self-contained classes in regular schools’. Thus, students with special needs are able to receive the special education they require, while having the opportunity to interact with non-SEN students in both classroom and extracurricular activities. These classes can be subdivided into two types: (a) independent classes which implement the curriculum related to special education institutions, intended for students who are blind, have autism, or have multiple disabilities or mild intellectual disabilities; and (b) classes for SEN students that implement the public school curriculum (Shahrani, 2006). The alternative, full mainstreaming, involves establishing support programmes pertaining to special education in mainstream schools. For example, these programmes include teacher consulting and peripatetic teacher programmes (ibid). Here, students with SEN are educated alongside their non-disabled peers in mainstream schools for the majority of the school day and follow the public school curriculum.

Al-Mousa (2010) adds that it is widely accepted that mainstreaming is effective at a number of levels: educational, social, economic and psychological. It can be distinguished from inclusion by citing the definition of inclusive education by Florian (2012: 278): ‘inclusive education was presented as an accommodation of individual differences within the structures and processes that are available to all learners’. The present study prefers the term ‘mainstreaming’ to refer to special education programmes in Saudi public schools, because the programmes in place are still at the stage of partial mainstreaming.

One advantage of mainstreaming is that students with SEN are able to attend a school close to home, allowing them to live with their parents and to maintain a stable life within their community of origin (Al-Mousa, 1992). The mainstream learning environment also allows these students to maintain contact with their peers, who may be more accepting of them and involve them in the classroom activities.

The first major project in the KSA to include students with SEN in the learning process, in an attempt to accomplish the goals of mainstreaming in secondary high schools, took place in 1984 at the Al-Noor Institute for blind individuals in Hafuuf (Al-Mousa, 2010). Other successful applications of this initiative were also reported in other secondary schools throughout the KSA (Aldakhiil, 2006). In 1985, the DGSE conducted a survey of views regarding the application of mainstreaming in government schools. Students and teachers at Al-Noor Institutes and other public schools across the KSA were asked to fill out a questionnaire about how mainstreaming was being implemented, with the result that both students and teachers agreed with this method of teaching. The mainstreaming method was therefore adopted by the DGSE in 1990 to be implemented for students with and without visual impairments at all levels of secondary education (ibid).

In 1996, the MoE concluded that 20% of students in public schools were in need of additional support services. The awareness of this need, in the light of international norms, convinced policymakers of the value of providing such services for students with SEN, leading to a qualitative leap forward in the educational process. The DGSE therefore instituted training programmes that aimed to increase the motivation and involvement of public school staff in educating students with SEN (Al-Khashrami, 2003). Since then, the mainstreaming of students with SEN has increased, as indicated by Tables 2.1 and 2.2 above.

By 2000, according to Al-Mousa (2000), a majority of all students with SEN were integrated into mainstream schools. In addition, educational services became available to a progressively wider range of SEN students, including those with autism, motor or multiple physical disabilities, hearing impairments and learning disabilities (Al-Mousa, 2007). Faiz (1996) states that mainstreaming programmes for hearing impaired students

were adopted in several public schools in the northern province of Sakaaka, while 12 mainstreaming programmes were launched in 1996 throughout the country.

For students with intellectual disabilities, the implementation of mainstreaming schools began in 1990 in the northern city of Al-Jouf and was then extended to other parts of the country. The first programme of mainstreaming for such students took place in Riyadh in 1998, followed by a large increase in programmes adopting this process; in 2006 it reached 465 programmes in boys' schools and 52 in girls' schools in Riyadh city (NCSE, 2006). Amongst the major influences on the expansion of the mainstreaming strategy in the KSA are the official policies, legislation and regulations regarding disabled students (Al-Mousa, 2005). The next section sheds light on these issues.

2.5 Disability Policy in Saudi Arabia

2.5.1 Background to Policies and Legislation

In accordance with Shariah beliefs, the Saudi government takes full responsibility for its people and supports them via social security in certain cases, for example disabilities, emergency events and old age, and also motivates them to be involved in charity (MoE, 2008). In addition, under Islamic law, all individuals must be treated equally, as discrimination on the basis of race, gender or ability is forbidden (Al-Jadid, 2013). The Saudi government therefore guarantees the protection of people with disabilities and prohibits any discrimination against them. People with disabilities are to be seen as human beings with needs and rights to enjoy, be involved in and hold responsibilities within the local community.

Article 26 of the disability legalisation enacted in 1987 states that the government must protect disabled people and ensure that they receive full support and care. The legislation led to the creation of many public organisations working to serve the needs of people with special educational needs and other disabilities, including assessment programmes to identify those eligible for SEN services. For instance, three items under Article 1 tackle the classification of disability, specific educational programmes and rehabilitation (Prince Salman Centre for Disability Research, 2004).

Simultaneously, a major change took place in the KSA in legislation related to special educational needs, which improved the way that students learn inside the classroom (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, n.d.). Of particular relevance to the present study is the issuing in 2002 of the RSEIP policy document (MoE, 2002), intended to develop the educational provision for students with SEN. The next subsection considers the RSEIP in detail.

2.5.2 The RSEIP Policy Document

In order to develop policy regarding students with SEN, the DGSE, through the National Committee for Special Education (NCSE), published the Regulations of Special Education Institutes and Programmes (RSEIP) (MoE, 2002), a manual of regulations whose application was mandatory for both special and mainstreaming schools.

The RSEIP was modelled on policies originating in the USA (Alquraini, 2010). Tanaka (2005) describes such borrowing of policies formulated and implemented in other countries, especially if the cultural contexts are profoundly different, as ‘authoritarian importing/exporting’. This term implies that educational policy is being imposed on a cultural context from which it does not originate, disregarding whether the people affected by this policy are ready or willing to accept it. Therefore, in the context of Saudi Arabia, the policy was later adjusted to better comply with local cultural specifics (Alquraini, 2005). Such a so-called ‘transformation’ of imported policy essentially comprises of amending it according to the assessment of its initial application in the local cultural context. This stage is necessary because policies formulated in the West and applied in the local context are often very static, insofar as they are not able to cope with new developments in the local contexts of the western world which exported them (Tanaka, 2005; Cowen, 2006).

The RSEIP policy document provides information about categories of both male and female disabled people and the required procedures to guide decision-making in determining eligibility for special education services (Al-Mousa, 2005). It sets out in detail the government’s vision for special education policy and practices. Among its aims were to organise the educational process, raise the level of services provided and

enhance the roles of IEP team members, with positive effects on the education of students with SEN. It stipulates that the education of students with SEN should, in common with mainstream education, constitute an integral part of the education system. The strategy stemmed from the MoE's awareness of the extent to which students with SEN in mainstream primary schools needed special education services. It also stemmed from the belief that the outcome of providing such services to the target categories would not be limited to those categories, but would also lead to pervasive qualitative improvements in the education of all students with SEN in Saudi Arabia (ibid).

The education policy in Saudi Arabia already reflected a number of principles associated with the field of special education. In addition, the global trend towards the universal provision of care and education for students with SEN necessitated that those principles be merged with a number of other fundamentals to form the basis of a special education policy, namely:

1. Seeking knowledge is mandatory in Islam upon every Muslim, and the state shall commit to promoting Islam and facilitating its learning during the various stages according to ability (Article 10).
2. The state must care for the educationally disabled and strive to eradicate all root causes of this problem, as well as setting up short and long-term special programmes, according to need (Article 55).
3. The objective of this type of education is to care for the disabled and to instil both Islamic and general values in them, as well as training them in the appropriate life skills, using the educational tools best suited to their abilities (Article 189).
4. The relevant authorities should develop a focused plan in order to promote all aspects of this type of education and to achieve its goals, and should also initiate the regulations required to manage its operation (Article 191).
5. Mainstream schools are the natural environment academically, socially and psychologically for students with special needs (MoE, 2002).

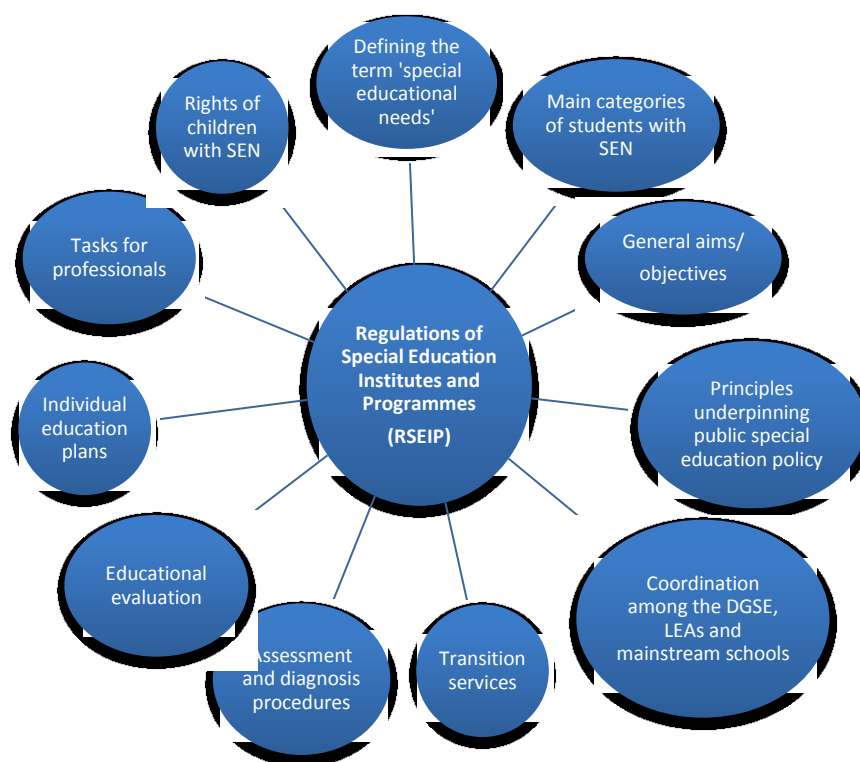
Ibrahim (2003) states that notwithstanding the soundness of these principles and their appropriateness to the expectations and needs of stakeholders in special education programmes, their successful application still requires a great deal of effort, time and physical and human resources, as well as constructive cooperation between all parties.

A central goal of Saudi special education policy at the turn of the century was to ensure that the education of talented students and individuals with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system. The DGSE (2000) therefore developed an educational strategy with the aim of providing additional support services for all students with SEN. This strategy had ten themes:

1. Activating the role of public schools in the field of education for students with SEN
2. Expanding the role of special education schools
3. Developing human resources within special education and mainstream schools
4. Developing curricula, study plans and textbooks within special education institutes and schools
5. Introducing modern technology to serve special categories
6. Developing the organisational structure of the DGSE
7. Reviewing and developing existing regulations and preparing new rules for future mainstreaming programmes
8. Reviving the role of special education in educational departments in Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in Saudi Arabia
9. Motivating the role of scientific research in the field of special education
10. Coordination and cooperation of the policy bodies involved, inside and outside Saudi Arabia.

In recognition of the seventh, the RSEIP document was drawn up in keeping with the fundamental changes that had taken place in the field of special education in Saudi Arabia (Hussein and Salem, 2000: 5-6). Consequently, the RSEIP document asserts the need to provide special education services of good quality on one hand, while allowing the development and preparation of regulations for future mainstreaming programmes in schools in Saudi Arabia on the other (MoE, 2002). Figure 2.1 depicts the framework of the policy document.

Figure 2.1: RSEIP Policy Document Framework



Source: MoE (2002)

The importance of the regulations lies in the organisation of the education process, in upgrading the level of services provided and in determining the responsibilities and tasks to be assigned to employees. In addition, they are essential to creating flexibility in the workplace and to promoting teamwork and a team spirit among members of the multidisciplinary team. The remainder of this section provides an overview of the eleven chapters of the RSEIP document (MoE, 2002).

Chapter 1. ‘Definition of the term special education’ describes a set of programmes, plans and strategies designed specifically to meet the needs of students with SEN. It covers special teaching methods, tools, equipment and aids, as well as special educational services.

Chapter 2. ‘Special education aims’ addresses the upbringing and education of students with SEN in the different special education categories. It refers to the need to train them to acquire the skills appropriate to their abilities and potential in line with plans and

programmes for improving their performance and preparing them for public life and integration into the wider society.

Chapter 3. ‘Principles underpinning special education policy in Saudi public schools’ lists a number of principles associated with the field of special education. It adds that the unprecedented development and expansion of special education has necessitated the addition of a number of other principles that have recently evolved to form a combination of the fundamental premises on which special education is currently based. One of these is the provision of care for intellectually disabled students and seeking to remove all core causes of this problem. This refers to society adapting to meet the needs of students with ID, as well as setting up short and long-term special programmes according to their needs (MoE, 2002: Article 55).

Chapter 4. ‘Special categories’ lists the main types of disability as visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, learning difficulties, talents and giftedness, autism, behavioural and emotional disorders, multiple disabilities, physical and health disabilities and communication disorders. Each of these categories includes an appropriate educational and teaching placement in order to provide special education services. (The current study is concerned with intellectually disabled students, more specifically those with mild intellectual disability, as explained in section 3.2).

Chapter 5. ‘Transitional and Rehabilitation Services’ specifies how to prepare students with SEN to move from one stage or environment to another. These transitional services are identified for each student through IEPs with the people responsible for the plans determining the nature, the method of delivery, duration and the extent to which students can benefit from them, according to Articles 14 and 15 (MoE, 2002). The different types of rehabilitation generally aim to enable students with SEN to live as independently as possible through the appropriate use of a set of medical, social, educational, psychological and professional procedures (ibid: Article 17).

Chapter 6. ‘Administrative and technical organisation of institutes and programmes’ lists the administrative tasks of the head teacher, the school agent and the programme supervisor, as well as the responsibilities of the technical body, whose members include the resident educational supervisor, teachers trained in the provision of special

education services, paraprofessionals and providers of support services, namely speech pathologists, specialist in communication disorders, physical therapists, health supervisors, occupational therapists, counsellors, psychologists and parents.

Chapter 7. ‘Technical, administrative and financial links with the relevant bodies’ covers the relationships of institutes and programmes with the DGSE, with LEAs and with students’ families, specifying their respective duties and responsibilities towards each other.

Chapter 8. ‘Producers of assessment and diagnosis’ stipulate the procedures for the collection of information regarding each child with SEN, which can then be analysed and interpreted to identify the nature of the disability to be dealt with. It specifies a number of objectives for the assessment and diagnosis process, the foundations upon which it is based, the team in charge and the steps comprising the process.

Chapter 9. ‘IEPs’ examines the importance of the IEP process, from initial planning, through implementation and evaluation. These issues are also considered in more detail in sections 2.6 and 2.7.

Chapter 10. ‘Educational evaluation’ stipulates procedures for assessing the level of student performance in terms of information, skills and targeted behaviours that students may have learnt and in which they may have received training. It explains the goals of the evaluation process, the rules and the basis of evaluation, the general tools and methods of evaluation, and those applicable to each category, such as students with intellectual disabilities.

Chapter 11. ‘General provisions’ consists of ten articles, of which three (Articles 94, 98 and 101) have specific relevance to the current research. Article 94 states that each stage of academic special education should incorporate the relevant curricula, textbooks and units, approved by the MoE and in keeping with the setting of IEPs. Certain necessary amendments can be made, depending on the capabilities and needs of each student. Article 98 requires special education institutes and programmes in mainstream schools to employ certain techniques and computer programmes for educational purposes, organising activities and tasks, documenting data and evaluating results.

Finally, according to Article 101, the administration of the institute or programme must form a multidisciplinary team under the supervision of the Local Education Authority (LEA) for each region, in line with specific regulations and standards set out by the DGSE.

Since the RSEIP document constitutes the key policy framework for IEP practice in Saudi Arabia, it is the key policy document for the present research, whose aim is to explore the perceptions of Saudi IEP team members as to how IEPs are implemented in relation to the RSEIP document. Before turning to the place of IEPs in the Saudi education system, the following section discusses the worldwide use of IEPs for students with special needs.

2.6 The Globalisation of Individual Education Plans

Today, IEPs are becoming increasingly common for students with SEN worldwide, but their use varies from place to place. They are used, for instance, in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden, New Zealand and Australia, in ways which differ according to the SEN policies of each country. Although all of these countries are developed Western ones, they seem to offer different perspectives on how IEPs should be adopted and implemented. Nor is the use of IEPs limited to the West; indeed, they are used on a global scale, including in Asia and the Arab world, Saudi Arabia being a case in point. The status of IEPs as a global phenomenon has been well documented in the works of several scholars (e.g. Fred, 1986; Riddell and Brown, 1994; Smith and Hilton, 1994; Rodger, 1995; Slee, 1998; Brookshire and Klotz, 2002; Fredrickson et al., 2004; Prunty, 2011; Andreasson et al., 2013). Less clear are the differences in policies in various countries. A close look at the implementation of IEPs for students with SEN in Australia, for example, shows that it is a collaborative and ongoing process (Queensland Department of Education, 2003b), as it includes students, parents and professionals in the design of a programme that monitors and accounts for the performance of the student over a six-month period. The IEP team is generally composed of individuals who regularly work with the students: teachers, a case manager, parents, specialist staff, school counsellors, community specialists and wherever possible, the students themselves. Similarly, IEPs in British Columbia (Canada) are written plans, devised by a team of students, parents, educators and other

service providers, designed for students who ‘have disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, or who have exceptional gifts or talents’ (Ministry of Education British Columbia, 1995). Schools are solely responsible for providing educational programmes for all students in their districts, as stipulated by the School Act 1996. However, the decision to integrate students with special needs into classes with other students was itself a belated one (ibid).

In New Zealand, the government’s first implementation of a special education policy was in 1996, when it budgeted for an increase in resources for students with SEN. This was later revised in the Special Education 2000 framework, which provides that all students have a right to learn, in accordance with the Special Education Policy Guidelines (McCausland, 2005). The Guidelines stipulate that it is pivotal to provide students with SEN with the same rights and responsibilities as is the case for students without SEN in the same age category. Therefore, special education should aim to meet the particular developmental needs of the learner, based upon the effective use of resources and informed by parental choice. These guidelines highlight the importance of the partnership between educators and parents in the process of enabling learning and overcoming educational barriers. Finally, the language and culture of the student is vital in understanding the specific circumstances in which the learning takes place; both factors must be considered in the creation of IEP programmes (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2003).

The IEP process in New Zealand falls within the Curriculum Framework, which informs all teaching and learning and identifies IEPs as a way of determining and fulfilling learning outcomes with respect to students with SEN. There is reference to the collaboration and collective endeavours of people closely involved with the student. In this cultural context, collaboration starts with the student him/herself, then includes parents and the classroom teacher, as well as relatives, other school staff such as special needs teachers, paraprofessionals, physiotherapists or speech-language therapists and even specialist service providers and rehabilitation experts (McCausland, 2005). New Zealand also has laws requiring the availability of certain equipment to enable students with SEN to learn in either mainstream or specialised classroom environments.

Similar to Australia and Canada, IEPs in the USA are administered by a team to ensure that all those students receiving a public education and identified as having SEN are in receipt of an IEP (James and Harris, 2010). The Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) (1975) provides that each child with a disability deemed to be eligible for support services must have an IEP. Many subsequent amendments to federal law have ensured that the IEP is at the heart of educational provision for students with SEN and that a free and appropriate public education is the right of all students with disabilities (Itkonen, 2007). While other approaches seem to focus on the application of IEPs or integration in its broad sense (e.g. the use of equipment in New Zealand and integration in Australia), recent US legislation stresses how IEPs should be specifically designed to meet the particular needs of each pupil and guide the delivery of all special education support services for that child.

In the UK, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SENCP), which came into effect in 2002 (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2001), shifted the focus of the IEP team. Unlike in the USA, where IEPs are prepared as a collective effort involving parents, teachers and students, the SENCP attempted to almost singlehandedly provide a common approach for determining, assessing and providing educational services for students with SEN. The approach used typically occurred through 'differentiation' of the curriculum, which implies that teachers need to alter their approach in accordance with the range of particular learning needs of their individual pupils. Therefore, the daily or weekly plans of the teachers should take into account the specific needs of students and be realistic. If unsuccessful, the school should make different or additional provision depending on the professional judgement of the teachers and support staff involved (Teachernet, 2004). The success criteria of the IEP should typically be based on achieving the targets that were set, after which new targets can be chosen.

In Asian countries including China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Thailand, an IEP can be described as a syllabus that has been designed for a specific purpose and which includes a modified version of a school curriculum (Lynch, 1994). Some other countries use similar programmes that differ somewhat from IEPs. For example, the educational situation in Bangladesh is based upon a Continuous Pupil Assessment programme, although this is similar to the IEP approach. Attitudes towards the adoption

of IEPs differ throughout the continent. For example, IEPs are acknowledged as being extremely important in the educational training provision given to teachers in Korea, with students being given one IEP that acts as a short-term lesson plan and a second IEP that pertains to their long-term educational and vocational development (Lynch, 1994). In Japan, IEPs are also employed in mainstream schools, catering for those students who are educationally gifted as well as those who have specific difficulties. This system, which involves a combination of normal classroom teaching with focused bouts of individualised attention, allows students with a propensity to be disruptive or under-stimulated to be relocated to a specially designed room, either individually or in small groups, where they can be given specially tailored instruction. It has been argued that this model may be an effective approach to support less gifted students (Yamaguchi, 1992). The use of IEPs in Thailand is somewhat less well accepted, as they are generally used only in schools for students with physical or mental impairments. Unlike in many of the other named countries, IEPs are not compulsory in Thailand and are not used in mainstream schools (ibid).

In the Middle East and the Arab world, more specifically in Saudi Arabia, professional attitudes towards the adoption and implementation of IEPs may be different due mainly to cultural variations and the specificity of Saudi society. As already noted in section 2.4.2, the relevant laws were derived primarily from US sources and have undergone a process of adaptation and acclimatisation, although mainstreaming practices are partial and still in their primary phase. There are also technical and administrative discrepancies with regard to the formation of IEP teams, which comprise special education teachers, parents, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists in the case of Saudi Arabia, as opposed to parents, teachers and students as the main participants in the USA, in both special and mainstream schools (Weber, 2012).

It is important to note that American and Western approaches generally involve the students with SEN as a member of the IEP team 'if appropriate'. Reviewing provision for SEN students in the Saudi context, the RSEIP policy document does not seem to have taken student involvement in the IEP process into account. This could indicate a misunderstanding by policymakers regarding the importance of students' active contribution to their own IEPs. Generally, affluent countries of the Arabian Gulf tend to offer social welfare services that may be well restrained by social perspectives on

disability and the absence of highly qualified persons to work in the field of special education (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2007), which is evident in the case of Saudi Arabia. Additionally, there is a clear absence of research studies examining various matters related to the state of mainstreaming in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, particularly due to the fact that this type of education is at an early stage of development (Ashencaen Crabtree and Williams, 2013). The table 2.3 below provides data on each of the countries examined, illustrating the implementation of IEPs within their overall local structure of IEP provision.

Table 2.3: International Practice for implementation of IEPs according to policy in each country

Queensland, Australia	British Columbia, Canada	New Zealand
All members of the team assist in monitoring and evaluating, relevant data are collected.	Precise plan agreed upon by the team for adapting the curriculum; specific training for IEP team members.	An adjustment of environment; necessary changes in learning and teaching methods; changes in teaching material, utilisation of technology as a form of assistance; staff with supporting roles; system of monitoring and evaluating the progress; a position of coordinator.
United Kingdom	United States	
Implementation of the plan upon agreement; focus is on meeting set deadlines and timeframes, IEPs is seen as a part of overall class management; teachers provide daily or weekly plans of IEP management; all involved have to be aware of individual IEPs; SENCO has a role in the way schools manage IEPs.	Plan is implemented upon general agreement; focus is on considering all vital factors and understanding each member's role and responsibilities; intensive communication between the school and parents; presence of a coordinator providing evaluation reports.	

The table above provides a general overview of the individual planning provisions designed and implemented for SEN students in different countries, with particular attention given to the policy and legislation developments that govern the delivery of special education. While certain important differences exist between the provisions offered by each of the jurisdictions, analysis of policy suggested that there are several broad areas of commonality. It is interesting to note that each of the countries places the

provision of SEN and IEPs within the context of mainstream education. This means that rather than designing an individual first principles course for each child with SEN, each of these countries instead emphasises inclusion and attempts to base the delivery of individualisation on making modifications to the general curriculum.

This section considers global variations in the composition of IEP teams. In Queensland, Australia, for example, the IEP team comprises the class teacher, a support teacher, a team coordinator and the student with his or her parents. In British Columbia, Canada, the team includes teachers, students, their parents, members of staff in supporting roles, community agencies and a case manager. Similarly, in New Zealand, students, their parents/guardians and other family members may all be team members, along with staff members: classroom teachers, therapists, aides and a central coordinator. There is no clearly defined team in the UK, but cooperation occurs between teachers, students and their parents; if needed, members of the LEA support service are available, together with professionals from health and social services, based on the specifics of a particular school and the circumstances of a given case, according to which SENCOs can be involved too. Finally, in the USA, IEP team members are general teachers, SEN teachers, and representatives of the school and of transition services, students and their parents, and specialists in interpreting the results of evaluation (McCausland, 2005). It is important to note that IEP teams in all of the above countries involve students, in contrast to the position in Saudi Arabia, where membership is based on the appropriateness of the situation in the class. The following sections discuss in detail the use of IEPs for students with special needs in Saudi Arabia.

2.7 IEPs in the Saudi Educational System

The previous section indicated that the concept of the IEP is part of a global trend to formulate and implement a new approach to special education. In the Saudi context, the RSEIP policy document defines an IEP as:

‘A written description of all educational and support services required to meet the needs of each student with SEN (on the basis of the results of diagnostics and measurement) and prepared by the IEP team at the school’ (MoE, 2002: Article 84).

The RSEIP policy document requires schools to provide the necessary resources to implement an IEP for each student with SEN. Therefore, the IEP plays an essential role in the provision of educational services for each child. Similarly, there are provisions in the RSEIP policy document that emphasise the provision of educational care appropriate for students with disabilities. The following subsections explain first the aims and principles of the RSEIP regarding IEPs, then their preparation, implementation and evaluation. This outline is followed in Section 2.8 by a detailed account of the roles of IEP team members as specified in the RSEIP policy document.

2.7.1 Aims and Principles

According to Article 84 of the RSEIP, the IEP is an acknowledgment and recognition of the individuality of students with special needs, in general, and of ID students in particular. Article 84 states that the IEP has the following objectives: ensuring the right of the student to educational and support services that aim to meet his/her needs by following the procedures set forth in the plan, assuring the right of the parents to receive appropriate care and education for their child, determining the quality and quantity of educational services and support required for the needs of each student individually, identifying the necessary actions to provide such services for each student individually, achieving communication between the parties concerned to serve the student and the parents, and to allow for a discussion of the appropriate decisions concerning the needs of the student and understanding the procedures of IEPs (MoE, 2002). It can be seen that the aim of the IEP is to ensure that students with disabilities receive good teaching and support, and that the rights of disabled students are enshrined within policy and culture.

Article 85 takes this further and aims to establish an IEP for every student with SEN regardless of the type, location and time of the required service. This includes acquiring the means and methods for the success of the IEP and basing each plan firmly on the results of diagnosis and measurement. The implementation of the IEP should also depend on the accurate written description of the educational programme. In addition, the plan should be based on the work of the IEP team, whose members include special education teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and parents (MoE, 2002). Equally vital and usually overlooked in special education research is the parents'

position as a central element of the application of IEPs. Thus, parents must actively participate in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the IEP at each stage (MoE, 2002).

It is thus clear that Articles 81, 84 and 85 seek to regulate the educational process, raise the level of services provided and determine the responsibilities and duties assigned to school staff and focus on key IEP elements. In summary, these articles are concerned with the principle of providing equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities, as is the case with other members of society who benefit from a free and appropriate education.

However, according to Hanafi (2005), the IEP policy as enshrined in these three articles is not properly practised or implemented in Saudi Arabia, so that the needs of people with disabilities, including students with deaf, have not been met as specified in the RSEIP. The fact that the RSEIP document policy was borrowed from a country (the USA) with a completely different culture and implemented without taking cultural and contextual differences into account (see section 2.5.2), has affected the process of providing students with SEN with appropriate educational services. One aim of the present study is therefore to explore the policy and practice of IEP implementation in Saudi schools some years after Hanafi's (2005) study with a view to exploring the current situation regarding the preparation, implementation and evaluation of IEPs and what helps and hinders such practices for the benefit of students with SEN. The following subsection discusses the requirements for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of IEPs.

2.7.2 Implementing IEPs

As described in the RSEIP policy document, IEPs for students with SEN are prepared by an IEP team , comprising special education teachers, the head teacher, parents, and other specialists (counsellors and psychologists) who may be deemed useful in the preparation of the plan. The IEP team is guided in this task by the recommendations of a diagnosis and measurement team, whose members include special education teachers, parents and psychologists (MoE, 2002: Article 81). The RSEIP policy document specifies that the IEP should be prepared within two weeks of the end of the diagnostic

procedures and should typically include the following information: short and long-term targets, appropriate teaching strategies, the provisions to be implemented, specific review date(s), expected outcomes and criteria for success (MoE, 2002).

The RSEIP requires the implementation of the IEP to proceed as follows: firstly, the starting date should be no later than one week after its preparation. Secondly, the plan should be implemented by IEP team members who are qualified to provide the services set forth in the plan. Thirdly, there should be coordination among the IEP team members assigned the task of implementing the plan (MoE, 2002).

Each IEP is assessed to determine its effectiveness in meeting the individual student's needs and goals, at least once during each academic year, while the assessment of the student's performance aims to achieve the short-term objectives on an ongoing basis (MoE, 2002).

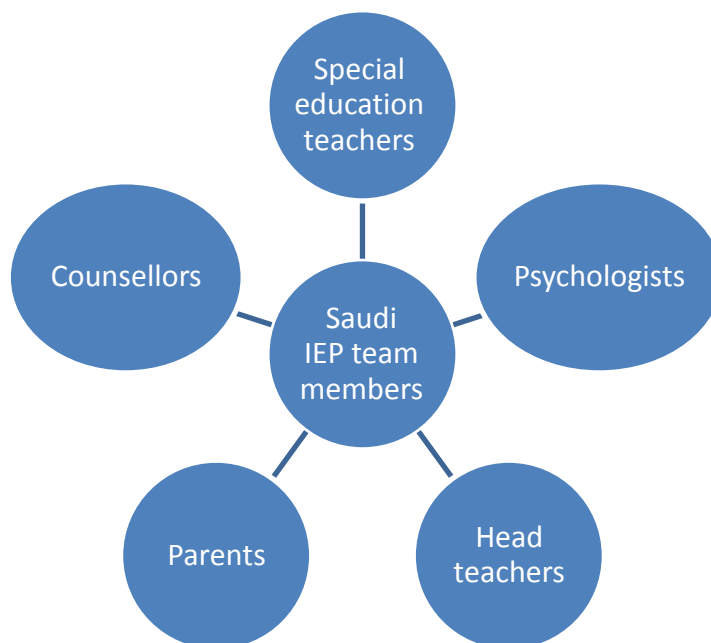
Based on the discussion above, an IEP is required for each student to ensure his/her effective and successful education, because the plan represents a general referential framework for the student's educational programme. It is also viewed as a tool to encourage communication between schools and parents. Therefore, the success of IEP development and implementation depends on cooperation among all concerned parties. The following sections discuss the roles played by the various IEP team members in Saudi Arabia.

2.8 Roles of Saudi IEP Team Members

This section reviews the practice of IEP preparation and implementation by IEP team members in Saudi Arabia, according to the RSEIP policy document. The team meets to carry out evaluations, determine the child's needs, recommend appropriate placement and teaching strategies, set targets and review the plan annually. According to Hanafi and Al-Mohsen (2004), the IEP is implemented following the approval of all IEP team members and is then subject to continuous monitoring and evaluation in order to ascertain its effectiveness.

Figure 2.2 depicts the makeup of the IEP team, whose members' roles are discussed in turn in the following subsections.

Figure 2.2: Roles of Saudi IEP Team Members



Source: MoE (2002)

2.8.1 The Roles of the Special Education Teacher

The special education teacher makes a key contribution to the IEP team by bringing experience and information about the process of educating students with special needs and training (Al-Herz, 2008). As Hanafi (2005) notes, the special education teacher has various tasks in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the IEP. In the light of the RSEIP document (2002), these tasks can be summarised as follows:

- Active participation in the evaluation and diagnosis processes, with a view to identifying the basic needs of each student.
- The collaborative preparation of IEPs implementation in coordination with fellow team members.
- Teaching students with SEN the relevant skills referred to in the IEPs.
- Helping the parents of each student with special needs to identify and realise the psychological and social effects of a disability on the behaviour of their child;

providing them with the educational tools to facilitate the task of following up the student's schooling; and introducing them to the services available to them at the school and in the wider community.

- Cooperation, coordination and strengthening the channels of communication between the families of students with special needs and administrators in the school (MoE, 2002).

2.8.2 The Roles of Parents of Students with SEN

In accordance to the RSEIP policy document, the active participation of parents, working with members of the school in the education of their children with special needs, enhances positive attitudes towards the educational process for both parents and school staff. Parents can also offer important information regarding their children's strengths and needs in order to support the development of IEPs. Hanafi and Al-Mohsen (2004) argue that the attendance of parents at IEP team meetings will help in monitoring the needs of SEN students, in identifying the appropriate services for each student and in formulating the objectives to be achieved by the student. In addition, the plan takes into consideration the extent to which the student can be involved in the regular curriculum. At the end of the meeting, parents have to give their approval for the plan to be implemented. This partnership can also be justified by the right to active contribution of all concerning the development, review or revision of the child's outcomes (Al-Kahtani, 2012). Al-Twajiri (2007) found that parents appreciated active participation in making decisions regarding issues arising at school.

The RSEIP document (2002) specifies the following roles for parents:

- Responding to the school's invitation to participate in the preparation and implementation of the IEPs and inform the assessment underpinning individual plans, individual intervention or follow-up of student progress.
- Cooperating with the school by approving the preparation and implementation of the IEP and the referral of the student to another specialised institution if needed. In some cases, the right for parents to refuse recommendations and actions is granted; carrying out tasks as requested by the school or IEP team, such as assisting students with their homework and helping them to maintain a certain type of behaviour.

- Abiding by what the school requests them to do at home, especially in terms of assisting students to perform certain tasks.
- Respecting all people involved in the schooling of their child when communicating with them.
- Informing the school of any change in the circumstances of the family or the student from which the student may have benefitted (MoE, 2002).

2.8.3 The Roles of the Head Teacher

The head teacher plays an important role in the educational process and is the most senior member of the IEP team in the school, but Al-Fahili (2009) found that the head's role in mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia was poorly defined. However, in a general sense the RSEIP sets out the role of the head teacher as:

‘Being the primary source of authority, the head teacher is responsible for the educational and administrative management of his/her school. He/she should also attend to all educational and administrative issues and facilitate cooperation with the school committee in accordance with the regulations and instructions. He/she should provide a good example to his/her members of staff in terms of performance; behaviour and dedication to his/her mission’ (MoE, 2002: Article 24, 44).

Article 26 of the RSEIP document (2002) specifies the tasks of the head teacher in relation to SEN students in mainstream schools as follows:

- The general supervision of special education programmes and provision of all the necessary materials.
- Striving to provide an educational environment to enable special education students to integrate fully with their non-SEN peers in classroom and extracurricular activities at school.
- Regular follow-up of teachers and provision of classroom observation, as well as appraising and adding to their input, in addition to monitoring their attendance on courses within the school environment or outside; assessing the effects of these training courses on teachers' performance and collaborating in doing so with the relevant educational supervisors.

- Working with educational supervisors and others whose job description involves visiting the school by facilitating their tasks and monitoring the implementation of their recommendations.
- Inviting the families of the students to check the progress of their children and consulting with them to address any issues that may arise (MoE, 2002).

2.8.4 The Roles of the Psychologist

The psychologist plays an important role in the testing and assessment of students with SEN, as well as the preparation of psychological and behavioural treatment programmes needed in each case (MoE, 2002: Article 48). The RSEIP document (2002) lists the duties of the psychologist as follows:

- Performing analysis and diagnosis on students transferred to mainstream schools, using the official assessment tools such as IQ tests and adaptive behaviour measures, as well as informal tools, such as interviews, observations and checklists
- Preparation of reports, including the most important psychological measurement results, and recommendations and proposals for each case.
- Following up and monitoring students' conditions, especially the recent ones, identifying unwanted behaviours and preparing the necessary treatment plans.
- Participation in the preparation of the school's IEP team.
- Participation in the preparation of awareness programmes for students and those closely associated with them, as well as their parents (MoE, 2002).

2.8.5 The Roles of the School Counsellor

The school counsellor is a member of the IEP team whose role involves encouraging students to understand and learn about their abilities, in addition to helping them achieve self-assurance and independence when solving problems (MoE, 2002: Article 51). The RSEIP document specifies the role of the counsellor as follows:

- Preparing annual plans for guidance and counselling programmes for students with SEN in the framework of the general policy for student guidance and counselling.

- Implementing guidance and counselling programmes, along with the appropriate developmental, preventative and therapeutic service; monitoring children's learning and behavioural cases, and providing the most appropriate counselling service.
- Following up students' academic and behavioural achievement and providing counselling services for them.
- Studying individual cases of learners showing negative behavioural signs and appreciating their concerns.
- Working to establish closer ties between the school and parents, and informing the latter about the progress of their children (MoE, 2002).

It can be inferred from the foregoing description that the roles of the IEP team are wide-ranging, but that the RSEIP policy document does not fully specify the participation of all mainstream school staff in the team. For example, it does not refer to the contribution that the head teacher or school counsellor may make to the work of the IEP team, its stipulations being limited to their more general roles in the school. By contrast, the document refers to teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and parents as active members of the team, but without specifying in detail their roles in the development of the IEPs. Arguably there is therefore a need for a review of how the RSEIP policy document applies in practice with respect to each individual professional role (Al-Fahili, 2009).

2.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has reviewed key aspects of special education pertinent to mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia, the context in which the current research was carried out, beginning with a historical and cultural sketch of the country and its education system, noting the place of special education within this context. It was established that the Saudi Ministry of Education had been seeking to develop IEPs through collaboration between key staff and parents in mainstream schools. International research indicates that there is widespread use of IEPs for students with special educational needs, well supported through relevant policy and legislation, and that IEP implementation has resulted in an improvement in the effectiveness of the special education services provided for such students. By contrast, there appears to be a lack of research into whether IEPs are effectively implemented in Saudi Arabia. This is important in the

Saudi context given this policy around IEPs has been ‘borrowed’ from another country, namely the USA (see section 2.5.2). The present study seeks to amend this situation by exploring the creation and implementation of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys’ schools in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. In particular, it seeks to improve understanding of the roles played by IEP team members and to analyse their views of effective practice and how specific challenges can be overcome.

The following chapter reviews the relevant literature, including a number of studies that have dealt with challenges to the implementation of IEPs and their solutions. It goes on to construct a theoretical framework for the present study in the light of that literature, with particular reference to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of child development.

Chapter Three

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Chapter Three

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

3.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature pertinent to the current research, beginning with the definition of the term ‘special educational needs’ and the widely debated political issues arising from the different perspectives on SEN. It next considers intellectual disabilities, rationalising the focus on this area of SEN, defining the terminology and discussing assessment and categorisation. Section 3.3 examines the right to special education as the context in which IEPs are used, and then Section 3.4 addresses IEPs themselves in some detail, exploring understandings of IEPs and the perceptions of IEP team members concerning their implementation and effectiveness. Section 3.5 reviews research relevant to the use of IEPs for students with special needs, the challenges to their implementation and proposed solutions to these, in the light of relevant theoretical concepts. It is important to note that the majority of the research literature related to the development and implementation of IEPs is from non-Saudi sources, because of the paucity of research into whether IEPs are effectively implemented in Saudi Arabia. This chapter thus uses sources that can be said to have high cultural relevance but are reports of smaller scale studies. Section 3.6 sets out the theoretical framework adopted by the researcher, based closely on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory. This theory is a useful lens for exploring the implementation and evaluation of IEPs and therefore guides the current study.

3.1 Defining Special Educational Needs

The term ‘special educational needs’ covers a wide spectrum of difficulties that may hinder a student’s achievement at school (Stakes and Hornby, 2000). The use of this term is relatively new; it emerged mostly from the language and philosophy of the Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science [DES], 1978). Most of the time, those writing about special needs do not explain the term, but SEN tends to be used to denote all students who have trouble reaching their maximum potential. The term now incorporates more than those students typically thought of as requiring special education, such as those with visual or hearing impairments or intellectual disabilities,

as well as students who have dyslexia, are gifted or have behavioural and/or emotional problems (Hornby, 1998).

The definition of 'special education' has raised considerable debate among professionals and the parents of students with SEN. Certain terms have emerged to denote people needing particular types of education, including 'exceptional student', 'handicapped student' and 'student with special educational needs'. They are recognised as having mental, emotional, physical or social needs, so that following a diagnosis they may require therapeutic intervention or special care by qualified specialists (Foreman, 2009). Warnock (DES, 1978: 20) refers to eleven pre-existing categories of disability, 'blind, partially sighted, deaf, partially deaf, delicate, diabetic, educationally subnormal, epileptic, maladjusted, physically handicapped and those with speech defects', and later rejects these because the concept of categories presupposes a medical model of disability, whereby the difficulty lies within the person and in turn that person needs care. She therefore proposes the term 'special educational needs' in an attempt to raise social acceptance of individuals with disabilities, as well as to re-conceptualise special education in Britain (Adams et al., 2000). With the increased inclusivity of the term, SEN can be considered the product of a disparity between the skills, experiences and knowledge of the students and their academic requirements (Beveridge, 1993).

According to the International Standard Classification of Education (1997; cited in Gymah, 2006), students with SEN include those failing in school for various reasons and in need of additional support. This may reflect what Chapman et al. (2011: 20) said more recently:

'The reality is that many of the students who come to be categorised as having SEN/D are simply those that schools have not been able to motivate and teach effectively, and who therefore have restricted access to knowledge'.

In other words, the term SEN relates to the extent to which schools need to adapt their curriculum, teaching and organisation in order to encourage efficient and effective learning for all students. Following this definition, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEN/D) can be understood to mean conditions such as difficulties with listening, reading, arithmetic, writing, written expression, handwriting and spelling. The

Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001: 6) states that students have a learning difficulty if they:

‘a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of student of the same age; or b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for student of the same age in schools within the area of the local education authority; c) are under compulsory school age and fall within the definition at (a) or (b) above or would do so if special educational provision was not made for them’ (DfES, 2001: 6).

The UK government’s Green Paper on Excellence in Education suggests that SEN students form a readily defined group with common characteristics and that this group includes students from disadvantaged families, as well as those with a Statement of SEN (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1997). Therefore, students are identified as having SEN on the basis of the difficulties they experience in school, rather than impairments or medical conditions (DfES, 2001). Dyson (2005) points out that since this system of identification lacks objective measures of impairment, around 18% of students in primary schools can be identified as having SEN. This can make it difficult for teachers to understand the various categories of students with SEN (Pearson, 2005). The SENCP (DfES, 2001) does not classify various types of SEN and instead recognises that all students may need additional support at one time or another in their schooling years, as suggested by Warnock (1978). Similarly, many feel that categorisation should not be used (Hunt and Marshall, 2002), since it does not fit the concept of inclusion, which seeks to remove social exclusion arising from differences and ensure equal opportunity for all (Ainscow, 2005). Florian (2003: 102) indicates that students with SEN:

‘Rarely fit categorical descriptions of difficulty and not all disabilities give rise to special educational needs, nor are all special educational needs a result of a disability’.

This definition emphasises that categorisation may have no educational relevance. However, notions of special educational needs have not eliminated categorisation from the education system (Adams et al., 2000). This has resulted in difficulties with resource allocation in relation to students with SEN, such as special education funding (Florian, 2002). In contrast, Armstrong (2003) claims that effective categorisation can be helpful

to describe a condition, to indicate a cause and to predict the long-term future. Categorising students as having intellectual disabilities or emotional and behavioural difficulties, or any other category, is therefore likely to continue despite the fact that categorisation highlights differences which may result in some students being marginalised (Florian, 2014). This debate signifies the fact that the changes in the field of special education have not been universally accepted, although these debates have endeavoured to address problems faced by persons with disabilities and attitudes towards them (Slee, 1993).

In order to resolve such issues, Booth et al. (2000) recommend replacing the term SEN with ‘barriers to learning and participation’, a more general term taking account of race, social class and gender issues, which are not included in the current definition of SEN, such as in the UK’s Code of Practice (DfE, 1994).

Mittler (2000) also contests the term SEN, contending that ‘special’ is an archaic and prejudicial word. He claims that many students who would be included in these contemporary approaches, such as impoverished ones, are only ‘special’ due to the education system’s failure to meet their needs. Furthermore, the word ‘needs’ requires reconsideration. Corbett (1996, cited in Mittler, 2000) believes that it implies deficiencies such as ineptitude, unworthiness and dependency. Still, Mittler (2000) recognises that the term SEN endures because finding an adequate replacement is difficult, especially because it is already embodied in legislation.

As demonstrated, there are both controversies and a variety of perceptions surrounding the term SEN, even within the UK, which have encouraged writers to propose alternatives. Different usages cause complications when examining literature or comparing practice, however, and these are further exacerbated when considering provision for SEN from an international angle, since different countries use vastly different terms. For instance, intellectual disabilities are denoted by the terms ‘learning disabilities’ (UK), ‘developmental disability’ (Canada and Australia) and ‘intellectually disabled’ (ID) (USA). The USA also uses learning disability which in the US means children with ‘normal intelligence’ but with specific learning difficulties. Saudi Arabia uses the term ‘intellectually disabled’; therefore this term is used in the present study.

In the USA over the last three decades, many of the above terms have been used synonymously despite having different meanings. For example, ‘handicapped’ refers to difficulties in performing a task in the way it is normally performed (Farrell, 2001), whereas ‘disabled’ refers to a lasting physical or mental impairment that causes an individual difficulty in performing particular functions, thus reflecting disability in the functional performance and effectiveness of an individual (Kittay and Carlson, 2010). Epstein (1984) prefers the term ‘disabilities’ instead of SEN. Although her work is based upon the social model, which concentrates on how difficulties can be created or averted by the attitudes and actions of teachers and other students, her use of the term ‘disabilities’ hints at the deficit model, which implies that difficulties arise from the child him/herself. This is currently relevant within the context of the UK, where SEN/D is being utilised by the government as a means of accommodating SEN and disability. As an illustration of this, in their study of UK schools, Chapman et al. (2011) argue that the term SEN/D creates a legal basis for the right of children to full integration in the general education curriculum, as well as creating the conditions that determine their placement in public education schools.

‘Developmental disability’ denotes a factor that affects the development of a child, mentally, physically or as a functional limitation in major life activities, and which requires the provision of special services or treatment for a long period (James and Harris, 2010). In contrast, ‘special education’ can be described as the science that deals with the categories of exceptional students in terms of measurement, diagnosis and the preparation of educational programmes and teaching methods appropriate to them (Rousan, 1998). The term ‘exceptional students’ is employed by Gearheart, Weishahn, and Gearheart (1992: viii) to refer to ‘all students whose educational needs are not effectively met through the use of the standard curriculum’. Polloway and Patton (1997) remark that the terminology applied to define such students differs with time and place, due to changes such as in relevant laws and policy decisions, and because terms like these are not particularly useful in specifying which strategies teachers ought to employ when managing particular students.

It should be mentioned that although some academic research studies in Saudi Arabia have used the term ‘special needs’, the government’s national policy and other publications typically use the terms ‘intellectual disabilities’, ‘disabilities’ and

‘handicap’. For instance, according to Article 1 of the Provision Code for Persons with Disabilities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an individual with a disability is ‘one who is totally or partially disabled with respect to his/her bodily, material, mental, communicative, academic or psychological capabilities, to the extent that it compromises the ability of that person to meet his/her normal needs as compared to his/her non-disabled counterparts’ (Prince Salman Centre for Disability Research, 2004: 5). The article mentions persons who have one or more categories of disability: ‘visual disability, hearing disability, cognitive disability, motor disability, learning disabilities, speech and language impairments, behavioural problems, pervasive developmental delay, multi-disabilities, and other disabilities which require special care’ (ibid).

Observing these definitions, it becomes apparent that the conception of special educational needs in Saudi Arabia differs from those presently in force in countries such as the UK and the USA. The usage of this term in the Saudi Arabian context acknowledges the importance of adapting educational provision for children deemed to have SEN; however, in contrast to the UK/US models, which attribute no fault to the children being described, learning difficulties in the Saudi context are perceived to arise as a result of faults or weaknesses within the child. It is therefore important to clarify that usage of the term ‘special education’ in Saudi Arabia is not necessarily confined to describing the provision of education for disabled students: it refers to the delivery of education that meets any student needs regardless of the type of disability.

The next section considers the category of intellectual disabilities, beginning with the reasons for the present study’s focus on this type of SEN.

3.2 Intellectual Disabilities (ID)

3.2.1 Rationale for Focusing on Students with ID

As the SENCP (DfES, 2001) notes, there are many types of special need, which has resulted in the kind of terminological controversy referred to above (Farrell, 2004). The present research is concerned with students in Riyadh who have mild intellectual disabilities. According to Al-Nahdi (2013: 120) the term of mild students with intellectual disabilities are ‘included in public schools, but in practice there are no integrated activities with other students. They spend the school day in separate classes

(self-contained classrooms)'. There are four main reasons for my choosing this study population. First, I worked in Riyadh for several years as a teacher of the intellectually disabled and as a lecturer at King Saud University. Secondly, the number of students diagnosed with ID has increased recently in Saudi Arabia. In terms of rights violation, it is also such students who are at most risk and who tend to rely heavily on the support and assistance of others (Al-Rubiyea, 2010). Another factor is that one of the most important development strategies for the MoE concerns the integration of these students into mainstreaming schools (Hanafi, 2005), which indicates the significance of prioritising the implementation of IEPs in order to support their educational needs. Finally, Riyadh was the first city in Saudi to establish inclusive education for students with mild ID.

3.2.2 History, Definitions and Terminology

This subsection considers the use of terminology and the various definitions of ID. Throughout history, negative attitudes have been displayed towards students with special needs (Weijers, 2000), such as disabled individuals being seen as a financial burden on society (Rousan, 1998). The field of ID has witnessed many changes over time, both negative and positive, towards members of this category (Aziza, 2001). There has been much discussion and controversy regarding the history and evolution of the term 'intellectual disabilities'. ID is 'a worldwide problem that prevents many children from reaching their full academic potential' (de Villiers, 2014: 2). In fact, rather than being perceived as part of the normal, based upon the recognition that all individuals have a range of inherent aptitudes and requirements, ID is widely seen as being a 'problem'. At present, a variety of terms, definitions and classifications of ID are accepted. Practitioners in the UK tend to use the term 'learning disability', which Emerson and Heslop (2010) consider synonymous with 'intellectual disability'. Indeed, there are several interchangeable terms in common use, including 'intellectual disability', 'developmental disability', 'learning disability' and 'mental retardation'. The 20th century witnessed the emergence of many terms which reflect the concept of mental retardation, such as 'mental impairment', 'mentally handicapped', 'mental deficiency' and 'mentally feeble minded' (Wen, 1997). According to Gulliford and Upton (1992), the concept of intellectual disabilities is unclear and encompasses a wide

range of difficulties. There is considerable controversy about classification and terms in specific use for people with ID.

Interest in it began with the making of provision for individuals, but there was no general academic interest in the area (Armstrong, 2003). It was seen that students with special needs were not able to benefit from educational programmes designed for the general population without additional support. Their needs could not be met unless special legislation was passed to provide for the handicapped (Adams, 1989). Tuffrey (2003: 1) therefore argues that 'people with intellectual disabilities are among the most disadvantaged groups in society'.

In the 1970s, there were many obstacles to students with ID in terms of their inability to achieve their educational needs, which were the subject of controversy and confrontation on the pages of scientific and professional journals (Macmillan, 1988). The definition, classification and measurement of intellectual disabilities were at the heart of this debate, which was considered one of the main obstacles to improving the structure of programmes to serve the needs of people with ID (Reid and Knight, 2006). The lack of an agreed definition of ID is compounded by the fact that there is no single approach to the identification of individual intellectual disabilities. As a result, a child might be deemed to fall into this category in one school setting but not in another.

In recent years, public attitudes to ID have been subject to significant changes, which have clearly affected the content of legislation and of educational programmes designed for each category of ID. These changes in attitudes will be discussed in the next section. The field has received a great deal of interest in many countries, where legislation has been enacted to ensure that students with ID receive the optimum education. In the USA, the concept of ID first appeared in legislation in 1975, in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which was designed to improve and develop services for students with ID. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) assert that growing interest in mental disability among scientists and professionals led to an evolution in the understanding of intellectual disability and the determining of its causes, but that it was still not easy to find a definition of 'mental retardation' which was comprehensive, accurate and acceptable to various scientific and professional groups. Forness and Polloway (1987) found that people working and interested in the field of mental retardation were still

unsure of the appropriate way to define and classify it specifically in the category of ‘mild retardation’, around which there was still a great deal of controversy. Macmillan (1988) also indicates that the pluralism in the label of ‘mental retardation’ had increased vagueness concerning the definition and diagnostic potential in this category, which had weakened the credibility of its scientific description. At around the same time, Kidder et al. (1990: 65) reported that ‘since its introduction roughly 40 years ago, the special education category of ‘specific intellectual disabilities’ has been the subject of ongoing debate and controversy’. A decade later, Kavale and Forness (2000: 239) warned:

‘Although ID has experienced unprecedented growth and has had a significant impact on special education, it remains among the most problematic classifications because of vagaries and antagonisms surrounding definition’.

In other words, definitional difficulties persisted, notwithstanding a terminological change. Meservy (2008: 7) explains the reasons for the modern trend in special education to use the term ‘intellectual disability’:

‘The name ‘mental retardation’ has been associated with negative connotations and does not always communicate dignity or respect. A quick dictionary search ... includes several definitions with the connotation ‘derogatory term’ linked to them. ‘Retardation’ further implies a static course instead of a dynamic and variable one. This often causes the practitioner, health insurers and providers to classify problems in the individual’s functioning as a ‘long-standing’ function of the individual’s mental retardation’.

Similarly, Klitze (2008) asserts that the notion of mental retardation often has a negative significance and denotes a lack of human respect. The rationale for using this term appears to be linked to a combination of social, scientific and philosophical factors. The most important of these appears to be that the use of the terms ‘mental retardation’ and ‘mental deficiency’ can produce a negative reaction in the families of those who have low mental capacity. It should be noted that the concept of ‘mental retardation’ went through several stages, aiming to formulate a comprehensive and clear concept which can determine the eligibility of individuals for special education services. The old definitions of ‘mental retardation’ were primarily focused on the level of disability of the individual, in contrast to the more modern definitions of Luckasson et al. (1992), discussed below, focusing on the amount of support and assistance needed by each

individual (Wehmeyer, 2003). Meservy (2008) also identifies four positive reasons to adopt the term ‘intellectual disability’: the abolition of stigma, improvement in the level of understanding, using measurement and evaluation for the diagnosis of the situation and the ability to describe people with mental retardation depending on the category. The topic of assessment and categorisation is dealt with next.

3.2.3 Assessment and Categorisation

Practitioners in the USA have often adopted the medical model of disability and the use of IQ tests to assess and categorise students with intellectual disabilities. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Students and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale are most commonly used there (Hunt and Marshall, 2002). Gymah (2006) offers the following categorisation based on IQ scores: intellectual disabilities may be mild (IQ 50-69), moderate (IQ 35-49), severe (IQ 20-34) or profound (IQ 20 to 25). This form of assessment has been criticised recently because these IQ tests may be culturally biased. In addition, the categorisation of these systems varies from country to country, with national differences potentially making the process of deciphering the attendant literature more complex and effective comparison impossible. This point is discussed in greater detail in the literature below.

With regard to the classification of the intellectually disabled, Zigler and Phillips (1961; cited in Keogh, 2005: 100) argue that ‘systems of classification must be treated as tools for further discovery, not as bases for polemic disputation’. Reindal (2008) adds that the classification process in the field of SEN has actually served to increase the stigma within the discipline. Luckasson et al. (1992) go so far as to suggest the abolition of the traditional mild/moderate/severe/profound classification, preferring a system which identifies the support needed and reflects the capabilities, resources and necessary strategies for an individual who has an intellectual disability to be able to learn and progress, while also establishing relationships within the work and home environments. This provides an opportunity for enhancing self-reliance, productivity and the ability of these individuals to integrate into the community (i.e. the social model). Luckasson et al. (1992) state that there are different levels of support available, related to the strengths and needs of individuals with mental disabilities and varying from ‘intermittent’ to ‘pervasive’. Intermittent support, either high or low intensity, occurs

during transition periods in a person's life such as moving to a new school or a health crisis. Limited support occurs on a regular basis for a short period of time, but the nature of support tends to be more intensive than in intermittent support. Extensive support occurs on a daily basis at home, school or work, often over a long time. Pervasive support is the most intense and is provided at home, school and/or work over the course of the individual's life (Wehmeyer, 2003).

Saudi Arabia has still not endorsed the Luckasson et al. (1992) classification system based on the kind of assistance needed; instead, the Stanford-Binet and Wechsler scales are widely used to categorise students as having mild, moderate or severe intellectual disabilities, corresponding to IQ scores of 55-75, 40-54 and less than 40 respectively.

However, apart from the role that these tests play in diagnosis of SEN for school aged children, the tests themselves are otherwise rarely used in the Saudi context; and most practitioners in special education and mainstream schools are not familiar with them and their use is therefore typically restricted to psychologists and specially trained practitioners (Al-Nahdi, 2007). Some students may have only mild intellectual disabilities, but in Saudi public schools they will still be educated in different classrooms. Nevertheless, they do spend parts of their day with normally developing students, during breaks and in extracurricular activities.

It is clear from the above discussion that one of the basic rights of students with SEN in general and those with ID in particular pertains to receiving the appropriate educational and support services. The next section discusses special education in the context of globally recognised rights and their legal manifestation.

3.3 The Right to Special Education

3.3.1 The Global Recognition of Rights

'A transformation in attitude is frequently a prerequisite to a change in the delivery of services' (Gargiulo, 2003:16). Globally, there exist numerous international bodies and lobby groups to protect students and their rights. One of the most significant of these is the United Nations (UN), due to its contribution to global political, economic and educational events, not to mention the large number of countries that have signed up

to and are thus committed to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). A major feature of the Convention is its stipulation that each state should pass domestic laws to protect the children from discrimination. Article 2 states:

‘Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status’ (UNCRC, 1990: 2).

Article 2 also requires member states to guarantee the protection of students from all types of discrimination or punishment based on their status or activities (ibid).

Article 23 specifies the important right of every mentally or physically disabled child to a full and respectable life, in an environment that ensures self-esteem, supports independence and enables the child’s active contribution to the community (UNCRC, 1990). Furthermore, countries need to recognise the responsibilities, rights and duties of student’s families, relatives or authorised guardians, as well as other people legitimately accountable for the child, who should offer suitable direction and care, in accordance with the developing abilities of the child. Article 23 thus stipulates that UN members should be aware of the disabled child’s right to special care:

‘States Parties recognize the right of the disabled child to special care and shall encourage and ensure the extension, subject to available resources, to the eligible child and those responsible for his or her care, of assistance for which application is made and which is appropriate to the child’s condition and to the circumstances of the parents or others caring for the child’ (UNCRC, 1990).

Such care should be provided free of charge whenever possible and national authorities must consider the financial situation of the parents or legal guardians. The Convention (Article 23) also makes it clear that students with SEN are to be given access to free education, ongoing training, suitable healthcare, reintegration education and products, future employment and leisure activities in a way that can contribute to their attainment of the fullest possible potential and social integration, while developing culturally and spiritually. Additionally, Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC acknowledge a student’s

right to be educated on the grounds of equal opportunity and with a focus on developing their personalities and skills, in addition to their psycho-physical capabilities.

Another key aspect of the UNCRC is Article 5, concerning the child's right to full integration with other students in the general education curriculum. This type of integration is premised on disabled students' right to attend local schools as long as the rights of other students are not in danger of being violated. In practice, students with special needs are often not included and there are numerous kinds of exclusionary procedures. For students with special needs, disability may not constitute the only issue that they have to encounter; many may also fall prey to discrimination on the basis of their colour, racial background or religious attitudes (Owusu-Bempah, 2001).

Saudi Arabia is committed to meeting the terms of the UNCRC. In this regard, one of the most significant action plans followed in Saudi Arabia in terms of students with special needs involves a policy to include these students in mainstream primary education. This is regarded as a key first step, since once students with special needs have become part of the public school system, the state can then look further at meeting its SEN responsibilities as these students begin their secondary schooling. That means access to, participation in and benefiting from this education in mainstream.

A number of international meetings and conferences have been held all over the world, highlighting student's rights to education. Some notable examples are the World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990, and the World Summit for Students in New York later in the same year. An equally important meeting was held in Salamanca, Spain, to address a developing strand, namely the World Conference on Special Education Needs. From this conference came the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, declaring the right of students with SEN to be included in conventional schools (Simmons, 1998). This has become useful in promoting inclusive education in many countries, according to Sebba and Ainscow (1996). Ainscow (2005) further argues that this practice of including students with SEN in mainstream schools has attracted increasingly wide acceptance globally.

3.3.2 Legislation in the UK, the US and Saudi Arabia

In the last few years, reflecting the global trends outlined above, lawmakers in developed countries such as the UK and the USA have legislated to support the education of individuals with SEN (Fredrickson et al., 2004). This subsection outlines some of the key legislation affecting people with special educational needs in those two countries and in Saudi Arabia, which has evolved through a number of stages.

As noted in section 3.2.2, the US Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, which sought to ensure that ‘all students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education and provided a funding mechanism to help with the excess costs of offering such programs’ (Martin et al., 1996: 29). This was eventually superseded by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990), which stipulated the writing of an IEP for any child known to have one or more disability and qualifying for specialised additional supporting services (Harris, 2010). At around the same time, the UK Department for Education issued its Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (DfE, 1994), specifying criteria for educational development. These included the implementation of an IEP for each child with special needs, designed to help such children to receive special education services in mainstream schools. Since then, successive revisions of the Code (known as the SENCP) in England and Wales (DfES, 2001) have served the educational interests of children with SEN (Prunty, 2011).

Sackel (2006) compares the special education policies in the UK and the USA, noting contrasts at various levels. While the British system appears to be flexible in the assessment of student needs and successful in its accountability policies without being punitive sanctions, the American counterpart is said to be stricter, placing too much accountability on educators and policymakers (ibid). Unlike the US model, the British model gives students with disabilities the option to withdraw from high stakes exams, without consequences for the school administration. In addition, inspectors in the UK have to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the whole curriculum and are provided with a balanced curriculum of their own. Such a job description seems to be absent from the American system, with students losing out on some types of enforcement measures (ibid). Another difference is that parents in the UK can move

their children freely between schools, whereas in the USA, parents have to pay for their children's education if they move them from their local schools. While recognising that students with SEN need regulations to safeguard their rights, Sackel (2006: 612) urges the USA to 'learn from the English system that maintaining accountability in schools does not necessitate the use of punitive sanctions'.

In Saudi Arabia, the foundation for current legislative and regulatory provision for students with SEN can be seen to reside in the Statute issued by Royal Decree A/90 in 1991, of which Article 26 announces the State's obligation to protect human rights according to Islamic law. Article 27 of the Statute specifies the right to social security and care for the disabled: 'the State guarantees full rights of the citizen and his family in case of emergency, illness, disability, and aging...'. Furthermore, Article 8 expresses the principle of equality among all citizens and acknowledges the religious context, by stipulating that 'the rule in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on justice, consultation and equality in accordance with Islamic law' (Alqraiti, 2005: 27).

Historically, educational provision for disabled persons can be traced back to the 1950s, when the MoE opened a number of schools for students with disabilities within the Directorate of Special Education (Rousan, 1998). The first directly relevant legislation was the 1987 Disabled Act, which set out a number of social and educational fundamentals, including the equality of the disabled in terms of rights and duties to other members of society, in keeping with their abilities and potential, while observing international laws and declarations in the field of disabled rights and legislation. As a UN member state, Saudi Arabia is committed to meeting the terms of the UNCRC. It upholds the principle of providing equal opportunity for students with special needs, as is the case with other members of society, and forbids discrimination between persons with or without disabilities in all social, economic and legal spheres, since it is a country where Islamic law is practised and the Holy Qur'an is regarded as the constitution. Thus, the MoE (1995) was able to claim two decades ago that it had been engaged for more than 30 years in the provision of special education services for students with SEN. These efforts resulted more specifically in the passing of the RSEIP policy in 2002, as discussed in Section 2.5. The next section of this chapter addresses in detail the concept and implementation of IEPs.

3.4 Individual Educational Plans

3.4.1 Introduction

Over the last two decades, there has been a great deal of interest in implementation of IEPs in regard to students with SEN (Rodger, 1995). In the Saudi context, the RSEIP policy document defines ‘The concept of the IEP’ as:

‘A written description of all educational and support services required to meet the needs of each student with special educational needs (on the basis of the results of diagnostic and measurement) and prepared by the IEP team at the school’ (MoE, 2002: Article 84).

The development of IEPs is a fundamental step in the promotion of educational abilities in students identified as having ID, while taking account of their strengths and needs (Smith and Strick, 1997). Typically, a team of parents, teachers and educational professionals design the IEPs. Team members must have a full understanding of curriculum planning, to ensure that the essential elements are included and that the students are enabled to reach optimum independence and success in their adult lives (Brolin, 1992). According to Minke et al. (1996), the philosophy of the IEP is based on the triangular relationship among school, teacher and student. Thus, Thomas (1996) emphasises the need for a qualified teacher on the IEP team; the teacher must have sufficient training and a thorough knowledge of the entire process, from the general planning of the curriculum to instruction. The primary objective of general curriculum planning is the provision of relevant and properly targeted educational activities for each individual student. It is also considered the basis of all training and educational activities for students with various disabilities (James and Lizanne, 2003).

An IEP thus entails providing an appropriate programme in keeping with the level of growth and development of the student. It should also take account of individual differences, of teaching strategies and of the learning environment. In striving to take into account individual differences among students with special needs, those working in the field of special education should design an IEP for each student (Kamens, 2004). An IEP is a road map for instruction and the essence of the special education process (Johns et al., 2007), which ensures the provision of the necessary services for a quality

education and a successful school experience for all students with SEN and their families (Aleada, 2006; Smith, 2007).

The provision of educational services for students with special needs is grounded in a large number of practicalities, notably the consideration of individual differences among learners and meeting those needs. Taking individual differences into account requires a diagnosis as well as a comprehensive assessment of the developmental and academic aspects pertinent to these students by members of an IEP team, whose complementary efforts lead to the eventual outcomes within an IEP framework for each student. The education of students with SEN should be viewed as a constantly changing and evolving process. It should lead to a marked improvement and an acceptable level of performance and behavioural skills for each student. Special education is categorically no longer confined to the traditional methods practised in mainstream education, but has become more centred on the individual needs of students with special needs. This altered focus comes from a recognition of heterogeneity among members of the same class, to which the most effective and appropriate response is the IEP (Al-Wabli, 2000). Theoretically, IEPs should nurture more effective interaction between teachers, other professionals, parents and learners, to provide a better education for the child (Polloway and Patton, 1997). The next subsection attempts to explain why IEPs are important and who should use them.

3.4.2 Understanding IEPs

The emergence of the IEP was related to the parent movement in America (Zigmond and Miller, 1986), where it became clear that parents had an increasingly significant impact on the development of special education, forming pressure groups to influence public opinion. Educational policies began to change as these groups made the voice of the student heard in the fight for the right to equal opportunities, including in the US courts. In 1970, the American Association for Intellectual and Developmental Disability brought a lawsuit in the state of Minnesota on the basis that an intellectually disabled student had been deprived of mainstream education. The court's decision was based on two major principles: those students with special needs should be provided with an environment suitable for education and similar to that found in mainstream school settings, and that parents should participate in making all decisions relevant to their

disabled child (Furney and Salembier, 2000). This case prompted a historic nationwide movement with humanitarian and social implications relating to the care of young people with disabilities and the necessary guarantees for disabled students to achieve as individuals (Goodman and Bond, 1993).

Smith (2007) argues that the introduction of the IEP in the field of special education was due to the influence of public opinion, mainly from parents as a source of pressure to formulate educational policies in the best interests of their children with SEN. This related particularly to those with an intellectual disability and the importance of educating these students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The IEP occupies an important place in the field of special education in general and in that of intellectual disability in particular, because it is viewed as the cornerstone of special educational provision appropriate for students with special needs and their learning (John and Shelden, 2002). Kane et al. (2002: 38) agree that 'IEPs have been seen as an important strand in the whole approach to education provision for students with SEN'.

Hence, the IEP comes at the forefront of a number of successful strategies and is able to meet the personal needs of students with special needs (Hawsawi, 2002). This has increased the significance of its use while working to create suitable conditions to increase its effectiveness. The IEP provides the opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators and service providers in addition to the students themselves when appropriate to work as a team with the purpose of designing IEPs according to the needs of individual students in order to improve their educational outcomes. The IEP shows that students can achieve long-term and short-term goals, as set out in the programme (McLaughlin and Lewis, 1995; Williams, 1999; Heumann and Warlick, 2000).

An IEP for each eligible student with SEN, aiming to put the child at the centre, is an important element of the US Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Richardson, 2008). The plan is a source of protection for individual students' rights, as it specifies appropriate special educational and support services; it also contains information concerning the most suitable places for their learning (Portman, 2011). The participation of students in the creation of IEPs has many benefits, as it involves the learning of skills, including self-esteem and self-advocacy, which are necessary to support and explain what objectives the student needs to achieve. These skills can also be supported

within the process of the IEP with the participation of the student (Test et al., 2004). Teachers of special education should recognise the crucial skills that may assist in the development of the IEP. A study by Martin et al. (2004), in Oklahoma, investigated the perceptions of 1,638 secondary IEP meeting participants from 393 IEP meetings within 3 consecutive years. They used quantitative research such as a questionnaire. They found that teachers of special education were key participants in regular IEP meetings and the best qualified to lead such meetings.

The relationship between the IEP and performance outcomes of 45 special education students in Ohio was studied by Dailey (2002), who also sought to assess how knowledgeable special education teachers were about IEPs. The study produced some useful findings, most importantly the positive relationship between students' grades and the quality of the IEP. Teachers confirmed that the quality of the IEP helped to increase the level of achievement for students and that it was in keeping with their academic needs. Teachers also stressed that the most effective measure for a successful assessment of students with SEN was the application of a comprehensive IEP.

Cobb and Phelps (1983) list a number of skills to be taken into account, including measuring needs, setting goals, planning and implementing the teaching strategies, management of learning and assessment of the educational process, all of which are fundamental for a teacher of special education. It can be considered that the IEP is a road map for instruction as well as the core of the special education process. The IEP ensures the meeting of each child's unique needs, with the aim of quality education for these students and their families.

A further consideration is the importance of identifying which students receive an IEP. In British Columbia, a student with SEN can be in receipt of an IEP when he/she needs more than slight amendments to educational resources, or instructional or evaluation procedures, or when the student with special needs is aspiring to outcomes different from the agreed curriculum outcomes (Ministry of Education British Columbia, 1995). An IEP can also be implemented when the student with special needs is focused towards the normal outcomes (ibid). There is only a need for IEPs for students who are diagnosed as having needs which are additional to or different from those of other students on a defined curriculum (Frankl, 2005).

Overall, the IEP is a tool designed to ensure that special education services are in keeping with the individual needs of each child. The school is solely responsible for the child in terms of carrying out all operations that could provide the required service according to specific measurement criteria, diverse training objectives and strategies, in addition to continuous assessment. In Saudi Arabia, lack of communication between parents and the school is one of the challenges to the implementation of IEPs (Abdullah, 2003). Unfortunately, the anecdotal experience of this researcher on multiple IEP teams and during conversation with colleagues, no role seems to exist for Saudi students in the IEP process. This means students are not regarded as a member of an IEP team, despite the fact that the RSEIP policy stipulates that the child with SEN should be central to the IEP process (Section 2.7). To pursue a clearer understanding of IEPs, it is important to examine the perceptions of IEP team members regarding effective collaboration among them; therefore, these will be considered in more detail in the next subsection.

3.4.3 Perceptions of the Process and Effectiveness of IEPs

IEP team members are influential in supporting the learning of students with special needs (Lytle and Bordin, 2001). Therefore, numerous studies have examined their views especially those of SEN teachers in relation to the benefits of IEPs for students with SEN in inclusive education. Aleada (2006) found that most SEN teachers had positive attitudes towards the use of IEPs, seeing them as useful tools in the planning and implementation of the learning topics and outcomes for students with SEN taught inclusively in general classrooms. A study by Gerber et al. (1986) sought the views of special education teachers regarding the introduction of IEPs into the teaching process and found general agreement on their importance of introducing the IEP in the teaching process. Myrick (1980) investigated attitudes to IEP implementation among principals and teachers in a comparative study of general and special educational institutions in North Carolina. The main finding was that attitudes towards IEPs were more positive among the specialised respondents (school head teachers and teachers) than their generalist mainstream counterparts. Such relatively negative perceptions among non-specialist IEP team members could be a major factor impeding IEP implementation for students with SEN in the general classroom. There are several factors, such as the level of awareness, which affect the perceptions of teachers. Pink and Healey (1999) report that there was confusion among teachers about the concept and use of the IEP, while Al-

Khashrami (2001) found that teachers had more negative than positive attitudes to the preparation and implementation of IEPs for students with SEN.

In a longitudinal study in the USA between 1978 and 1980, Morgan and Rhode (1983) examined the attitudes of teachers in the special education sector concerning IEPs and their requirements. The researchers designed a questionnaire which they administered to 611 special education teachers of both sexes. One of the major findings was again the prevalence of negative attitudes toward IEPs, with teachers complaining that IEPs consumed a great deal of time and that they received little support from colleagues. They also felt that they could teach effectively without IEPs. However, the study also had some positive findings; including the perceptions that IEPs were helpful in organising the teachers' time and that their preparation and organisation contributed to the overall satisfaction of special education teachers with their work. Another useful finding was of a positive relationship between the attitudes of teachers and the amount of support they received from colleagues. In other words, the greater the support for the SEN teacher provided by other staff members, the more positive were that teacher's attitudes to IEPs. It could be argued that developing IEPs in mainstream schools gives IEP team members more responsibility for preparing and implementing suitable programmes. In addition, it involves evaluating and following up what is included in the IEP at the beginning of each month or school term.

In New Zealand, Thomson and Rowan (1995) report that the IEP was used in schools as a means of educational planning and of obtaining additional and different sources of help for students with special needs. They investigated the extent to which the IEP could meet the needs of students with special needs in 36 schools in New Zealand by analysing 159 IEPs. The data, gathered from both professionals and parents by means of a questionnaire, indicated that many of the components of the IEP document were not clear, but that there was a high level of satisfaction among parents and school staff concerning the IEP process. These findings emphasise the value of using IEPs to support inclusive education. A study by Childre and Chambers (2005) aimed to identify the perceptions of six parents before and after the implementation of the IEP as a planning tool. The study found that the focus on the child contributed to an increase in parental satisfaction and to greater collaborative participation with other school staff members.

Clearly, the family and the student should be seen as important contributors to the development of the IEP outcomes. It is thus both notable and regrettable that few other researchers have investigated the involvement of parents in implementing IEPs; all other studies reviewed in this subsection sampled teachers and other professionals, not students or their families. Based on their own experience, however, the present researcher believes that lack of cooperation between parents and the school may tend to impede active involvement in the IEP process by a number of IEP team members within schools in Saudi Arabia. The following section outlines such challenges and suggests ways of overcoming these barriers to the implementation of IEPs.

3.5 Challenges to Successful IEP Implementation

In the current study, the terms ‘challenge, ‘obstacle, ‘hindrance’ and ‘barrier’ are used interchangeably. Although this section refers to research into many different categories of SEN, the implementation and principles of IEPs are the same. The literature suggests that there are key factors which present challenges to IEP team members implementing IEPs in mainstream schools, affecting their roles, their tasks and the quality of outcomes in special needs education that are achieved. The present research is particularly concerned with IEP team members’ views of both barriers to their implementation of IEPs and solutions to these obstacles. This section reviews the literature on such challenges, concerning first the duties of the different IEP team members, then the involvement of parents. Each hindrance is examined with regard to possible solutions that would support IEP teamwork and sustain better parental participation.

3.5.1 Challenges Involving IEP Team Members

Writing from an American perspective, Christle and Yell (2010: 113) assert that ‘since their inception in 1975, IEPs have been fraught with problems and have failed to live up to their original promise’. In recent years, there have been many factors which limit the implementation of IEPs (Rodger, 1995). This means that whilst the IEP is an essential strategy for the education and training of students with SEN, through which the codification and documentation of their needs are carried out to ensure the provision of special educational services appropriate for them, it still faces challenges as regards implementation (Gerber et al., 1986). Obstacles to the implementation of IEPs involving teachers of SEN include the failure to determine the child’s needs, poor knowledge of

IEPs and a lack of understanding of special education policy. Failure to understand the IEP concept can be an obstacle to the teacher in assessing the child's individual needs. For example, in the USA, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, passed in 1975, did not achieve the desired outcomes, because there were many obstacles to both the preparation and application of IEPs (Whitworth, 1994). Scholars have continued to describe significant confusion among teachers concerning IEP implementation (Luckasson et al., 2007).

A study in Mississippi by Brookshire and Klotz (2002) found that general education teachers did not score well on knowledge of how IEPs should be implemented. Earlier, Albright and Preskil (1981) studied the level of knowledge of IEPs among general and special education teachers in the state of Vermont and found that there appeared to be collaboration between the two groups on preparing IEPs. It also found that the majority of teachers, whether in special or general education, needed to gain more knowledge of IEPs to develop more effective practice. Additional challenges and difficulties were identified around accessing information, defining the stated goals, linking the objectives to the assessment and finally, time management (Gallagher and Desimone, 1995).

In South Korea, Paik and Healey (1999) carried out a similar study to explore awareness levels among special education teachers of the services provided for students with special educational needs at the pre-school stage. It found that there were too many services of this kind and that there was a lack of clarity among teachers about what IEPs involved and how to apply them to the teaching of students with special needs. Elsewhere in East Asia, Lins and Miller (2003) assessed the extent to which special education teachers in Taiwanese primary schools were knowledgeable about laws regarding special education. They report that these teachers had minimal knowledge of the legislation, but were deeply convinced that special education students needed more help to address their issues. Furthermore, the scope of research in the field of special education was found to be extremely limited in the case of Taiwan (Lins and Miller, 2003).

According to McBride (1983), important hindrances to IEP usage are the psychological and environmental pressures faced by SEN teachers in the implementation of IEPs. His results indicated that special education teachers, including teachers of students with

intellectual disabilities, were more vulnerable to psychological pressures than ordinary teachers, partly because of the volume of extracurricular work which IEP planning and implementation involves. There was also a lack of awareness of fundamental aspects of the IEPs (ibid). In the Saudi context, Abdul-Jabbar (2004) studied the level of job satisfaction among general and special education teachers in public primary schools in Riyadh. There were statistically significant differences between the responses of the general education teachers and their counterparts in special education, with the former showing higher levels of dissatisfaction than the latter. Clearly, teachers had inadequate knowledge of IEPs. According to Price and Goodman (1980), logistical challenges may also present obstacles to teachers' involvement. They found that teachers involved with IEPs were concerned by the increasing amount of paperwork and demands placed on their time.

A number of other studies (Morgan and Rhode, 1983; Furney and Salembier, 2000; Menlove et al., 2001) have identified various factors hindering the participation of teachers in IEP work, such as lack of cooperation between the team members, shortage of time, lack of training and dissatisfaction with IEP implementation. Hawsawi (2002: 21) argues that 'a well-trained, strongly motivated teacher is the main key to successful curriculum planning for students with intellectual disabilities', while Whitworth (1994) highlights the importance of training in helping teachers to understand the philosophical and legal background to the IEP. In Jordan, Al-Skarna (1995) concluded that appropriate training encouraged SEN teachers to change their attitudes from negative to positive in terms of design, implementation and evaluation.

Whilst regular IEP meetings are crucial in developing a suitable IEP for a child with SEN, the IEP team members must be aware of and satisfied with their respective roles, one of the most critical being that of the teacher. Role conflict can be a hindrance to IEP team members' involvement. Thus, many researchers (e.g. Roberts and Solomon, 1970; Schiper and Wilson, 1978; Smith, 2001) have discovered that the implementation of the IEP is problematic where the roles of IEP team members overlap or are interchangeable, as this can undermine and reduce the quality of IEPs and teaching practice. Roberts and Solomon (1970) also found that the roles of teachers involved in IEP team meetings varied considerably. Consistent with this finding is the conclusion of Arivett et al. (2007) that the specific duties of team members are ambiguous, particularly as to

whether it is the teacher or the school psychologist who should supply the assessment results and recommendations. Specifying these roles is crucial, particularly because IEPs are believed to be more productive when a team approach is followed (Stroggilos and Xanthacou, 2006). On the subject of role definition, Leyla and Tevhide (2009) found that the special education teacher was the only person responsible for applying the IEP, while other team members showed little awareness of how they could contribute effectively during meetings held at different stages of the IEP programme. Therefore, the present study is concerned with better definitions of these complementary roles and the distinct contributions that different team members can make. In order to accomplish this goal, the duty of each team member ought to be outlined and a definitive list of behaviours established (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002).

Lytle and Bordin's (2001) research clarifies what a correct IEP process ought to be. The most productive teams share traits such as precisely outlined duties, an encouraging network of individuals, an appreciation for different viewpoints, proximity and justice within their ranks, for instance. In addition, Belbin (1981) emphasises the importance of team-building in the successful growth and development of effective team leadership. Thus, IEP team members in the school must work together to improve some of the main elements of the IEP content, including functional performance, aims and targets, special education services and annual goals. This process also involves place, length of service and a statement of transition services to support young people who are leaving school (Ysseldyke et al., 2000; Gargiulo, 2003; Yell, 2006; Hulett, 2009).

Other obstacles include the everyday practices of classrooms not being consonant with the original content of the IEP, the IEP team members lacking efficiency in the implementation of the IEP, insufficient participation of parents in meetings concerning the IEP and inadequate knowledge on the part of teachers about the goals of the IEPs (Whitworth, 1994). Any such shortcomings on the part of IEP team members will impact on the child. This requires serious action from the IEP team, which must work together in all areas and not only in the educational process (Lytle and Bordin, 2001; Smith, 2007).

Legislation-related matters can also be obstacles to IEP team members' participation. In a similar vein, in Saudi Arabia, there have been studies of IEPs for students with SEN

which have pointed out significant problems. Al-Wabli (2000) reports that IEPs were not implemented in local schools in accordance with official policy, such as articles 54 and 55 of the EPKSA. As a result, a number of professionals in the field of special education have declared the wider adoption of IEPs to be a pressing issue. Research by Al-Khashrami (2001) found that special education schools in the KSA were not fully committed to implementing IEPs as set out in the special educational policy. The present study therefore takes its implementation of IEPs for students with ID and how practice can be developed further within the RSEIP policy document.

In the context of this thesis, several comparable studies have examined the Saudi education system in order to identify potential barriers to developing additional support services and implementing IEPs. When addressing the issue of curricula as far as Saudi Arabia is concerned, a number of scholars agree that the most important factors facing the school when dealing with students with SEN is the lack of investment in effective curricula and textbooks (Al-Othman, 1995; Duwaysh, 2000; Al-Mani, 2002; Ibrahim 2003). However, each student's curriculum is likely to be distinct (Thomas, 1996); therefore a successfully planned curriculum depends to a very large degree on a well-trained and strongly motivated IEP team. In the Saudi context, along with a shortage of training courses, a lack of human resources working in the field of special education is considered one of the enduring problems in terms of developing additional supporting services in schools (Al-Rajhi and Ammar, 1982; Al-Idrissi 1992; Al-Aloui, 2003). By the same token, students with different disabilities are not being provided with an adequate level of educational services in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries (Ashencaen Crabtree and Williams, 2013). There is not only a lack of human resources and personnel to deliver instruction for students with special needs, but also a shortage of teaching aids. Understandably, this frustration is expressed by Aldosari (2006), who argues that the most important factor preventing the achievement of the goals of special education is the lack of resources such as teaching aids. In addition, failing to provide support services for students with SEN in special education and mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia can have adverse effects. Al-Nahdi (2007) also highlights shortcomings in compliance with the rules and guidelines on assessment and diagnosis in the RSEIP policy document. In fact, the lack of effective application has created a gap between these legal frameworks and the provision of services, resulting in a lack of support

services for some students with SEN, in turn impacting on the learning process and the achievement of the desired outcomes of their IEPs.

It is also important to note that an IEP team member can assume more than one of the team positions if appropriately qualified and selected (US Department of Education, 2000). For instance, a representative from the school organising body may also take the role of interpreting the learner's assessment marks. In the US context, these individuals must collaborate with others in order to write the child's IEP. There should also be a meeting to draft the IEP within a month of determining that the student is eligible for special education and other related services and facilities. While all team members need to bring some vital information to the IEP meeting, the gathered information should be shared among the members, who must work together to write the child's IEP. It is important to note that whatever information an individual brings should be added to the team's knowledge of the child's needs and should influence the strategies used and services involved. Nevertheless, the literature does not delineate specific instructions on which members ought to attend meetings.

3.5.2 Challenges to Active Parental Participation

This subsection discusses obstacles to parents' active involvement in IEP implementation which are referred to in the literature. For instance, many parents possess insufficient knowledge about the educational needs of their child. This could be due to a lack of knowledge and experience compared with that of education specialists, despite their willingness to participate in the various processes related to their child (Rock, 2000). In general, Strogilos and Xanthacou (2006) found that parental involvement was limited and that parents themselves did not tend to consider that they made substantial contributions to the IEP team. Nonetheless, in the USA, as mandated in 1990 by IDEA, parents and/or guardians are considered equal associates in the promotion of the IEP (Tod et al., 1998; Yell, 2006). This equal partnership can be justified as their right to fully contribute to the development, review or revision of the child's IEP (Yell, 2006; Hulett, 2009). This means that the parents or guardians of students with disabilities should be able to take a more active part in the decision-making process.

Several researchers have referred to the typically limited parental participation in IEP practice. According to Stroggilos and Xanthacou (2006), teachers and other active members of the IEP team do not methodically collaborate with parents. Instead, parents are instructed to provide their thoughts about the objectives outlined by other professionals, rather than setting their own goals. As a result, several parents described feeling estranged from the IEP process, with the teachers and other more active team members completely controlling the decision-making process (Turnbull and Turnbull, 1997). Fish (2006: 60) describes the IEP meeting as a 'meaningless ritual', since the parents' involvement in decision making was negligible. Such negative attitudes of teachers and other school staff towards parents' involvement in IEP practice might obstruct the wider implementation of IEPs for students with SEN in mainstream education programmes (Morrissette and Morrissette, 1999; Staples and Diliberto, 2010). Thus, it can be said that the commitment by IEP team members to cooperate with parents in the development of an IEP is a fundamental issue. The IEP provides a good opportunity to link the parents of SEN students with staff in schools. Based on the above, parents are an integral part of the process of improving the implementation of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities.

Examples of such literature suggests that parents are not usually involved in the team's decisions, which tends to make parents feel both daunted and guilty during regular IEP meetings, as if their contributions are meaningless. Also, parents believe that they are unable to discuss their worries about their children's education because they do not have a comprehensive understanding of the terms utilised in special education (Fish, 2006). Lack of understanding of the legislation, lack of knowledge of specialist terms or not knowing what is being asked of them can all serve as obstacles to parental participation. According to Deslands et al. (1999), legislation is not adequate to encourage parents to participate in these educational programmes.

Some research has now expressly focused on parental involvement in the IEP process. This focused research has produced straightforward and productive strategies that IEP teams can utilise in order to contribute to the process. Supporting parental contributions during the IEP process is as easy as giving parents the opportunity to contribute to the educational decision-making pertinent to their own child's programming. Research by Cimera and Rusch (2000) indicates that the participation of parents is appreciated in the

process of IEP development and application. Furney and Salembier (2000) found that greater parental participation encouraged stronger ties with professionals and better educational processes. Thus, there was a relationship between increased parental participation, closer parent-professional links and better educational outcomes for the child.

IDEA (1990) asserts that school administrations should guarantee that the IEP team members involve at least one parent representative in making key decisions at school. This system enables parents to become more active members and have more of a voice in local IEP procedures and activities (Martin et al., 2004). IDEA emphasises the importance of the participation of parents of each SEN student subject to an IEP. In addition, this process can in itself help develop better partnerships between parents and other IEP team members within the school (Carl, 2002). Therefore, it can be argued that they contribute more actively to decisions that are made during the IEP planning and review sessions which take place annually. Being almost as directly affected by the IEP as the student him/herself, parents can offer critical accounts which are of value in designing the student's educational services. Also, the parents' contribution and commitment to the IEP development process will improve the quality of education for the child.

Another important challenge to the participation of parents in the IEP process is poor communication between parents and school staff. A lot of studies have shown that the legal framework or relevant professional standards or guidelines are lacking to specify what parental involvement in this process should look like. A study by Fish (2008) looked at the participation of parents in the educational process from the viewpoint of teachers of special education. The results indicate that teachers' views about parental involvement were generally positive. The need to develop programmes to encourage and support the role of parents in the educational process was also stressed. As seen above, knowledge of these challenges will help professionals to develop strategies and inform staff training with a view to improving parents' experiences of the IEP process.

However, research in Saudi Arabia indicates that teachers fail to encourage parental involvement. For example, Abdullah (2003) argues that IEPs are usually applied by teachers of students with ID without the effective involvement of the parents and other

school staff in either special or mainstream schools. Teachers are not ready for greater involvement by parents in schools (Morrissette and Morrissette, 1999; cited in Engle, 2008: 11). Therefore, the success of school provision for disabled students and the processes of psychological, professional and social development are not only dependent on the potential of the child and the school, but are also linked to the individual skills of the IEP team members and the efforts made to encourage greater parental involvement (Alqraiti, 2005). In addition, it is associated with the ability to utilise these skills and specialised expertise from a comprehensively collective point of view for the purpose of achieving the common goals as a unified group in the school environment (ibid). The RSEIP policy document (2002) suggests that the parents' contribution to the IEP development process improves the quality of education planning and that parents should be recognised members of the IEP team (section 2.7.2).

A whole crop of studies in the Saudi context have identified socio-economic factors as significantly influencing parental participation in schools. For example, Al-Thaqafi (1997), Al-Kahtani (2012) and Aldosari and Pufpaff (2014) assert that the level of parental participation in special education activities for students with intellectual disabilities, whether at home or at school, is largely influenced by their educational level and the number of family members. Similarly, Al-Twajjri (2007) reports that the most important obstacles hindering parental participation include lack of knowledge on their part about the importance of their contribution to their child's schooling and lack of awareness of its possible benefits for the student. A recent study by Al-Kahtani (2012) looked at the obstacles to communication between teachers of students with intellectual disabilities and their parents in special and mainstream schools in Riyadh. It found that the most important of these obstacles could be ascribed to the parent dimension. However, the RSEIP assigns an important role to parents in implementing IEPs in mainstream schools and the above studies demonstrate a clear challenge to implementing policy in Saudi Arabia.

3.5.3 Addressing Challenges to IEP Implementation

Having discussed obstacles to successful IEP implementation, it is important to consider potential solutions to them. In response to the challenges outlined above, some researchers have identified the best practice that could be a possible model approach to

this issue. According to Aleada (2006), there are several ways to improve implementation of IEPs for students with SEN. For example, the experience of the state of Illinois in the United States in dealing with some obstacles to the achievement of the programme's objectives is helpful. The state tries to offer solutions through the design of a training programme to help staff to develop effective IEPs. Whitworth (1994) stated that the training programme has a number of dimensions, including knowledge and awareness, designed to provide a basic understanding of the IEP. Another dimension deals with the main process of the development of IEPs, which requires those responsible for implementation to have skills in several areas, such as communication, planning, time management and collective dynamics. The purpose of this dimension is to help the trainees to acquire the skills of teamwork. Indeed, other authors have emphasised the importance of training and some have made the point that few studies have focused on the effectiveness of training for school staff and parents or how this impacts on IEP practice. According to Parsons et al. (2009: 88), 'training for personnel involved has yet to be addressed for newly trained teachers or those requiring in-service training'. For this training to be effective, participants should be given the opportunity to develop their collaborative skills through a series of team tasks.

It can be argued that the successful implementation of the IEP is based on the process of preparing the written statement which refers to the appropriate educational programme for the student with SEN. While special education teachers play a key role in the development of the document, it is essential that they work together with other IEP team members (Roberts and Solomon, 1970). As De Name (1995) stresses, if IEP team members work productively together, they can contribute with their skills and creativity to the education of students with SEN, as well as addressing their behavioural problems. It can be seen that this underlines the importance of involving all team members during the educational process for students with special needs. The success of inclusive education requires a real partnership amongst IEP team members in the education of students with SEN (Smith, 2007).

For example, there is a need for parental involvement in the application of IEPs for intellectually disabled students, according to which parents have a specific role complementary to that of the school, while collaborating with members of staff in the performance of that specific role (Al-Kahtani, 2012). Carl (2002) argues that there are a

few important ways in which parents can be helped to participate: first, to make a list of questions to be presented to the IEP team; second, to highlight the strengths of the student; third, to set up records of the child's needs; finally, to ask for clarification.

Given the importance of parental involvement in the IEP process, it is logical to argue that the student should also be directly involved if schools are to provide appropriate education for disabled students, as interpreted through the IEP (Huefner, 2000). Indeed, in the UK, the SENCP (DfES, 2001) emphasises that young students with IEPs should play an active and crucial part in their planning and implementation. Brak and Lechtenberger (2010) noted that in the USA, the re-drafted IDEA also highlighted the importance of student participation in IEP meetings and in the development of their own IEPs. Conversely, Arndt et al. (2006) argue that one of the constraints to the implementation of IEPs is not giving students the opportunity to become partners in the process of meeting their individual needs, in addition to a lack of educational programmes to identify these needs. However, in the Saudi context, the RSEIP policy document (2002) does not include the student as a member of the IEP team (see section 2.7).

In conclusion, awareness of the above barriers to successful IEP implementation is important in order to plan the proper strategies to overcome them. This knowledge will help instructors to develop suitable training related to IEPs and is important in creating a new spirit of teamwork to improve the level of educational services provided for students with intellectual disabilities. A key element of this teamwork, which is designed to benefit the student, is the close involvement of those students' parents. This recognition is reflected in the next section, which presents the theoretical framework for this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that investigating human development necessitates an examination of the ecological system, which means that a child's education will be fundamentally affected by how the school and the parents work together.

3.6 Theoretical Framework

The current research takes an ecological stance as its theoretical framework; that is, a perspective that understands the relationships between people (in this case, children

with SEN) and their environmental system, comprising their families and the community (Leman et al., 2012). This section examines the main concepts and assumptions of this theory and explains how they were used to guide the researcher in addressing the research questions. The literature review has informed the choice of the ecological framework to investigate the barriers and solutions to implementing IEPs in the Saudi context, as it provides a lens to explore ‘the layers of environmental or contextual systems that impact child development’ (Leman et al., 2012: 8). The framework provided by Bronfenbrenner (1979) in relation to human development, which is arguably the most prominent and influential of the ecological theories (Odom and Wolery, 2003), was chosen for its ability to illuminate the factors that may be thought to have an association with the development and implementation of the IEP policy.

3.6.1 Child Development

Individual educational plans can be developed only if they are based upon an understanding of the needs of the child. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory provides an increased awareness of the way that we need to understand how students develop if we are to understand their behaviour and their needs. In particular, the framework he provides facilitates analysis and makes the ensuing discussion of issues facing students with special needs more productive. If we accept the claim by Maier (1978) that human beings evolve and develop every minute of their lives, it is essential to assess a child’s development continuously, to ensure that those responsible for the welfare of the student, such as those responsible for generating IEPs, are able to meet changing demands. Bronfenbrenner’s view that child development is linked to the environment means that IEPs need to include a sense of students’ relationships and interactions with their environment and should consider their ability to adapt to it and rely on it for survival; this is seen as intrinsically important to their development. Bronfenbrenner more comprehensively defines the process:

‘Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended, differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or structure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 27).

This view of child development raises awareness of how comprehensive and holistic IEPs need to be. They cannot just focus on the learning of the child, but must consider the whole of the child's development in its constantly changing environment.

Bronfenbrenner's complex view of human development leads him to three conclusions. Firstly, he acknowledges that he sees human development as involving an alteration in an individual's behaviour that is 'neither ephemeral nor situation-bound' (1979: 28). Secondly, development takes place within the areas of both perception and action. Thirdly, the structure of all of these domains is 'isomorphic with the four levels of the ecological environment' (ibid). The next subsection discusses the ways that each of these levels is important in: a) conceptualising the significance of IEPs, b) evaluating the current situation and c) developing the analysis of the data and the recommendations which arise from it.

3.6.2 The Ecology of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner (1979) claims that the development and parenting of a child with special needs are best examined in an ecosystem framework, as no interaction between child and parent occurs within a vacuum, but involves the interplays of a complicated system over a long time (John, 2009: 24). This provides an important framework for understanding the significance of IEPs. Many authors (Schwigwer and O'Brien, 2005: 513; Ahuja, 2006: 2; Laluevein, 2006: 28; Niemeyer, 2007: 3; Johnson, 2008: 2; John, 2009: 25; Mitchell, 2012: 48) agree that such 'a multidimensional model of human development' suggests that IEPs and their social context can be best analysed as a set of four interplaying and interrelated 'nested structures', which together and separately all affect human development to some degree: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (Filler and Xu, 2008: 55; Pillay and Terlizzi, 2009: 495; Barnes, 2011: 15).

What this suggests is that in order to understand the likelihood that the IEP will effectively represent the child and help her or him to develop, we need to understand the way that these different layers affect the content and use of the plan. According to Johnson (2008), Bronfenbrenner later incorporated a fifth level, the chronosystem,

which incorporates an element of the four systems changing over time. This is reflective of a child and his environment changing, for example, at puberty or on the birth of a sibling (Leman et al., 2012). Each of the levels incorporates different environments and the impact they are likely to have on a given individual's life, and in this case the development of a plan which will strongly influence the child's learning experience. The theoretical framework of the ecological system thus takes into account the interaction between individuals and their different environments, and additionally analyses the relations between the environmental systems.

In viewing the environment as a set of nested structures and levels, Bronfenbrenner led the developmental psychology field, examining to what degree not only family and school, but even the economy and political system are influential in a child's development into adulthood. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) is thus useful in understanding human development difficulties, providing a way of understanding the separate and interrelated factors that affect a child's development (Sontag, 1996). Schwigwer and O'Brien (2005: 513) advocate the usefulness of this framework in understanding human development 'for the design of intervention approaches addressing other complex problems'. There is some debate on the usefulness of the ecological model in regard to particular and specific situations. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) sees the environment as interlinked, where humans with or without special needs develop in a complicated society, which can and should be analysed over multiple levels over a period of time. It is sensitive to diverse and contextual issues that occur in the environment (Filler and Xu, 2008). The success of child development thus relies on the examination of these integrated processes and in what ways they are interrelated (ibid). The central relevance of this theory for this study is to look at IEPs in order to better understand the way that the relationships between different stakeholders who create the IEP may affect its development and how this may influence the child. In examining IEPs, it also allows us to take into account the wider policy background along with the local government.

Ecological models do have their critics; for example, Dogaru (2008) asserts that the ecological model is necessary but not sufficient. It sets the stage for understanding a phenomenon, but does not explain the more details. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) is broad and general: it tells us that IEPs need to be understood in

this broader context and framework. However, being applicable to a variety of situations does not address the particularities, and it is for the researcher or the practitioner to fill in the detail. Although the ecological model encompasses the systematic interactions within broad frameworks such as family and school, it does not detail the particular interactions involved, or the reasoning behind them. Therefore, in order to better understand the intricate details of how the interactions between family and schools shape IEPs, for example, it is necessary to examine how parents and schools interact and for what reason, as well as the influences on and results of each interaction. However, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) has provided me with sufficient guidance and I have found it helpful in examining the relationships between environments such as home and family or the LEA and school head teachers. As stated by Richardson (2008), and as I demonstrate in chapters 5, 6 and 7, I have found that the theory is useful for thinking about developments and paths, theoretically and practically. I have also used it to develop recommendations that I hope can assist students and their families.

For the purposes of this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) will be used to understand the strengths and obstacles that may be associated with implementing IEP policy in mainstream schools. Central to this theory is its aim to understand students with special needs and this ecological approach can provide an extremely useful framework for supporting students with SEN through the development of IEPs.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), human development can be seen as a product of the relationship between constantly developing human beings and their environment. He provides the following definition of the ecology of human development:

'The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 21).

Overall, the ecological environment is perceived as a consistent organisation of constructions or levels of society, each enclosed within the other, known as the

microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem levels. The chronosystem runs alongside each of the other systems to represent changes within and among these over time. The present study does not make use of the notion of the chronosystem, although it might be useful if the evaluation or development of IEPs over time were being studied. The main reason for deciding to include the four interlocking ecological systems above is that although students with ID are normally involved in the IEP process where possible, they were not interviewed for this study. However, the plans devised by those who create the IEP are supposed to represent the child and to act in his or her interest. It is thought that by exploring how the plans are devised through an ecological lens, we can understand how the processes influencing what is constructed can affect how effectively the child is represented by the plan. As discussed earlier, the plans are based on the notion that a team including teachers, parents, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists should be able to offer a clear representation of the child. However, as Paquette and Ryan (2001: 1) assert, ‘Changes or conflict in any one layer will ripple throughout other layers’. Figure 3.1 illustrates the general ecological environment framework for child development.

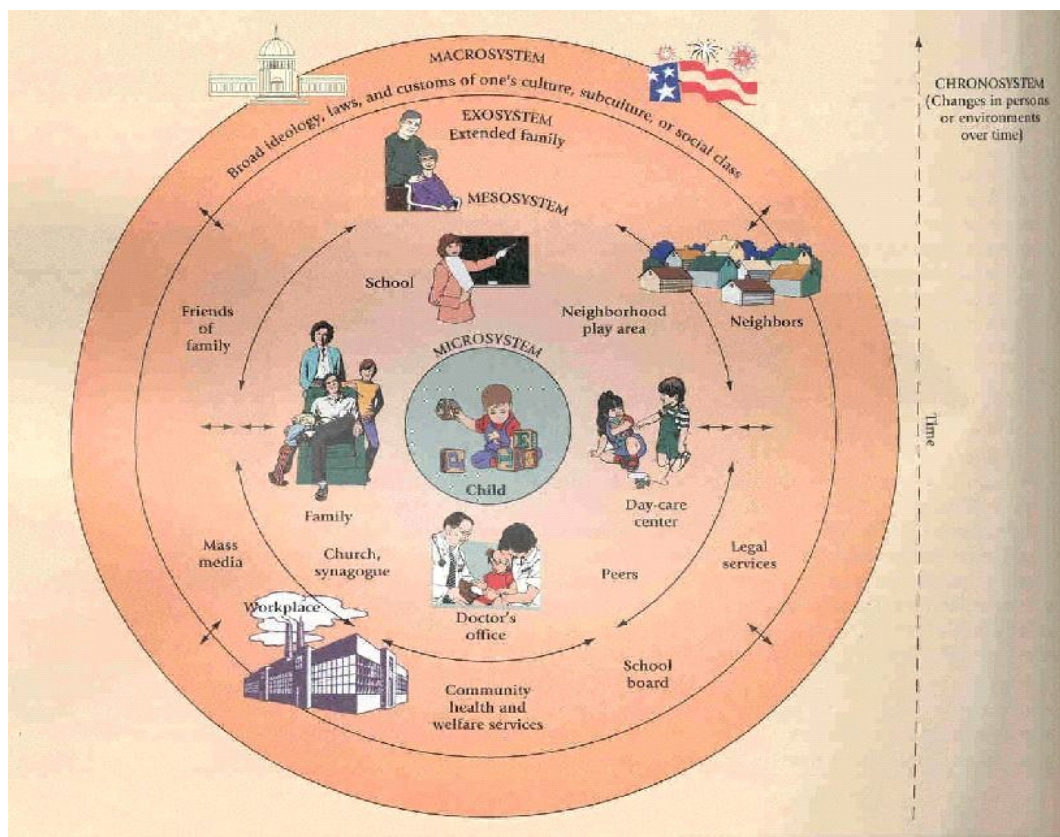


Figure 3.1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development

Source: Al-Rubiyea (2010:24)

This study therefore uses Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as both a theoretical and a practical tool. As a theoretical tool it has helped me to locate strengths and needs in terms of the different systems.

3.6.3 The Microsystem and Human Development

In some respects, what constitutes the microsystem is hard to identify in terms of this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979: 22) defines it as 'a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics'. Thus, all individuals interviewed, for example, interact within microsystems. However, in terms of the child to which an IEP applies, the microsystem focuses on the interrelationships and interactions the child has with his or her immediate surroundings (Berk, 2000). It represents the context in which the child lives and directly relates with people and institutions (Leman et al., 2012). Figure 3.1 shows how the child is likely to be interacting with family, school, religious institutions, neighbourhood, peers or childcare environments. Relationships within the family, for example, include those that the child has with siblings and with parents. In this layer, 'relationships have impact in two directions, both away from the child and toward the child' (Paquette and Ryan, 2001: 1). For example, the microsystem (of intellectually disabled children at Saudi Arabian mainstream boys' schools) tends to be characterised by poor structure and poor cooperation between IEP team members. In fact the analysis of the data demonstrates that there is insufficient coordination and understanding of their roles by IEP team members, which are likely to impact negatively on the child within his immediate environment.

In examining how this theory affects the IEP process, it may be seen that IEP implementation can be developed most effectively if there is some consideration of what key people have learned about the child in the context of different microsystem interactions. In Saudi Arabia, therefore, the importance of the partnership with parents is stressed in the RSEIP policy (MoE, 2002), because they bring an understanding of the child from micro-interactions in the home environment. The importance of this input is indicated in some research studies (Wolfendale, 1993; Ramjhun, 1995; Webster, 1995), which have demonstrated that the level of parental participation can impact on the quality of the child's learning. Research and discussion of what can be done is often

motivated and supported by Bronfenbrenner's theory (Karila and Alasuutari, 2012), which sees the child as placed at the centre of the world. It can be concluded that the microsystem focuses on the individual child and his or her interrelations, but it is also important to consider the interrelations between the components of the microsystem and the mesosystem.

3.6.4 The Mesosystem and Human Development

The mesosystem for a child with ID for whom an IEP has been created is that which results from the interaction between two systems in his or her fairly close environment, such as the family and the school. The relationship between these two groups/organisations affects the IEP and the student's life and micro-interactions within the school. For example, if the family has an understanding of the child's emotional or social needs which is not incorporated into the plan due to bad relationships between school and family, this will have important consequences. Bronfenbrenner (1979: 25) defines the mesosystem as follows:

‘A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)’.

Therefore, the mesosystem describes the interrelations between multiple settings, which affect the developing individual as an active participant, as do the linkages between the child's school and home (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Supporting this view, Karila and Alasuutari (2012) assert the importance of the relationship between parent and teacher, among the most important mesosystems that affect child development. In the current research, mesosystems are all settings which impact on an individual's immediate context. Thus, this research aims to identify challenges and barriers that may limit the impact of mesosystem relationships on the implementation of IEPs, such as a lack of coordination between the school and home, as highlighted by Scanlon et al. (1981). On the other hand, when it comes to a child with special needs, it is important to understand the different contexts which impact on the child. Thus, it is important to look at the settings where the child is actively involved and at other influential settings in the exosystem, as laid out next.

3.6.5 The Exosystem and Human Development

As stated above, the exosystem is premised upon an understanding that external influences, such as the employment conditions of the parents and the wider community, or the media can all affect the child's socialisation within the family. Therefore, when a child has special needs, it is important to comprehensively understand the exosystem and the ways in which this can impact upon the child's development. The exosystem is defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979: 25) as 'one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person'. Exosystems are concerned with two main objectives: connecting the microsystem of the subject to external events and connecting the microsystem to developmental changes that occur in individuals in that setting. The connections can also be reversed (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 279). An example of the first case would be when funding from local authorities might lead to a lack of equipment. The second case can be illustrated by a child failing to develop in learning because of that lack of equipment.

The exosystem creates social settings that have an effect on the developing child's direct environment, such as the parents' workplace, local government, local education authority and mass media. It can be seen that the exosystem involves influences on the child from locations that may or may not involve or include any members in the microsystem, such as the LEA. In the current research, the exosystem is also IEP team members involved in the child's life occurrences and where the different educational settings for each child are situated. Thus, the study is concerned with the exosystem when it explores how the creation of the IEP shapes the school environment for the child.

The exosystem may also affect the mesosystem. For example, one of the major challenges to implementing IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities is ensuring the input of parents with low incomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 241). Poverty often results in the child having poor housing conditions and diet, which can be contributory factors to ongoing developmental difficulties and thus need to be considered when developing and implementing the IEP (Al-Herz, 2008). This means that in order to ensure the creation of a suitable educational environment for students with intellectual

disabilities, special education services will often be needed, to offer support to their parents. Arguably, the systems of school and family or other services and family may need to work together to support the family. It is important to note that the above settings, such as the relations among home and school, should arguably be seen as challenges to the application of IEPs in a school.

Another aim of the current research is to explore the interactions among IEP team members within schools, which can determine the best possible means of implementing IEPs for ID students in mainstream schools in Riyadh.

The exosystem contains all of the key stakeholder groups, their networks and peers. In my analysis it is at this level that there is or should be cooperation between the individual IEP team members and the parents of the child with an intellectual disability. It also focuses on IEP team members' perceived roles in implementing the IEP. This determines the value of teamwork and partnership between team members and the parents of students with intellectual disabilities. It is this collaborative level which reflects the efficiency of the special education services of the school. Thus, this layer of ecological theory yields important insights for the purposes of the present study, as it raises the question of understanding the main roles and duties of IEP team members in IEP implementation in mainstream boys' schools.

3.6.6 The Macrosystem and Human Development

The macrosystem is the locus of dominant beliefs and ideologies concerning the IEP and the world of the team members. A macrosystem, as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979: 26) refers to 'consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro, meso, and exo) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies'. In other words, it 'represents the ideological and institutional patterns of a particular culture or subculture' (Leman et al., 2012: 8). The macrosystem shapes the micro, meso and exosystems in a particular culture, through the values and attitudes that predominate in the community, in addition to related belief systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In terms of human development, macrosystems can be influenced by variables including ethnicity, class, socioeconomic conditions, status, poverty, law, culture and religion. Equally vital, ethnic differences in social practices in relation to human development may affect the macrosystem (ibid). Paquette and Ryan (2001: 1) state that ‘the effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other layers’. The macrosystem involves a range of societal, cultural, economic and political factors that can have a strong influence on human development. Cultures can vary significantly between societies and between groups, although they tend to be internally homogenous. Therefore, a major factor in the macrosystem is social change within the child’s environment. It has been argued that the macrosystem focuses on the cultural principles, morals and values that are prevalent in a community. It is the layer which consists of the cultural context and government policy.

In this study, the macrosystem is represented by the RSEIP policy document, as well as various aspects of Saudi culture and the subculture of the school. This study assesses how successful public policy and local practice are in terms of putting the child at the centre, as advocated by Bronfenbrenner (1979). This means that this layer demonstrates the relationship between the transfers from theory to evidence-based practice regarding the implementation of IEPs in mainstream schools, as perceived by Saudi IEP team members.

3.6.7 Applying Ecological Theory to the Current Research

It can be concluded that these several environments are crucial to students with an intellectual disability, because they often determine what the individuals are doing, where they are doing it, when they are doing it and with whom. In the Saudi context, students with intellectual disabilities could be helped to the extent that the ecological system proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) considers the ‘competing influences’ that can impact a child’s development (Leman et al., 2012: 354). This theory could help participants within and across all layers of the system to understand the importance and role of participants in each layer and to avoid conflict between layers, thus preventing ripples to other layers (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). It could arguably help IEP team members to make decisions on appropriate educational placements, special education services and mainstreaming, especially in a situation where students with intellectual

disabilities still receive their education in separate classrooms, despite a policy of mainstreaming. Therefore, it is crucially important to understand that implementing IEPs for students with ID could assist the process of mainstreaming in public schools in Saudi Arabia. As well as special education teachers, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists, it can be considered that parents should be included as far as possible in the work of the IEP teams, since they have information which can contribute to improving special education services for their children (Al-Kahtani, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) argues for putting the child at the centre of the system and for taking into account his or her interaction with the environment. This theory incorporates the benefits of the medical and social models of disability, whilst avoiding some potential issues, insofar as 'their cooperation and co-existence may be in the interests of the child' (Mittler, 2000: 3). As the foundation for the theoretical framework of the study, ecological theory can provide a very thorough comprehension of people's needs by perceiving them in the dynamic context of their interactions. However, it is also recognised that the social model suggests that relative inactivity may exist, because the children have not been given sufficient opportunity to interact. According to Swain et al. (2003), it is possible to mitigate the negative characteristics of the medical or social models by focusing on the ecological perspective, which Swain perceives as being at the centre of the social world. This perspective can be implemented through a wide array of relationships in which people interact with one another and with the environment as a whole. Florian (2014: 2) urges a move from a focus on education's normative centre to 'core values of equal opportunity, respect for human dignity, and a belief in the capacity of all people to learn'. Equal opportunity suggests finding ways in which students with SEN can contribute, with the focus shifting towards identifying their capacity to learn and respecting human dignity (de Valenzuela 2014; Florian, 2014), bearing in mind that sociocultural theory claims that the child's environment has a significant influence on his or her development (de Valenzuela, 2014).

In the current research, ecological theory is utilised to form both a practical and a theoretical framework. In terms of the practical framework, using this theory affects the methodological attributes of the research through a concept which Bronfenbrenner (1979: 29) calls 'ecological validity', because '...the environment experienced by the

subjects in a scientific investigation has the properties it is supposed or assumed to have by the investigator’.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) additionally theorises that human development is not tied to changes that occur in specific or momentary situation; it is not possible, he writes, to demonstrate that one specific variation or factor in a given environment can produce a particular change in a child’s behaviour. Development thus occurs over time in many places, without a particular spatial or timed event, in what he refers to as the ‘establishment of development validity’:

‘To demonstrate that human development has occurred, it is necessary to establish that a change produced in the person’s conceptions and/or activities carries over to other settings and other times. Such demonstration is referred to as developmental validity’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 35).

As Whiting and Edwards (1988: 240) demonstrate, students in school face four particular major challenges: they

‘must learn new motives involving the acceptance of remote goals; must learn to perform individually; must learn to manage competition with peers; and student in societies with social classes or mixed ethnic groups must learn to interact with student whose families have different conventions and styles of life’.

All of these challenges demonstrate some interaction with the outside environment in some way, and in what ways the behaviour of students is particularly challenged by exterior interactions and issues. Thus, it is these practical tasks that can be assisted by a comprehensive understanding of Bronfenbrenner’s theories of human development.

The theoretical framework set out here has been derived from gaps identified when examining and synthesising current frameworks. Having reviewed the literature and established this theoretical framework, the present chapter ends with a restatement of the research aims and questions set out in Chapter 1, which themselves originate from this framework and thus ultimately from the literature review.

3.7 Research Aims and Questions

This study seeks to explore extensively the obstacles to implementing IEP policy and their potential solutions, in order to contribute to Saudi Arabian educational policy and practice. In order to do this it has the following aims:

- To investigate the experiences and perspectives of key agents (teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and fathers) regarding their roles and duties in developing and implementing IEPs designed for students with intellectual disabilities at mainstream schools;
- To explore key agents perspectives on the effectiveness of existing practice and key challenges faced;
- To explore the findings through the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

The literature review revealed that current IEP practice in Saudi Arabia does not follow the stipulations of the RSEIP policy document, which has created problems for those who have to apply them (Al-Wabli, 2000). I have become familiar with this situation from my own practice. Few studies have so far focused on finding solutions to the problems encountered in the application of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities in Saudi Arabia (Al-Herz, 2008). Hanafi (2005) confirms that the application of IEPs is still limited, as they are applied by the individual efforts of SEN teachers, in the absence of comprehensive roles for other members of the IEP team. Therefore, the first research question, addressed by the data analysis presented in Chapter 5, concerns the views of team members on how to describe their roles and duties.

RQ1. How do the following IEP team members describe their roles and duties as regards the implementation of the plans for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh?

- Teachers
- Fathers
- Head teachers
- Psychologists
- Counsellors

The literature review has drawn attention to the need to identify obstacles to the application of IEPs and the provision of special education services for students with SEN (Hanafi, 2005; Al-Herz, 2008; Al-Kahtani, 2012). Therefore, the second research question concerns the most important obstacles to the application of these individual plans in mainstreaming schools from the perspective of the IEP team members (see Chapter 6).

RQ2. What do the following IEP team members consider to be the barriers to implementing IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities within mainstream primary boys' schools in Riyadh?

- Teachers
- Fathers
- Head teachers
- Psychologists
- Counsellors

Having identified obstacles to the implementation of IEPs in Saudi Arabia, the literature review emphasises the need to develop solutions to overcome them or reduce their potential negative effects on those with disabilities (Hanafi, 2005). Adopting such solutions would help to enhance the educational process for students with special needs and ensure the application of IEPs in line with the RSEIP document. The third research question, addressed by the data analysis in Chapter 6, is thus as follows.

RQ3. What do the following IEP team members consider to be possible and reasonable solutions to overcome barriers to implementing IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream primary boys' schools in Riyadh?

- Teachers
- Fathers
- Head teachers
- Psychologists
- Counsellors

3.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to the topics of special educational needs, including intellectual disabilities, and of IEPs, in Western countries such as the UK and the USA, in various other countries around the world and in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia. International research reveals that the application of IEPs is a familiar practice due to the widespread passage of legislation requiring these plans to be implemented for students with SEN. As a result of IEP application, there has been an increased effectiveness in terms of the special education services provided for such students. As mentioned earlier, IEPs are not being implemented effectively in Saudi Arabia. The present study seeks to amend this situation by offering valuable findings concerning the development of IEPs for boys with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

To this end, this chapter has reviewed a number of studies that have dealt with challenges to the implementation of IEPs and the various solutions to them which have been proposed or employed. This review was followed by an account of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and its value in constructing the theoretical framework of the present research. Finally, the aims of the study and the research questions were restated in the context of the review. The next chapter explains the research methodology and methods of data collection used to fulfil these aims and answer the questions.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

*'There is no single blueprint for planning research.
Research design is governed by the notion of 'fitness for purpose'.
(Cohen et al., 2000: 73)*

4.0 Introduction

This study takes a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews and documentary data were used to collect data from four mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh, with the aim of exploring IEP team members' experiences of implementing IEPs designed for students with intellectual disabilities attending such schools.

The use of any research approach should be based on the research aims and questions, due to the fact that the research questions 'dictates the type of methods one pursues' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006: 234). This study was guided by the following salient aims:

- To investigate the experiences and perspectives of key agents (teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and fathers) regarding their roles and duties in developing and implementing IEPs designed for students with intellectual disabilities at mainstream schools;
- To explore key agents perspectives on the effectiveness of existing practice and key challenges faced;
- To explore the findings through the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

This chapter discusses the methodology of the study and why it was chosen. Firstly, it gives an overview of the philosophical paradigm that led the present research and of the underpinning paradigmatic and epistemological choices. Secondly, it discusses the research approach and methodology, followed by a discussion of the methods used to collect and analyse the data. Details of sampling and participants are followed by an exploration of the ethical issues affecting the various phases of the study, such as gaining access, anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent. The matter of the

validity of the study is highlighted, before a discussion of its limitations. Finally, the major points addressed in this chapter are summarised.

4.1 Research Philosophy

In educational research, there are three main paradigms: positivistic, interpretive and critical (Cohen et al., 2000). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), Smith (1999) and Avramidis et al. (2000), the implications of the particular paradigm adopted by researchers have been shown to profoundly impact the manner and goals of the research. Patton (1990) explains that a paradigm is a worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world. As such, paradigms are deeply embedded in the socialisation of adherents and practitioners, telling them ‘what is important, what is legitimate, what is reasonable’ (ibid: 37). For this reason, it is essential to comment upon the particular paradigmatic issues and their connotations within the context of this study, namely, investigating the implementation of IEPs in mainstream Saudi primary schools. In this sense, there are two major paradigms in human sciences such as positivism and interpretivism. King (2012: 53) identifies positivism and interpretivism as ‘the two main philosophical paradigms that underpin social research’, offering ‘conflicting views of how to interpret social reality’. Firstly, positivism is strongly related to objectivism (Gray, 2004). It concentrates on generalisation, which arguably does not take into account individuality and the diversity involved within each person’s free will, goals and unique qualities (Cohen et al., 2000; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). The positivistic paradigm was rejected as its basis, due to its inability to account for the capacity of individuals to interpret their own experience (Cohen et al., 2000; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Wellington (2000: 16) remarks that in interpretive research, the researcher accepts that ‘the observer makes a difference to what is observed and that reality is a human construct’. Individuals are able to comprehend reality only through their subjective insights; that is, they understand the world and society around them based on their separate experiences and interpretations of the behaviour of other individuals (Radnor, 2002).

Secondly, the interpretive paradigm offers a theoretical and practical approach to social research that addresses some of the challenges of positivism. Interpretivism does not state that there is a universal truth that is prevalent irrespective of the existence of

individuals, claiming instead that the concept of reality is a social construction (Bassey, 1995). The aim is to understand and clarify the relevance of individuals' intentions, not to generalise (Pring, 2000). From this perspective, it is not possible to discover any form of objective reality or objective truth about it. By the same token, meaning and for that matter truth is created by engaging and interacting with the world and its multiple realities; hence, it is not for us to discover meaning, as meaning has to be constructed. Different people construct different meanings in different contexts. For example, disability is a social construct which can be interpreted and analysed differently depending on the situation and the individual. Interpretivism is therefore an appropriate paradigm within which to conduct this study, due to its exploratory and non-generalising approach. In order to fully explain the philosophical perspective of this study, it is also important to take into consideration the underlying ontology and epistemology (Cohen et al., 2000). These are discussed in the next section.

4.2 The Interpretive Paradigm: Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology, or the study of being, 'is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such' (Crotty, 1998: 10). Ontological perspectives can be subjective, as in the interpretivist paradigm, or objective, as in the positivist paradigm (Morrison, 2002). Burrell and Morgan (1979; cited in Crotty, 1998) indicate that the objective dimension of the positivist ontological perspective lies in realism, which uses objective variables and then either falsifies or verifies certain sets of hypotheses. The positivistic view is still dominant in educational research in Saudi Arabia, with qualitative studies being less common. There have been three relevant research studies of IEPs carried out by Saudi researchers, namely, Al-Wabli (2000), Al-Khashrami (2001) and Hanafi (2005). One of the most significant characteristics of these studies is that they were based on a positivist paradigm, with the researchers using pre-test, post-test and quasi-experimental designs. Contrary to the positivist/scientific paradigm, interpretivism looks 'for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty, 1998: 67). It assumes that 'reality is dependent on the meanings of people in the society, and such socially constructed reality is ungoverned by any natural laws, causal or otherwise' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989: 86). Consistent with this view, the reality investigated by the present study is seen as lying in the participants' understandings of the phenomena under question and is

therefore subjective. This is particularly important for the present study, since its aim was to explore the roles and duties of IEP team members in relation to the implementation of IEPs.

Epistemology is central to any research endeavour (Cohen et al., 2007). It is defined as ‘a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know’ (Crotty, 1998: 9). The present researcher’s epistemological stance is in line with social constructionism, in which neither truth nor meaningful reality can exist independently of our thinking, but come ‘into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world’ (Crotty, 1998: 8). The current research is principally of an exploratory nature, its aim being to explore the obstacles to implementing IEP policy as viewed by the IEP team members, rather than testing hypotheses or theories about IEPs. No clear understanding of the situation could be gained without the researcher’s constructive engagement with the study participants. Thus, the study seeks to comprehend perceptions and social realities in order to effectively understand individual responses and to avoid providing generalised facts and concepts.

The methods and questions of the present study were formulated to encompass the researcher’s interactions with various participants in the light of my own prior subjective experience in Saudi mainstream primary schools. The interpretive paradigm results in facts which must be understood and are supported by interpretations and values. Thus, a key point is that it is only through constructionism, rather than objectivism, that the research could fulfil its role. This role encompasses constructing a meaningful picture of the reality of the application of IEPs, the details of the process, the challenges to it and the changes needed to address these. This reality is seen through the perspective of IEP team members in the Saudi context, via the interpretations revealed in the participants’ responses. As with all research it is important that the researcher’s philosophical stance aligns with the research design and approach employed. This will now be explored.

4.3 Research Design

Yin (1984) defines research design as ‘the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research question and, ultimately, to its conclusions’ (cited in

Morrow and Brown, 1994: 250-251). This effectively means that whenever studies attempt to gather empirical data, a close connection between research questions and the data collected should be absolutely fundamental. The research methodology answers the research question: ‘how can we produce reliable and valid knowledge?’ (Al-Jadidi, 2012: 92).

The methodology of this study falls within the interpretive research paradigm, as noted above, which facilitated a rich and deep insight into the implementation of IEPs for primary school students with intellectual disabilities in the Riyadh region. Central to interpretive studies is a qualitative research design, which was employed for data collection and data analysis in this study. Importantly, the qualitative approaches employed in undertaking educational research tend to be ‘enriched by multiple traditions beyond the umbrella of the interpretive approach’, according to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006: 16), who add: ‘Qualitative knowledge is produced from a variety of rich perspectives on social reality. While they share attentiveness to interpretation, they also focus on different aspects of social reality’ (ibid: 16). While there are arguments that qualitative methods are easier, faster and less complex than quantitative research techniques, there is a strong argument that qualitative approaches are generally ‘the best methods for understanding the complexity of education in practice’ (Suter, 2006: 327).

In the Saudi context, a key issue is the lack of qualitative research into IEPs. In general, educational research in Saudi Arabia is quantitative and based on the positivist/scientific perspective. As mentioned above, this paradigm positions itself ontologically as exploring external reality. It attempts to approach epistemological reality by an objectivist/empiricist philosophy. In quantitative approaches, the researcher’s aim is to generalise his/her research results to the wider population of the initial research sample. By contrast, the present study is not concerned with testing hypotheses or theories, nor does it aim to draw general conclusions from the data collected. Rather, data were gathered from various sources with the aim of providing a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by IEP team members in applying IEPs and of facilitating reflection on effective solutions, in the context of Riyadh boys’ primary schools.

A qualitative approach was thus employed to collect and analyse the data, the methods being informed by conceptualising the ecological framework discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.6). In qualitative research, data are usually ‘in the form of words rather than numbers’ and are therefore ‘a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 1). Adopting a qualitative approach was consistent with the general aim of seeking an understanding of a phenomenon based on participants’ perceptions and interpretations. This approach was considered ‘more sensitive and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered’ (Bresler, 1995: 2). Creswell (1994: 145) argues that in qualitative research, the researcher seeks to understand ‘how people make sense of their lives, experiences and their structures of the world’. It was intended that this stance would be used to inform the questions asked during the research and would be present throughout all of its methodological phases, including data collection, analysis and interpretation. The ontological and epistemological stances taken in this study are thus seen to be aligned with the research design and methodology.

4.4 The Case Study Approach

The tradition of qualitative research includes many investigative techniques, offering a number of approaches with which to meet the particular needs of a given research project. For the purpose of the current study a case study approach was utilised as a research strategy for defining the sample, what data was to be collected and the method of data analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (1992: 62) define a case study as “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event”. In this case the single subject was IEPs for primary school children with intellectual disabilities: boys schools were chosen for pragmatic reasons of access. In addition, the case study methodology has been described as a “strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Yin, 2009, cited in Robson, 2011:136). For this research the multiple sources of evidence were the perspectives of different IEP team members regarding the implementation of IEPs and the RSIEP policy document which is a single source of evidence relevant to all four research sites. The multi-perspective interviews provided by the IEP team are important

as they fits with the interpretive paradigm and a constructivist-realist philosophy which suggests that research participants who are differently related to a phenomenon and who have different subjectivities and experiences can build a rich and complex source of data but that these both create and accord with aspects of the real world (Maxwell, 2012). A case study may relate to an individual or group, a particular institution, such as a school or other organisation, or a particular program, practice or event. The location of the research sites in schools cross-cuts a single institution but instead they represent a single phenomenon that was selected because, on the basis of the length of time they have been operating, they have the 'most likely' chance of success in each of four regions of Riyadh (Flyvbjerg, 2005). The four boys primary schools were each the first in their region and their context (boys primary schools) to introduce IEP's and ostensibly had the best chance of having developed more sophisticated practices.

There are three main reasons to justify the choice of a case study methodology in the present research. Firstly, a case study is adopted in this research due to the specific nature of its aims and objectives, largely due to the fact that this technique facilitates a researcher in obtaining rich data and therefore to conduct an in-depth analysis of the real problems and challenges regarding IEP teams, using multiple perspectives of the IEP team. Secondly, this research is not concerned with examining a particular hypothesis, as would be the case in an experimental design (Cohen et al, 2000), but with eliciting qualitative data which correspond to the realities of the participants in relation to the phenomenon under study. In this regard, a case study is helpful for focusing the research, as well as for providing meaningful insight into the implementation of IEPs for primary school children with intellectual disabilities in Riyadh region.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, cited by Cohen et al, 2007) have presented the features of case study research as opposed to other research strategies. They explain that the case study method provides particular types of data, based upon a timeline of the given actions and events that pertain to the case. In this case the actions were largely interviews but also some documentary analysis. This can be particularly useful for understanding the perceptions of participants and thereby enabling a given event or series of events to be analysed. However, case study research has a number of disadvantages that the researcher should be aware of. The first disadvantage is that in this type of research, the sample is not often representative of the research population (Gagnon, 2010), which can make it difficult to make generalizations (Wellington,

2000). However, Flyvbjerg (2005) points out the flaws in this perspective and argues for their greater relevance beyond the case. The second disadvantage is that the aim of this kind of research offers a rich description of a single or multiple cases (Thomas, 2005). Thus, it is time consuming and demands considerable time investment on the part of both the interviewer and the interviewees. Although these disadvantages place some limitations on the present research, the key features in case study methodology remain of crucial importance in approaching the topic under investigation.

4.5 Methods of Data Collection

This section explains the choice of the two methods of data collection employed: documentary data and face-to-face interviews. Table 4.1 summarises the research aims and research questions, and shows their relationships with the chosen methods of data collection and analysis. It also notes the relationship (discussed in section 4.6) between these aims and the elements of the Bronfenbrenner framework.

4.5.1 Documentary Data

It can be considered that written materials of all kinds, such as memoranda, correspondence, publications, annual reports, personal diaries, letters, artistic works, photographs, legislative documents and memorabilia, can provide rich data to augment that collected from interviews (Bresler, 1995). However, the use of such documents, known as documentary analysis, is under-represented not only in SEN research but also in educational research in general (Scott, 1990; McCulloch and Richardson, 2000; McCulloch, 2004). In educational research, relatively little provision is made for the use of texts and documents, meaning that ‘for those students who wish to centre their work on the study of documents or, even, to take account of documents in their research work there are few pronouncements on methodology available’ (Prior, 2003:ix). The reason, in Scott’s words, is that ‘the handling of documentary sources, governmental papers, diaries, newspapers and so on is widely seen as the hallmark of the professional historian’ (1990: 1).

Table 4.1: Methods of data collection and analysis employed, in relation to the aims and research questions

Aims	Research questions	Data collection methods	Data analysis
To investigate the experiences and perspectives of key agents (teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and fathers) regarding their roles and duties in relation to their involvement in the development and implementation of IEPs designed for students with intellectual disabilities at mainstream schools	How do the following IEP team members describe their roles and duties as regards the implementation of the plans for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh?	Documentary data	Documentary analysis
To explore any barriers that team members may face in relation to IEP implementation	What do the following team members consider to be the barriers to implementing IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities within mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh?	Interviews	Qualitative analysis
To determine the best possible means of implementing IEPs for intellectually disabled students at mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia	What do the following IEP team members consider to be possible and reasonable solutions to overcome barriers to implementing IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh?	Interviews	Qualitative analysis

However, this research did use documentary data as the first method of data collection, for two main reasons. First, documents are a source of data similar to other sources such as questionnaires and interviews, the major difference being that these data 'have not been generated by the researcher', whose role is limited to 'gathering, reviewing, and interrogating relevant documents' (O'Leary, 2004: 177). Secondly, documents offer alternative sources of data and allow the researcher to analyse interview categories from other viewpoints. McCulloch explains that 'although documentary research is often thought of as one single type of source, it actually offers a number of different perspectives from which to view a given problem or topic' (2004: 129).

The only document collected in the present study was the RSEIP document, which provided historical and contextual data to supplement the empirical data obtained from the interviews with members of the IEP teams concerning their areas of speciality. The main aim of the RSEIP document is stated as being to support the organisation of work in special and mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia and the design of suitable programmes to meet identified needs (MoE, 2002). Accepting Prior's contention that 'people think with things as well as with words' (2003: 70), it was felt that documentary data would lead to a better understanding of the RSEIP policy document relative to the individual IEPs and identify areas of potential conflict between the RSEIP document and current practice. Analysis of the document was particularly helpful in clarifying the main roles and duties of team members in IEP implementation in mainstream schools. This information was particularly needed to answer the first research question. In essence, this means that documentary data was not only used for the purpose of supplementing the interviews, but was also a very effective means of providing important additional insights into key historical and cultural issues influencing IEP practice, thereby providing data that the interviews alone could not have achieved.

4.5.2 Interviews

The use of interviews for the purpose of data collection is one of the most common and important qualitative research approaches. Kvale (1996: 11) explains that the use of this technique 'marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulative and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations'. This is consonant with the definition of interviews offered by Cannell and Kahn (1968; cited in Cohen et al., 2007: 351):

'Two person conversations initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation'.

There are several kinds of qualitative interview, the most basic being the face-to-face interview, which can be either one-to-one or one-to-many. The latter is the case in focus group interviews, in which an interview is carried out by a moderator with a small group of participants in an unstructured or semi-structured and natural way (Rabiee, 2004). In educational research, face-to-face interviews are used to acquire data or

information which should assist the researcher with exploring, discussing and understanding cultural problems (Sekaran, 1992). As a consequence, one-to-one interviews with the IEP team members were used in this research to obtain direct evidence of their perceptions, experiences, attitudes, feelings, adherence and awareness. One of the main aims of such an in-depth interview is to understand the subjective world from the perspective of the individual being questioned (Cohen et al., 2007). Another important point is that the in-depth interview enables the researcher to learn in greater depth about respondents' individual experiences and values and the ways in which these factors shape their behaviour (Ely et al., 1998).

One-to-one interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. Structured interviews are utilised when interviewers know exactly what they need in terms of information (Sekaran, 1992). This method was not appropriate to this research, where participants needed some freedom to provide their views and insights regarding IEP practice. However, the researcher felt that unstructured interviews would also be unsuitable, as they are used where the interviewer has little or no idea of premeditated subjects or questions (Sekaran, 1992). This gives participants control over the interview procedure and they may give responses unrelated to the research aims.

The present researcher intended to analyse the interview data in light of the review of literature reported in Chapter 3, which provided pre-existing knowledge about the terrain that needed covering, seeking to establish whether interviewees' experiences were similar to those discussed in the literature and to identify areas of difference, for example between the situation in Saudi Arabia and in other countries. It was thus appropriate to use semi-structured interviews, to ensure that the researcher was in full charge of the interviewing process and that the respondents' answers to the pre-set questions were able to better serve the research aims, while offering the participants freedom to expand on the issues arising during each interview. Robson (2011: 280) offers this description of the semi-structured interview:

‘The interviewer has an interview guide that serves as a checklist of topics to be covered and a default wording and order for the questions, but the wording and order are often substantially modified based on the flow of the interview, and additional unplanned questions are asked to follow up on what the interviewee says’.

According to Drever (2003), one advantage of the semi-structured interview is the ability to gain required information about the experiences of participants. In addition, this form of interview concentrates on reactively eliciting responses from interviewees that can be utilised to provide a detailed analysis of their underlying motivation and their personal insights into the subject matter under investigation. Semi-structured interviews help interviewees with the expansion of their ideas, thus providing the researcher with opportunities to create abstract notions through descriptive material (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

It was decided that semi-structured interviews would better allow the present researcher to pursue emerging comments of great relevance, as well as allowing interviewees to give their unique insights into IEPs, freely providing richer data. Semi-structured interviews were therefore designed, with the collaboration of the researcher's supervisor, to elicit the views of IEP team members regarding their roles in the implementation of IEPs and the barriers to their success. The main data collection tool in this study was thus the interview schedule reproduced in Appendix E. The interview questions addressed three main aspects of the implementation of IEPs in Riyadh mainstream boys' primary schools:

- The roles of IEP team members
- Barriers to developing IEPs, as perceived by IEP team members
- Their suggested solutions to these challenges.

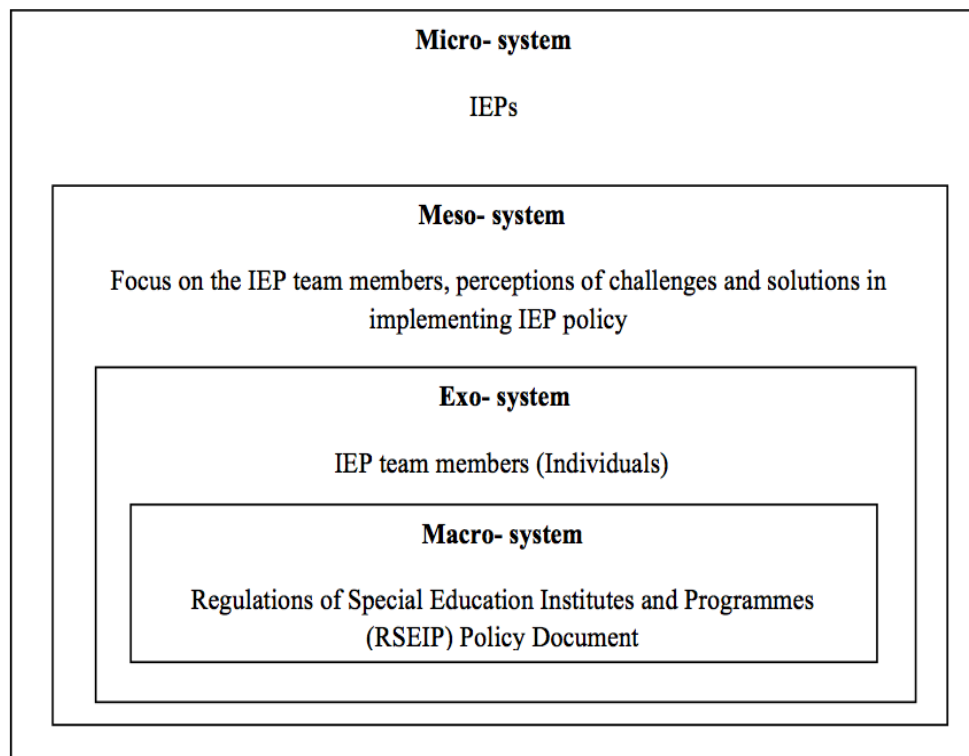
4.6 Linking the Research Methodology with the Theoretical Framework

This chapter has so far outlined and justified the research methodology adopted. A detailed account of its application begins in section 4.3, but it is first worthwhile to relate it to the theoretical framework set out in the previous chapter (section 3.6).

The present study can be seen as revealing and exploring the nature of a discrepancy between the RSEIP document, which is a statement of the policy guiding the implementation of IEPs in Saudi schools, and the actual practice of developing the plans in mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh. This gap between policy and practice is explored using an adapted version of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), which

suggests that the micro, meso, exo and macrosystems influence what happens on the ground, mainly because Bronfenbrenner’s model is able to address a range of diverse matters regarding IEPs in Saudi Arabia, as well as offering a strong understanding of the relationship between the individual and the surrounding context. Figure 4.1 shows how the data sources used here can be related to the different layers of the Bronfenbrenner (1979) model.

Figure 4.1: Data sources related to Ecological Systems Theory



The table above indicates that the microsystem corresponds to the practice of IEPs, which was examined by using semi-structured interviews, looking at such aspects as the IEP team members’ understanding, commitment and attitudes concerning the implementation of IEPs in their schools. The study then investigated how the mesosystem impacted on the barriers experienced to the implementation of IEPs and solutions proposed, with a particular focus on the perceptions of school staff members and those of fathers. For example, there is a lack of coordination among the mainstream schools and home. As to the exosystem, semi-structured interviews were used to discuss the impact of the school context on the development of individual IEP team members’ roles, each member’s perceived role in implementing IEPs and the quality of school-

parent interaction needed for effective collaboration. For example, the interactions between IEP team members are the exosystem. Next, concerning the macrosystem, it examined issues pertaining to social policy, looked at historical and cultural contexts and developed an understanding of the influences of research on policy in implementing IEPs for students with ID in mainstream schools. These were examined through the analysis of documents and through a survey of the related literature.

Finally, the present study explores links between the four levels of the model, to help identify the barriers and suggest new ways forward for implementing IEPs more productively within the Saudi context. The study thus contributes a unique multiple perspectives based on qualitative empirical data and provides important insights regarding the usefulness of Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework in exploring IEP policy and practice more broadly.

As noted in Chapter 3, earlier studies in the Saudi context all affirm that IEPs have not been applied in the proper manner stipulated by the RSEIP policy document (macrosystem). This may be due to the fact that the special education policies are not activated. These policies stress the obligations of public schools in terms of the application of the IEPs for each child in need of special education services and associated support services (Al-Wabli, 2000). Al-Khashrami (2001) asserts that special education schools in the KSA are not fully committed to implementing the IEP (exosystem). In addition, Hanafi (2005) identifies obstacles hindering the implementation of IEPs at mainstreaming schools (exosystem) as perceived by teachers of hearing impaired students.

Abdullah (2003) identifies a lack of communication between parents and schools (mesosystem) as one of the obstacles to IEP implementation as perceived by teachers of students with intellectual disabilities. These constraints may influence the IEP (microsystem), which is at the heart of the educational process, in terms of providing the best services needed for the child (Al-Otaibi, 2012). This is because the successful implementation of IEPs serves the protection of the rights of the students concerned, including special education services, support services and the appropriate educational setting for them.

It can be noted that these constraints are limited in terms of the ecological theory layers, as described above. Therefore, the researcher believes that Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system theory is the most appropriate theory to use in responding to the research questions of the current study, which is limited to four systems, namely, the microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; and macrosystem.

4.7 Data Collection Strategies

This section now details the data collection strategies used. It is divided into three subsections, dealing with the successive phases of data collection activity: documentary data, pilot interviews and interviews.

4.7.1 Documentary Data

The RSEIP policy document was the only document analysed for the purpose of the present study. Before the documentary data stage began, the document was prepared for analysis using a specific appraisal strategy, whose main objective was to ensure that the data gathered from it were both credible and trustworthy. It was therefore evaluated in terms of its authenticity, reliability, meaning and theorisation (Scott, 1990; McCulloch, 2004). Authenticity describes the degree to which a document is ‘genuine and of unquestionable origin’ (Scott, 1990: 6). In this study, this was appraised through verification of the author, place and date, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Authentication of the RSEIP document

Document	Author	Place	Date
RSEIP	NCSE at DGSE	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	5/4/2002

As explained in Chapter 2 (section 2.5.2), the NCSE (2006) was commissioned by the DGSE to draft the RSEIP document as its new policy towards SEN students in 2002. For the purposes of the present research, the document is categorised as a primary source, having been written by people directly involved in the event studied (Finnegan, 1996). The NCSE, along with specialised advisory committees from the MoE, had been involved in the development of special education services in the form of programmes, curricula, educational plans, recommendations and suggestions, as well as the preparation of scenarios and the proposal of topics related to students with special educational needs.

The next stage in the appraisal process was to examine the document's credibility, which refers to the extent to which one can rely on the account in a given document (McCulloch, 2004). Therefore, this issue is partly 'dependent on recognition of the bias and the purpose of the author' (O'Leary, 2004: 178). In this study, potential authorial bias was accounted for in the document, taking into consideration its apparent purpose, interest and overall perspective. For example, it was shown that the presentation of the IEP in the RSEIP document seemed to put the child at the heart of educational planning and teaching. It was also shown that the document produced scenarios which the research literature suggested are ideal for implementing IEPs. The meaning of the document was next appraised, 'ensuring that the evidence [was] clear and comprehensible to the researcher' (Scott, 1990: 8). The RSEIP document offered an understanding of how the IEP strategy was intended to be implemented in mainstream schools as perceived by Saudi IEP team members. The final stage in the document appraisal process was theorisation. McCulloch (2004) explains that this entails developing a theoretical framework through which a document can be interpreted. In this study, the document was interpreted to provide a contextual understanding of the current status of IEPs in Saudi mainstream schools. As already explained, the theoretical framework was provided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory. In particular, his notions of the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem were found to be relevant to this study.

4.7.2 The Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was next conducted, prior to the main data collection process, in order to ensure the appropriateness of the different components of the interview, the techniques and certain practical factors. Specifically, these factors were the duration of the interview, the extent to which the interview guide was suitable and the manner in which the tape recorder was used. The pilot interview was conducted at the beginning of 2012, when all of the interview questions were sent to six members of staff of the SEN Department at King Saud University. These assessors were intentionally selected for their knowledge of the research methodology employed in the study and of the specific theoretical area under investigation, in addition to the convenience of mutually compatible scheduling. Based on these factors, it was expected that they would be well placed to provide useful feedback for the improvement of the interview questions.

A number of key issues were identified, such as the need to increase the intended time from 20 minutes to 45-60 minutes, depending on the particular depth and richness of data provided by each participant, as well as recognition of the circumstances in which each interview was conducted. Because of this, it was also important to refine, refocus and elaborate upon the interview guide in order to ensure that the core areas required to address the research questions in this study would be comprehensively covered. The interview questions were adjusted, amended and rearranged in order to increase the level of their comprehensibility whilst providing accuracy of their cultural and linguistic side. Finally, a decision was made to replace the traditional tape recorder used in the pilot interview with a digital sound recorder in order to guarantee a high quality of sound recording that would facilitate accurate transcription.

4.7.3 Conducting the Interviews

In May 2012, the researcher travelled to Saudi Arabia, where consent forms for the data collection were submitted to the MoE, the educational administration in Riyadh, the participating schools and the participants. The interviews were then conducted with IEP team members (a total of 20 SEN teachers, fathers of intellectual disabled students, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists, chosen as explained next, in section 4.8) at four mainstream boys' primary schools offering provision for disabled students in Riyadh, all under the auspices of the MoE. The study took place in the central region of Riyadh over a period of three months. On every visit, after access to the school had been granted, the head teacher would conduct a tour of the school and then assign a room where interviews could be conducted. While interviews would normally begin with the special education teachers, it was possible on some occasions to interview the head teachers first and to conclude by interviewing fathers. All interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis on an agreed date, at a time and place suitable for each of the IEP team members. Therefore, the majority were conducted during normal working hours in the head teacher's office. Only six of the participants preferred to be interviewed in a meeting room at the school.

Upon receiving permission from the participants to carry out the study, I introduced myself as a PhD student and explained the aims and objectives of the study, as well as explaining that all responses would be important and valued. I conducted the interviews

and introductions in Arabic, my first language. At the beginning of each interview, after switching on the digital sound recorder, I expressed assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, as well as a promise to use the information supplied only for qualitative analysis (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2004). I then explained that each interview would not involve questions and answers delivered in a fixed and linear way, but instead would take the form of an active, friendly conversation on a matter that was directly relevant to each participant, whether they were a team member or parent. Since these interviews were not fully structured, it is important to note that the sequence of questions shown in the schedule (Appendix E) was not always followed and that not all of the scheduled questions were always asked. In this way, the interviewees were encouraged to talk informally about their experiences and perceptions of the IEP from their individual perspectives and were invited to elaborate on their answers and give illustrations. This often happened while I listened and took notes, allowing the interviewee to direct much of the interview. These techniques were important so as to gain in-depth insights into the main duties of the current (IEP) team members and the challenges faced by IEP team members in applying IEPs for primary school students with intellectual disabilities and their reflections on potential solutions, addressing the aims of the present study. On certain occasions, some interviewees were asked to clarify a point, while frequent verbal affirmation and encouragement were provided in an attempt to create a relaxed atmosphere. The data were transcribed as soon as possible after each interview, and then translated into English for the purposes of analysis, as explained in section 4.8.

4.8 Sampling Strategy

The data in this study were gathered from a purposive sample of participants from mainstream primary schools in Riyadh city and did not therefore meet the standards ‘of adequacy and appropriateness necessary for quantitative strategies or measures’ (Morse, 2003: 193). Maykut and Morehouse explain that in qualitative research, purposive sampling ‘acknowledges the complexity that characterizes human and social phenomena and the limits of generalisability’ (1994: 56). Unlike random sampling, in purposive sampling, researchers choose the sample cases they deem to be typical, by criteria they consider appropriate to create a sample which meets their particular research requirements (Cohen and Manion, 1994). One of the main advantages of

purposive sampling is thus that it can provide in-depth data which are relevant to the aims of the study, while its main disadvantage is that the research findings cannot be generalised as they can when random sampling is used (Cohen et al., 2007).

In comparison to studies relying upon quantitative research techniques, the sample size in this qualitative study was relatively small, mainly because the purpose was not to gather data that could be generalised to a wider population. Instead, the aim of this study was to gain in-depth insights into IEP team members' perceptions. Due consideration was given to the relevance and perspectives of each participant regarding the field; this representation was not completely straightforward, and was also based on the assumption that 'in qualitative work the use of sampling to refine ideas rather than to satisfy the demands of calculation is a well-established principle' (Prior, 2003: 153).

As noted in section 4.7.3, the sample consisted of members of IEP teams in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia. This city was purposely chosen for its central location and ease of access to the participants. It has 12 million inhabitants and a significant number of students with intellectual disabilities placed in several special and mainstream schools. In addition, I had worked in Riyadh for several years as a teacher of students with intellectual disabilities and as a lecturer at King Saud University. Likewise my gender and my familiarity with the Arabic language and with the cultural and religious context all informed my approach. Another point in favour of choosing Riyadh as the research location was the presence there of the headquarters of the DGSE, the government body responsible for designing and implementing IEP programmes and overseeing IEP team members working with intellectually disabled children.

Finally, Riyadh is the city where students with intellectual disabilities first began to attend mainstream schools. The four schools in this study (one each from the north, south, east and west of the city) were not representative of all mainstream schools in Riyadh. Their selection was based on my own experience as a teacher, student teacher and resident supervisor. They were also the first mainstream schools in the Riyadh region where programmes for students with intellectual disabilities were established.

Accordingly, collecting research data from these schools gave me an opportunity to meet with the IEP team members working directly with students with intellectual

disabilities. In each of the four schools, the study sample comprised one special education teacher, one head teacher, one counsellor, one psychologist and one father of a student with mild intellectual disability chosen from the IEP team, making a total of 20 interviewees, as shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3: Semi-Structured Interviews IEP team Samples

Primary mainstreaming schools for students with intellectual disabilities	Region (Riyadh)	Semi-Structured Interview
Mainstream School	North	1 Special Education Teacher 1 Head Teacher 1 Counsellor 1 Psychologist 1 Father of male student with mild intellectual disability
Mainstream School	South	1 Special Education Teacher 1 Head Teacher 1 Counsellor 1 Psychologist 1 Father of male student with mild intellectual disability
Mainstream School	West	1 Special Education Teacher 1 Head Teacher 1 Counsellor 1 Psychologist 1 Father of male student with mild intellectual disability
Mainstream School	East	1 Special Education Teacher 1 Head Teacher 1 Counsellor 1 Psychologist 1 Father of male student with mild intellectual disability
Total	4	20

There were several reasons for choosing this sample. First of all, the IEP teams, comprising qualified full-time members of staff plus fathers, were seen as rich in experience of the use of IEPs. Therefore, the research would gain the benefit of this experience in investigating the application of IEPs. Team members would have an understanding and knowledge of students with intellectual disabilities through their interactions and communication with the students, their families and the education authorities. Secondly, collaboration among members of the IEP team was seen as a key element in applying IEPs. Team members would also have knowledge of the legal and regulatory requirements and be able to provide information on the extent to which the teams adhered to these, giving weight to their opinions and attitudes concerning their

application. Their views on what might help in overcoming barriers to the use of IEPs would be most relevant, given their first-hand experience. Finally, they would be aware of the current position of the IEPs. It is noteworthy that the selection of parent interviewees was those who participate in the IEP planning and attending the school meetings.

It should also be noted that the selection of interviewees from the IEP teams was made irrespective of factors outside the direct focus of this research, including age, length of educational experience or qualifications. Accordingly, it can be seen that integrating the IEP teams' views into intervention plans stems from their extensive knowledge and experience. Their involvement was considered to have the additional advantage of increasing their participation in plans for change, as well as raising expectations among all members.

Finally, it is important to explain why only male participants were interviewed. If female educators and the mothers of boys or girls with ID had been included in the research sample, their perceptions of the implementation of IEPs might well have been significantly different from those held by male IEP team members, making their inclusion worthwhile in enriching the multiplicity of representations in this study. The simple explanation for their omission is that the strict gender segregation within the education system in Saudi Arabia made it necessary to restrict this study to schools where both students and staff were of the same gender as the researcher. Similarly, it was possible to interview the fathers of students, but not their mothers. It would have been culturally unacceptable for a male investigator to seek face-to-face contact with female interviewees. This limitation is discussed further in section 4.13.

4.9 Data Analysis Procedure

The diversity of available research approaches emphasises that there is no one right way to carry out data analysis. The choice depends on the research aims and it is crucial that the approach to analysis is aligned from the outset with other aspects of the research, instead of being an afterthought (Boyatzis, 1998). Whatever method is chosen, Miles and Huberman (1994: 2) identify many difficulties with qualitative data analysis:

‘The methods of analysis are not well formulated. For quantitative research, there are clear conventions the researcher can use. But the analyst faced with a bank of qualitative data has very few guidelines for protection against self-delusion, let alone the presentation of unreliable or invalid conclusions to scientific or policy-making audiences. How can we be sure that an ‘earthy’, ‘undeniable’, ‘serendipitous’ finding is not, in fact, wrong?’.

Another perceived limitation is the individual researcher. This issue comes to the fore when the researcher sits down in front of the qualitative data, in this case interview transcripts and the RSEIP document, and is unsure what exactly to do (Punch, 2005). Broadly speaking, analysis in qualitative research involves categorisation and coding of all data, where similar ideas are grouped into units. In the present study, the interview data were translated into English, then manually analysed by the thematic coding approach (Miles and Huberman, 1994), whereby findings can be determined inductively by assessing the data and/or its significance in relation to the research questions, earlier research studies or hypothetical assumptions (Robson, 2011). In fact, the analysis of interview data was based on Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. Themes were identified and led to the development of abstract concepts. This six-step framework provided some practical steps for thematic analysis using examples from the authors’ own research methods. In other words, it provides assistance to the novice qualitative researcher to deal with data analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 79), thematic analysis is ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’. Among its advantages are its flexibility and its ability to shed light on the major themes to be identified in the process (Howitt and Cramer, 2008).

The first phase involved becoming familiar with the data collected by reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews, in the original Arabic, with the aim of searching for meanings and possible patterns. The transcripts were then translated into English by the researcher and sent to a colleague at King Saud University to perform an independent back translation (see section 4.9). This phase also involved taking notes for coding in the subsequent stages of thematic analysis, thus providing ‘the bedrock for the rest of the analysis’, as ‘ideas and identification of possible patterns’ were formed through reading (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87).

The second phase involved generating initial codes and grouping data relevant to each code. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 88), the process of coding involves

identifying a feature of the data, whether covert or overt, and referring to ‘the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon’. In this study, the assignment of initial codes was done manually by going through the entire dataset and highlighting important sections. Each highlighted section of text was given a corresponding code name that described it. For example, one theme concerned the challenges to IEP implementation, so a theme was created along with its code as follows:

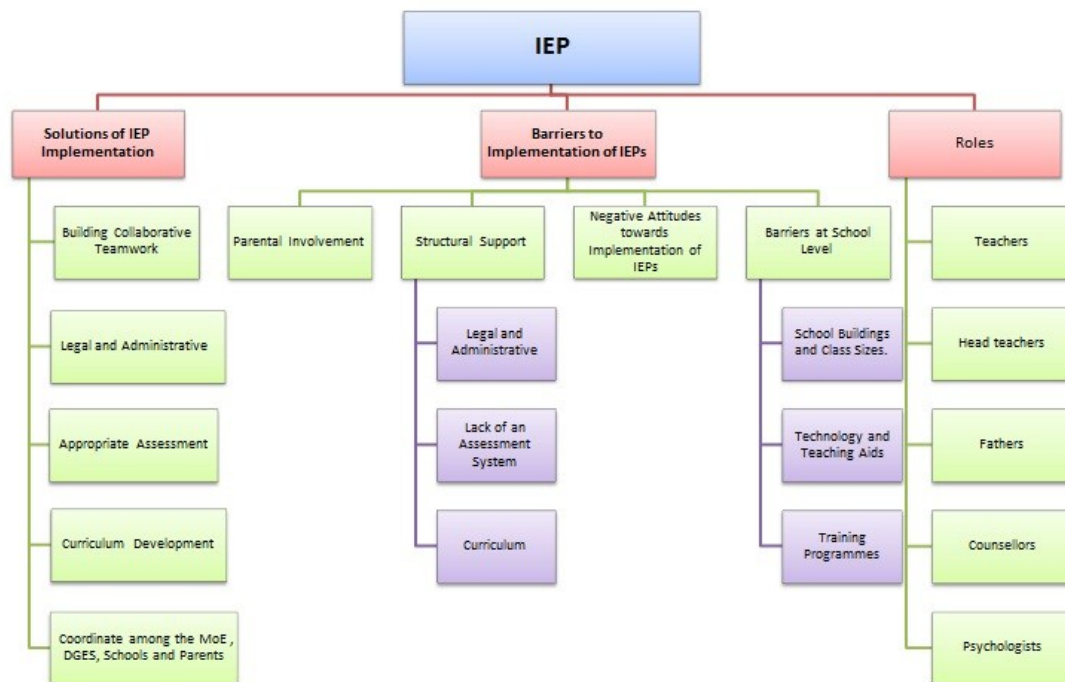
Theme: Challenges to IEP

Code: Challg IEP

The third phase entailed gathering all data relevant to each theme. Braun and Clarke (2006: 83) advocate the use of an inductive approach in which themes identified are ‘strongly linked to the data themselves’. In this study, while the identification of themes was indeed a data-driven process, it was partly influenced by the researcher’s theoretical framework based on the four layers of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system theory (section 3.6.2). At this stage, the data were analysed according to the separate emerging themes, in order to achieve a complete understanding of each of these themes individually and in the context of the overall framework of ecological theory. Blending participants’ understandings with those of the researcher generated multiple meanings and perspectives, while allowing space for the coexistence of diverse perspectives and the unfolding of new meanings.

Kvale (1996: 190) describes data analysis as a process that ‘involves developing the meaning of the interviews, bringing the subjects’ own understanding into the light as well as providing new perspectives from the researcher on the phenomena’. Consequently, after a number of themes were established from the interview schedule, the transcripts were subjected to repeated reading and re-examination, constantly comparing them to the theoretical framework and existing literature, which facilitated the creation of a list of themes and subthemes. Each theme was then assigned a file in Microsoft Word and was given a name and an abbreviated code for easy retrieval. The responses were then grouped by themes under the relevant categories. The main themes under which the data were grouped are displayed in figure 4.2. Finally, each data extract was inserted under the relevant theme or subtheme.

Figure 4.2: Thematic analysis model of all major themes



The fourth phase consisted of studying the identified themes and making sure that data and codes were consistent with each relevant theme. This was done at two levels. The first involved reviewing the coded data extracts. Each set of collated extracts was subjected to a careful reading to make sure that they formed a coherent pattern and were consistent with the allotted theme. As a result, some extracts were found not to fit under their existing themes, so new ones were created to accommodate them. The second level of phase four involved reviewing the entire dataset. Each individual theme was revisited with the aim of considering the extent to which it accurately represented the meaning of the dataset as a whole. This meant coding additional data within the themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 91), ‘the need for re-coding from the data set is to be expected as coding is an on-going organic process’. The following example shows four subthemes generated for the theme ‘Barriers to IEPs’:

Theme: Barriers to IEPs

Code: Barr IEPs

1. Parental Involvement
2. Structural Support
3. Negative Attitudes towards Implementation of IEPs
4. School Level

In the fifth phase, themes were defined and named. Braun and Clarke view the process of defining and refining as ‘the essence of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures’ (2006: 92). A detailed account of each theme was written, highlighting interesting aspects raised in the data, with careful consideration of the themes themselves and of the research questions. This was followed by giving each theme a working title. These titles were precise names which could provide the reader with a sense of what the theme was (see Appendix F for an example of a theme and coding framework for thematic analysis).

The final phase was to write a report of the qualitative data analysis, supporting the findings within each theme, to serve as the foundation of a discussion of the major research outcomes. This report provided ‘sufficient evidence of the themes within the data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 93). All participants’ responses were divided into five groups: teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and fathers. In order to ensure clarity while also ensuring the confidentiality of participants, responses were coded using a system of descriptive labels and numbers (Teacher 3, Father 4, Head 2, Psychologist 1 and Counsellor 5).

4.10 Quality of Research and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the establishment of validity is different from that in quantitative research, where it means that the research tools accurately and effectively measure the variables for which they have been specifically designed (Golafshani, 2003). The concept of validity is more broadly described in qualitative studies as quality, rigour and trustworthiness (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Furthermore, opinions differ as to what counts as valid qualitative research. Creswell (2007: 202) lists some views on the matter:

‘These perspectives are viewing qualitative validation in terms of quantitative equivalents, using qualitative terms that are distinct from quantitative terms, employing postmodern and interpretive perspectives, considering validation as unimportant, combining or synthesizing many perspectives, or visualizing it metaphorically as a crystal’.

For a study to be meaningful and trustworthy, it is essential that its individual processes be conducted fairly, representing the perceptions and experience of the study sample as closely as possible (Ely, 1991). In qualitative research, the idea of trustworthiness refers to the level of belief that others can have in the validity and dependability of the research findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The main way to increase the degree of trustworthiness is to generate a larger amount of high-quality data from which to draw conclusions (Deacon, 2000). In fact, many agree that ‘when reality is viewed in this manner, internal validity [trustworthiness] is a definite strength of qualitative research’ (Merriam, 1998: 203). According to Petty et al., (2012: 381) trustworthiness is ‘the confidence or trust one can have of a study and its findings and is determined by those assessing a study’. A wide range of methodological approaches can be used to increase the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study. These include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, member checking and thick description (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In the context of this study, the following steps were taken to support the quality and trustworthiness of the research results: triangulation, prolonged engagement techniques and re-checking with participants.

Triangulation relies upon the use of a wide array of data to identify any emergent trends or reveal inconsistencies, which is normally achieved by using data from multiple sources (Creswell, 1998). Triangulation in data collection helps to compare data and to identify discrepancies and disagreements among the data gathered from various sources (Robson, 2011). In education research, data should be gathered from several different schools and from a variety of people in each school (Denzin, 1970). The current study used both triangulation of sources and triangulation of method. In terms of sources, data were collected from four mainstream primary schools with facilities for students with intellectual disabilities, where the interviewees represented the full spectrum of IEP team members set out in the RSEIP, namely special education teachers, the fathers of students with intellectual disabilities, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists. As to triangulation of method, the empirical data gathered by means of these interviews were supplemented by documentary data of the RSEIP document (Table 4.4). Although the findings of the present study may be useful to other SEN researchers and practitioners in similar contexts, it should be stressed that triangulation was not done in

order to generalise the findings, as that is not the aim of this study, but rather to gain a fuller and more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under investigation.

Table 4.4: Triangulation of methods and sources

Methods	Sources
Documentary data (Macrosystem)	RSEIP policy document
Semi-structured interviews (Mesosystem and exosystem)	IEP team members (teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and fathers)

Prolonged engagement refers to the collection of data over an extended period of time, which may be less than six months or more than two years (Ely et al., 1998). It ensures ‘the investment of sufficient time to achieve a certain purpose’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 19). In the present case, visits to schools to collect data took place from mid-May to the end of August 2012, allowing the researcher time to gain an excellent insight into the ways in which IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities were implemented there.

As to the technique of re-checking with participants, it is important to note that a qualitative stance was adopted in this study while recognising the potential for the beliefs and values of the researcher to affect the findings, thereby potentially harming the overall validity of the research. This means that data processing and analysis approaches must be considered for authenticity and appropriateness with as much rigour as the findings themselves. This was managed, in part, by giving the participants an opportunity to validate their responses before the analysis and interpretation processes were even begun. This aspect of validation concerns construct validity, which can be seen as ‘the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it’ Scheurich (1997: 83). One way to achieve this is to ensure a degree of consistency between the constructed realities of the researcher’s interpretation of the data and findings on one hand, and the realities and perspectives offered by the respondents on the other.

One of the methods used in the present study to ensure accuracy in the data collection and analysis was the recording and transcription of all the interviews. Therefore, each interviewee was sent a written transcript in the original Arabic, by email, to check for

any areas of confusion, whether on the part of the researcher or the respondent. In addition, there were telephone discussions (if required) to confirm that things were well understood from the participant's standpoint. The researcher then translated the interview data from Arabic to English. The aim of language translation techniques, which are central to many cross-cultural qualitative research studies, is to minimise potential threats to validity (Esposito, 2001). To check for accuracy of meaning and consistency in translating the data, the present researcher asked a colleague who, like himself, was fluent in both English and Arabic to independently translate the quotes from Arabic to English. The two translations were found to be similar and resulted in no significant differences in the interpretation of what interviewees had said. Next, the researcher translated the quotations into English and sent to a member of staff at the SEN Department of King Saud University, who translated them back into Arabic to verify that the resulting text was close to the original Arabic transcripts of the interviews. The researcher then took advice from colleagues to address issues that arose in terms of using the correct translation of certain phrases or words from Arabic into English in order to ensure rigour and accuracy.

4.11 Researcher's Positionality

Notwithstanding the three-stage verification of the validity of the research and its findings described in the previous section, it is important to acknowledge my own positionality as an educator and a teacher of special education with nine years' experience. As a result, I was at the same time an insider, an outsider and sometimes both, as suggested by Kerstetter (2012). As an insider, my educational background, cumulative experience and direct involvement with these schools can be seen to have put me at an advantage in studying the views of IEP team members in relation to students with ID, enabling me to engage research subjects more easily and utilise their mutual experiences to collect a much richer and deeper dataset than would otherwise have been possible. 'The issue of researcher membership in the group or area being studied is relevant to all approaches of qualitative methodology as the researcher plays such a direct and intimate role in both data collection and analysis' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 55).

One drawback of the insider approach, however, is that one could find it hard to separate one's individual experiences from those of the respondents (Kanuha, 2000), to acknowledge the possibility of biased opinions (Serrant-Green, 2002) or to deal adequately with matters of confidentiality in the case of conducting interviews with colleagues or other community members about sensitive issues (ibid). From my experience of teaching boys in mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia, I became aware of the sensitivities surrounding IEP implementation from the perspective of fellow IEP team members. Furthermore, I shared my gender, culture, religion and ethnicity (Saudi/Arab) with the community being studied. I also held the same understanding of how a gender segregated school system operated on the ground. As an insider, I was uniquely positioned to understand the issues that IEP team members faced in putting RSEIP policy into practice. I was also aware, however, that the interviewees might be consciously shaping their answers to some extent, to comply with what they believed I expected to hear from them. The research relationship and power dynamics were factors that needed to be considered, so I took care to remind interviewees of the purpose of the study, to assure them of confidentiality and to give them further opportunities to increase their understanding of the interview questions and to review their responses accordingly.

As a male researcher undertaking this study within a gender segregated school system, this meant that the study focused on boys' primary schools for students with intellectual disabilities. Within this cultural context all study participants were male; students, fathers and school staff. This has shaped the research field for this study by limiting, to a point, the information yielded on individual research participants as compared with other research findings from other countries that might include both male and female participation.

While it seemed unavoidable that I would maintain an insider's approach, I also attempted to be as objective and emotionally distant from the situation as I could, emulating an outsider's approach to the research participants, although being too distant can make it difficult to elicit the desired data from respondents (Chawla-Duggan, 2007). According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), there are few instances when a researcher would be seen as a total insider or outsider. Mercer (2007: 7) argues that this aspect of positionality is a continuum and that in some interviews; particular topics may appear to

‘engender a greater degree of insidersness’. In my research, I have opted more or less for what Dwyer and Buckle (2009) term ‘the space between’, i.e. neither a total insider nor a complete outsider. I have to stress that this space between two extremes is typified by a number of multidimensional characteristics, including cultural background (Saudi/Arab), religious considerations (Islamic conservative society) and relationships with respondents. In fact, all researchers have to work out where they are positioned within this space and determine how their position may impact on the research process and its final outcome (Serrant-Green, 2002).

I was committed to ensuring that the findings were a true reflection of an etic perspective, that of the participants, not an emic perspective, my own (Fram, 2013). Therefore, I had to be careful not to let my own views over-influence the questions and how I interpreted the answers. On the other hand, I acknowledge fully the autonomy of the participants’ voices, both during the process of collecting data and their subsequent analysis, insofar as I perceive them as playing an active role in the reality in which they were positioned, whilst through their roles both influencing and being influenced by this reality. Accordingly, my voice in the analysis of interviews is presented as ‘one of many’ and is decentred in favour of ‘a polyphonic display of the voices of the researched’ (Grbich, 2007: 19).

4.12 Access and Ethical Considerations

A number of key procedures have been followed throughout this research in order to ensure full compliance with regulations and guidelines on research ethics stipulated by the University of Lincoln, thereby ensuring adherence to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association. According to Sieber (1993), ‘ethics has to do with the application of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair’ (cited in Wellington et al., 2005: 104). A discussion of ethics should not focus on making any particular moral judgments, but rather on ‘the meaning and justification of moral considerations which underlie research’ (Pring, 2000: 142). The ethical framework should protect, as much as possible, all groups involved in the research, including respondents, organisations, funders and investigators, throughout the research process and at the publication stage. In this regard, Wallen and Fraenkel (2001: 23-24) list three key issues that researchers

should address: ‘protecting participants from harm, ensuring confidentiality of research data, and avoiding the knowing deception of research subjects’.

For this study, an ethical research proposal was completed and considered by the CERD Research Ethics Committee of the University of Lincoln. The proposal was duly approved by the chair of the University’s Ethics Committee (Appendix A). Only once ethical approval had been granted and permission obtained from the relevant authorities did this research begin. Upon gaining ethical approval, I began the long and time-consuming process of seeking access to schools, in addition to submitting an application for a provisional offer from the MoE to conduct this research at four mainstream schools in the Riyadh region selected for this study (Appendix B). The study, including its core aims and objectives, was then discussed with a number of key stakeholders in the MoE, namely representatives from the Department of Curricular Development, the Department for Educational Research and the Directorate General of Special Education.

Once the provisional offer had been obtained, it was submitted, along with the research plan and other supporting documents, to the Saudi Cultural Bureau in London, in order to formally address my sponsor, the University of King Saud in Riyadh, with a request for the approval of the data collection process. Two months later, after final approval had been granted (Appendix C), further personal contact was made with the MoE with a request to issue letters to the region’s LEA in Riyadh, as the next stage in enabling the data collection process. The LEA in Riyadh agreed to contact the selected mainstream boy's schools for students with intellectual disabilities to secure admission with IEP team members, which meant that individuals could then be contacted for their permission to participate, giving their informed consent after having been assured of their confidentiality and anonymity within the research.

Prior to the commencement of this study, consent forms (in Arabic) were submitted to, and completed versions obtained from, all participants involved in the study. These forms included an explanation of the aims and purposes of the study as well as the benefits to be expected (Appendix D). In addition, the informed consent process included requests for participation and noted the rights of participants to withdraw from the study at any stage without affecting their treatment by their schools, thereby ensuring that ‘informed consent implies informed refusal’ (Cohen et al., 2000: 51).

At the first stage of the interview process, before the interviews started, each participant was assured of confidentiality and anonymity within the research study. They were also assured that any information that they supplied would be used only for the purposes of the study. Once permission had been granted, the interviews were recorded, although if requested, the recording process could be suspended. This was particularly important in ensuring that participants felt comfortable in disclosing certain personal details during the interview. Participants were also assured that the characters and codes used to describe them in the analysis, discussion and publication of the data would not be assigned in a manner that enabled their identification. As an illustration of this, assurances were fulfilled through the use of pseudonyms and the listing of the interviews in a random order to protect the identities of participants. Finally, once data had been collected, they were stored in a safe place and were not shared with any third parties such as supervisors, teachers or school head teachers.

The design of the current research concentrated on ensuring that deception and bias were given careful attention. Deception 'relates to the act of the researcher intentionally deceiving the informants to gain information' (Creswell, 2007: 242). In order not to privilege one participant over another, each interviewee was given the opportunity to review his interview transcript and to clarify or comment upon his responses if necessary. Non-discriminatory language was used, with every effort being made to avoid stereotyping or the use of labels. Unless agreed beforehand, off-the-record information was deleted from the analysis in order to ensure that the participants were not harmed.

In order to avoid the problem of deception, important information about the purposes and benefits of the research was communicated to each participant, so that he could understand the relevance of the study in light of the application of IEPs. The moral and political interests of the study were also made clear, particularly the aim of empowering participants by problematising the ways in which they perceived and portrayed the phenomenon. Finally, as researcher, I explained that my personal objectives in conducting the research included understanding the field and gaining a higher level qualification. Recognition of the value being placed on their contribution seemed to give participants the sense that their efforts were appreciated.

4.13 Limitations of the Study

A number of challenges may be seen as having constrained the success of this study. The first problem was to persuade IEP team members to participate, as many were busy and unaware of the importance of qualitative research. Secondly, there were challenges in accessing the most suitable schools which would welcome the data collection process. The three months available for data collection were also insufficient to conduct a very large number of comprehensive face-to-face interviews, given the time needed to do so and to analyse the data.

Another constraint to the data collection process was the degree of gender sensitivity in Saudi Arabia, which made face-to-face interviews with female participants impractical. As noted in section 4.7, the strictly gender segregated culture and school system in Saudi Arabia meant that the study was limited to boys' schools and that all study participants, staff and parents alike, were male. This has shaped the research field for this study by limiting the breadth of data as compared with research in other countries, which might include both male and female participants. A recommendation is duly made in Chapter 8 (section 8.4) that complementary research should be conducted in Saudi girls' schools by female researchers.

A further set of obstacles were the geographical and financial factors making it unfeasible to arrange visits to all parts of Saudi Arabia and restricting the conduct of face-to-face interviews to one city, Riyadh. Had it been feasible to involve a much larger sample from all regions, the research might have had different outcomes, but this would have required the investment of more time and money than were available for a doctoral research project. The qualitative methods of data collection and analysis also mean that the findings of the study cannot be generalised. Finally, as is often the case with educational research, there was a risk of eliciting false information from Saudi IEP team members because they might have been reluctant to reveal their true opinions about sensitive educational issues, such as students with intellectual disabilities or the use of IEPs.

Despite the limitations discussed here, this research has made some major theoretical and practical contributions, which are considered in the final chapter (section 8.2).

4.14 Concluding Remarks

This chapter started with a discussion of the main kinds of research philosophy. This was followed by a detailed account of the approach informing the present study. Attention then shifted to a review of the research design and the reasons for having chosen a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology. There was then a focus on documentary data as a useful supplement to the interviews that were used as the main source of data collection, before a discussion of the relationship of the methodology to the theoretical framework of the study. The piloting, data collection and data analysis stages were described and the sampling procedure justified. The chapter ended with discussions of research quality, ethics and the limitations of the study. The following chapters present, analyse and discuss the research findings, beginning in Chapter 5 with interviewees' views of their roles and duties on the IEP team.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Findings:

IEP Team Members' Views on their Roles and Duties towards IEP Implementation

Chapter Five

Discussion and Findings: IEP Team Members' Views on their Roles and Duties towards IEP Implementation

5.0 Introduction

This chapter is the first of three presenting the research findings which were obtained through an analysis of the 20 semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 IEP team members and of the RSEIP policy document as described in Chapter 2. The outcomes of this research have been divided into two chapters, each of which addresses one of the three main research questions. This chapter presents the findings that relate to my investigation of the main duties and roles of the current (IEP) team members. It describes how plans are implemented according to the perspectives presented by the different team members in the interviews and this is compared with the account of how the policy document suggests IEP teams should work. Chapter 6 goes on to explore IEP team members' accounts of the challenges and ineffective strategies that restrict IEP implementation. Chapter 6 also draws upon the IEP teams' suggestions and my analysis of the data relating to what is and is not working. Chapter 6 discusses recommendations for future policy and practice, as well as suggestions on how to improve IEP implementation for students with intellectual disabilities. Finally, Chapter 7 provides the findings presented in Chapter 6 using the model of Bronfenbrenner (1979).

To aid the analysis of the data and my evaluation of the challenges faced in implementing the IEP the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory is employed; in particular it is used to explore the four interrelated systems he describes: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (see section 3.6.2).

Generally speaking, the findings from the documentary data of the RSEIP policy and the interviews revealed a disconnection between the macrosystem and every other level of the system. These findings indicate there are poor understanding, poor communication, and poor coordination among IEP team members. My analysis using Bronfenbrenner's ecological system demonstrates how there are problems with the flow from macro policy through the different systemic levels to the microsystem. The

findings described below begin with a description of IEP team members' poor understanding of their roles according to the RSEIP policy document. Drawing on findings from the qualitative semi-structured interviews, the ensuing sections present an analysis of five distinct roles within the IEP team within the exosystem which is the level at which the teams interact with one another to create the IEP. Each section is based upon interviews with different groups who represent different members of the IEP team which comprises of: teachers of students with SEN (Section 5.1); the head teacher (Section 5.2); the counsellor (Section 5.3); the psychologist (Section 5.4); and, the parents of students with intellectual disabilities (Section 5.5). Each section therefore critically analyses the relevant parts of the policy document and the specific accounts of participants. Where applicable these are discussed in the light of findings from the literature review and the theoretical framework. The next section will focus on the roles of teachers of students with SEN.

5.1 Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers of Students with SEN

‘The SEN teacher has a noble mission and a message in society. He/she is entrusted with the students’ welfare and is primarily responsible for their righteous upbringing and education in order to achieve the overall objectives of the educational policy in the Kingdom’ (MoE, 2002: Article 39, 53).

Whilst SEN teachers are required to play a central role in developing and implementing IEPs, it is also clear that they are to be part of a team (see Chapter 2). The macro (policy) level states that the cooperation of other team members is needed and that teachers should not work in isolation. Therefore, even if teachers working alone appear to be acting responsibly, teachers should not be doing so. Their responses which are described below conflict with the stipulation that they should:

‘Prepare the individual education plans and seek to implement them in coordination with members of the IEP team’ (MoE, 2002: Task 2, 55).

The SEN teachers included in this study are class teachers who have students with ID who are in a separate class in a mainstream school all day. The RSEIP policy document places emphasis on the central role of SEN teachers in implementing the IEP, it suggests they should have:

‘active participation in: the evaluation and diagnosis processes with a view to identifying the basic needs of each student; the preparation of IEPs and striving to implement them in coordination with members of the team plans; teaching students with SEN the relevant skills referred to in the IEPs; helping parents of children with special needs to identify and realise the psychological and social effects of a disability on the behaviour of their children; provide parents with the educational tools which would facilitate the task of following up their children's schooling; as well as introducing parents to the services available for them at the school and in the wider community; and, cooperate, coordinate and strengthen the channels of communication between the families of children with special needs and administrators in the school’ (MoE, 2002).

Given the size of this role and their centrality to the lives of children with SEN it is important to know what their teachers do in relation to creating IEPs and how they work with students with intellectual disabilities. At the microsystem level of the child, the teacher has the primary direct-contact during the school day. At the exosystem, the teacher is dependent upon the successful workings of the IEP team. A lack of communicative interactions with individuals and agencies at the mesosystem levels, by the teacher, will also impact the child's microsystem.

The findings suggest that teachers of SEN take a leading role in the coordination and implementation of IEPs, which as discussed below, should not be their role. It would seem here that the SEN teacher is doing too much on the ground in the creation of the IEP as well as being responsible for the IEP implementation in school. Teacher 5 illustrated this attitude:

‘I developed the IEP in terms of its preparation and I am responsible for implementing the IEP for children with special needs. A special education teacher is one who leads the implementation process of the plan, as opposed to the rest of the team who [no details concerning the team overseeing the plan] are only there to sign on the IEPs’.

Teacher 3 of students with SEN shared the same view:

‘My role involves the preparation and implementation of individual education plans for students with intellectual disabilities, in coordination with the resident supervisor within the school’.

There was no mention of the rest of the team by interviewees in this respect and it appears the work of a team is being disproportionately undertaken by teachers. This is not in line with the macrosystem as envisaged in the policy document, which stipulates that a team must work together at school. Without a transdisciplinary approach there is no sharing of ‘information, knowledge, skills, and where team members worked jointly on assessments, programme planning and implementation’ (Travers, 2014: 7) to best meet the needs of the students. Teachers’ working alone creates problems because as these teachers strive to cope with a rising workload, it is likely the strain of workload impacts upon the quality of service provided to each child. This means the school practice advocates the teacher is doing too much.

The participants were asked about their personal views of IEPs and the importance they ascribed to their role in creating them. In general, teachers of SEN students appeared to feel that their role in IEP design was important, which suggests that the attitudes of Saudi teachers are consistent with those from other countries, as reported by Stought and Palmer (1998), and Nevin et al. (2002). Teacher 2 provides a good example of this as he describes the way that he believes teachers play an important and solitary role in the development of IEPs:

‘My role in the plan is central, because it involves designing and implementing the plan, as well as setting the short- and long-term goals for each student, based on their educational needs. In addition, I also have the responsibility of preparing the plan to assess the current levels of performance of students with intellectual disabilities. Besides this, I have to seek to strengthen these objectives and determine whether or not the goals have been achieved for each child’.

In support of this view Teacher 2 also indicated that he took on a lot of the IEP development and implementation work without support from the wider team:

‘I have identified individual differences among intellectually disabled students to enable me to give them proper guidance and to then assist them to grow, in accordance with their abilities and interests’.

These findings indicate that the teachers of SEN students interviewed were committed to implementing their roles as stipulated in the RSEIP document regarding IEPs. However, they also suggest that teachers went beyond what was prescribed by the

RSEIP. All five teachers interviewed gave examples to show how the IEPs were implemented largely by them without the cooperation that the RSEIP suggested was needed. For example, Teacher 4 showed this in the following excerpt and also indicated that the focus of IEPs was on academic learning outcomes as opposed to, for example, broader social or emotional skills:

'In fact, being a teacher of SEN students, all IEP designs are unified in the school where I teach. They are specified in the form of module objectives that refer to targets which the student is expected to achieve within a specified period of time. I was responsible for implementing these plans in the special class [...]. All mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh devise the IEPs based on individual needs [...]. Most of the individual educational plans implemented are personal endeavours by teachers according to their particular school. In addition, no strategy is uniform among the individual educational plans within mainstream schools'.

Also, as indicated by the above, teachers revealed that they used a similar IEP process but the plans were different even though they were all in the same city: so there could be different sub-headings and the actions that get noted and advised can vary. These individualised approaches by teachers mean that there is likely to be little coordination across schools and a variety of plans will then lead to a variety of approaches to working with students who have ID. A consequence of people working with different plans is that there is no co-ordinated and formal mutual learning process or development of practice that takes place across schools. This can be attributed to the teachers' not really understanding the role of others and as viewing themselves as solely responsible for the implementation and monitoring of IEPs in their schools. For example, Counsellor 2 mentioned this dominant role of the teacher and suggested that it fostered the non-participation of others. He pointed out that:

'The process of our not activating the roles needed to generate individual educational plans by a team is primarily due to the teacher of SEN. For example, the teacher alone presents all the individual plans to the school head teacher, effectively ignoring the rest of the team'.

Psychologist 1, Psychologist 3, Counsellor 1 and Counsellor 4 agreed with Counsellor 2. Counsellor 4 explained how the teachers took on his role:

'Teachers of SEN students cancel out my role in the process of applying the individual educational plan, as they communicate directly with the parents of intellectually disabled children using their mobiles and e-mail'.

This situation can be attributed to teachers' belief in the importance of their participation and its positive impact. For example, Teacher, 1 shared his sense of responsibility and commitment:

'I was solely implementing the IEP in my school [...]. This is a positive trend because these individual educational plans help children with mental disabilities to integrate with ordinary children in their respective schools, and to change the negative attitudes towards students with SEN to be more accommodating and positive'.

This view is not uncommon in the sample; such teachers seemed to be working alone and without the active participation of other team members, without any sense that there could be better working relationships. SEN teachers seemed to be responsible for the coordination, which should not be their role. Teachers in Saudi Arabia are not alone in this as this result seems to be in agreement with McLaughlin, and Lewis (1995); Williams (1999); Heumann; Warlick (2000); Hanafi (2005) and Al-Herz (2008) who argued similarly in other contexts. They appear to have overall control of the IEP and that it was they who carried out all the functions designated as necessary in the RSEIP. They did not see a problem with this and reported that they felt their specialisation in the field enabled them to effectively plan and implement IEPs through their particular understanding of intellectual disabilities and the needs of their students. Teacher 3 expressed this view of the application of IEP:

'From my point of view, teachers are crucial members of IEP teams because they have active participation in the preparation and implementation of any plans for children with intellectual disabilities based on the curriculum of the Ministry of Education'.

So this teacher is typical in that he appears to emphasise the importance of his understanding of the curriculum and its relationship to the children's disabilities. However, this seems to disregard the expertise that head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and parents could bring to the team. Teachers really only seemed to feel that collaboration amongst SEN teachers and good communications within the

mainstream school were critical to IEP implementation. This is encapsulated in this quotation from Teacher 5:

'The positive collaboration with teachers of intellectually disabled students is an extremely significant element of teamwork [...]. Teachers are essential participants in the implementation of IEPs as well'.

The findings of the current study indicated that there is a lack of communication between teachers and the rest of the team members. It might be that teachers do not collaborate with others because this has not worked in the past. For example; Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 stated that even when IEP teams only consist of a few members there is an overlap of roles between them. Teacher 1 stated in the following extract that:

'The level of cooperation among the IEP team members in mainstream schools was weak, with fairly bad communication between them regarding the implementation of IEPs'.

Teacher 4 also agreed with Teacher 1 and Teacher 2, stating that one of the barriers limiting the application of the IEP is the lack of cooperation between the teams during the preparation and implementation of the IEPs. He gave an example to illustrate the gap between the school staff and the teachers of students with SEN, as shown in the following interview excerpt:

'The lack of the cooperation between IEP team members with special needs teachers is particularly problematic in mainstream schools'.

Going back to the literature review, this seems to be in line with the findings of Menlove et al. (2001), whose study aimed to investigate the obstacles to the participation of teachers in the IEPs. The poor cooperation indicates that teachers do not feel that they are part of the IEP team.

The other data, which is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections, revealed that the spirit of teamwork may be lacking in other team members. Teacher 3 agreed with the three teacher interviewees above, indicating that there are obstacles to collaboration as suggested by Travers (2014):

'There is an absence of the spirit of teamwork in the educational environment that requires the use of IEPs'.

The aim of the above analysis is not to imply that the participating teachers of intellectually disabled children had bad intentions towards their students, but that their practices had led them to believe they were solely responsible for the IEPs and their implementation which did not allow them to fully take into account the interests of these children. In general all of the teachers I interviewed were committed to inclusion as described in section 3.5.1 and below. For example, Teacher 2 indicated that inclusion was a flexible educational policy which is used to improve and expand the educational programmes for students with intellectual disabilities:

'An IEP, if it is applied in an appropriate way, can enhance the process of inclusion and activate the quality of education for a student with intellectual disabilities'.

As described in Chapter 2, each of the team members is supposed to contribute a specialist knowledge that is essential to representing the child effectively and which cannot be all contributed by one group of professionals. In this sense, it can be argued that the desire of teachers to promote inclusion through committing themselves to IEP implementation seems to fit in well with the finding of Hanafi (2005), who indicated that IEP implementation was increasing in significance, with a national trend in favour of inclusion. It could also be argued that some teachers may have over emphasised the role they play and their contribution to the IEP process and not be acknowledging that IEPs effectiveness is based upon a range of other factors such as the follow-up procedures undertaken, not only by the relevant departments in their schools, but also by MoE educational supervisors, monitoring IEP practice.

It can be observed from the analysis that teachers of SEN did not seem to understand their role in a partnership of other team members. They also seem to do their own individual thing alone which means that mistakes or bad practice could go unchecked by others and the process of devising and implementing IEPs does not benefit from the critical expertise of all team members. The data below exploring the other IEP team members' views of their roles suggests that the teachers view of their current role and burden is accurate.

5.2 Roles and Responsibilities of the Head Teacher

At the macrosystem level, head teachers are supposed to play a key role in the development of IEPs. As described in Chapter 2, they also have a vital part to play in the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools. They are responsible for all of their schools' activities and need to lead and be role models for the school staff in all aspects of the schools' educative function. The specific duties of head teachers in Saudi Arabia as stated in the RSEIP refer to how they facilitate the inclusion of children with SEN, including the following:

‘General supervision of mainstream schools; striving to provide all of the required tools; creating an educational environment that enables special education students to be included with their peers in both in- and out-of-classroom activities; overseeing the transfer of special education students and ensuring the consistency of standards throughout the academic year; and administering financial matters such as arrears and bonuses to be repaid and disbursed in accordance with the specified regulations’ (MoE, 2002: Article 26, 47).

At the exosystem level, as chair of the IEP team, the head teacher should assume the lead role in organising the team, through careful co-operation and co-ordination with other team members within the mesosystem. Their efforts are supposed to be important to the implementation of IEPs, so through these functions head teachers are charged with directly impacting on the IEP and the children at the microsystem level.

For example, the RSEIP policy stipulates quite a significant leadership role for head teachers in the provision of special education and as part of providing and monitoring the professional development and support of the IEP team. It lists these responsibilities of head teachers:

‘Supervising teachers and undertaking classroom visits, as well as assessing their performance, activities and contributions; contributing to the professional development of teachers by identifying their training needs and recommending the right programmes for them, in addition to monitoring their attendance on courses within the school environment or outside; assessing the effects of these training courses on teachers' performance and collaborating in doing so with the relevant educational supervisors; working with educational supervisors and others whose job description involves visiting the school by facilitating their tasks and monitoring the implementation of their recommendations’ (MoE, 2002: Article 25, 44).

The same article of the RSEIP sets out the responsibilities of the head teacher regarding parents as follows:

‘...consolidating relations with the students’ parents and guardians, inviting them to attend parents’ sessions where they can be updated on their children’s progress in terms of their behaviour and overall achievement, and holding discussions to deal with any issues facing their children; activating school boards, organising meetings with parents to discuss educational and organisational aspects, ensuring that all parties are committed to their respective obligations, in addition to monitoring what has been agreed’ (MoE, 2002: Article 25, 44).

They are therefore supposed to take a communicative role between schools and families. Finally, Article 25 refers to head teachers’ duties regarding training:

‘... participating in meetings, proceedings, and training courses as set out by the General Secretariat of the Special Education and the Department of Education. The head teacher should assess teachers’ performance and training needs regarding IEP practice’ (MoE, 2002: Article 25, 44).

They should also therefore engage in their own training and assess teachers’ performance and training needs. With regard to some aspects of head teachers’ participation, the interviews indicated that head teachers were not fulfilling their official duties; rather they were implementing only a small portion of what the RSEIP policy document (2002) stipulates. As stated above, the head teacher should chair a multidisciplinary IEP team (see Chapter 2). However, many of the head teachers did not seem to understand this aspect of their role and expressed the belief that their role in IEP implementation was in need of further clarification. For example, Head Teacher 4 said:

‘My role is poorly defined concerning the implementation of IEPs within the school’.

Head Teacher 3 expressed a similarly vague understanding of his role:

‘IEPs come from the teachers and my only involvement is to sign them’.

When the researcher asked him if he could explain this statement further, the respondent indicated that head teachers needed clarification of their role, using mechanisms and procedures that would enable them to perform it as described in the RSEIP policy.

In addition, the findings suggest that head teachers often blamed the MoE for not clarifying the head teachers' roles and for not offering the necessary support required to implement the RSEIP document and for the deficits in training programmes in how to implement IEPs. Head Teacher 4 showed this in the following excerpt:

'The MoE has as yet given insufficient attention to the training programmes of head teachers in the implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools'.

Notably, when head teachers were asked about their role in IEP implementation, there was very little agreement among them. For example, with the exception of one head teacher, all of those interviewed indicated that they were not fully aware of what the role entailed or how to undertake the roles assigned to them. For instance, Head Teacher 1 said:

'I do not have any role in the process of the preparation and implementation of individual educational plans. [...]. I don't sign the individual education plans at all'.

Head teachers were not always oblivious to this failing on their part; for example, Head Teacher 3 indicated that he knew that problems arose from his lack of involvement and suggested that his own workload and insufficient administrative support hindered his participation:

'I do not have an active role as specified in the RSEIP document, due to the huge administrative workload on the school [...]. We also do not have other people who can help us with the administrative side of our tasks, such as an administrator, or an administrative assistant, or a supervisor. This means that I have no time to supervise the special education programme and the monitoring of individual educational plans in my school'.

Another participant who provided data conflicting with those who appeared to be unaware of their roles was Head Teacher 5; claiming that he had been made aware of his roles in IEP implementation and explained his role as follows:

'In reality, I have a basic role with regard to the supervision of the teachers and overseeing the individual education plans [...]. A month after the start of the new academic year, I have to assess these plans in terms of their appropriateness for each student with intellectual disabilities'.

It can be seen that the head teachers provided different perspectives on what they thought their role was, but evidence from them and from interviews with other team members suggests that all played a fairly minimal role. For example, many head teachers appear not to have supported or even attempted to understand the IEPs. For example, Teacher 3 said:

'Heads don't have a basic understanding of the individual education plans'.

Teacher 2 agreed, arguing that the role of the school head teacher in the IEP process was marginal:

'He doesn't have any role in the preparation and implementation of individual educational plans. [...]. He doesn't sign the final IEPs at all'.

Such responses make it seem as if some head teachers had not read the RSEIP policy document, which would indicate a failure on their part, as they are supposed to be the leaders in this respect. Indeed, in contrast to the stipulations of the RSEIP document (2002), head teachers tended not to exercise a positive leadership role. Instead, their organisation and management of IEP teams were far weaker than those specified, with many of their responsibilities carried out by the SEN teachers. Another group of SEN teachers agreed with those quoted above. They claimed in interviews that some of the head teachers had not read the policy on developing the IEPs, which Teachers 1, 2, 3 and 4 thought was because some head teachers were not specialised in special education. Teacher 2, for example, said:

'In some mainstream schools, the heads are non-specialists in the field of special education'.

Another interviewee, Father 3, raised the same concerns:

'There is a lack of qualified personnel in non-specialised service providers [...]. The service providers are not specialised'.

Whilst this later respondent did not particularly refer to head teachers on the whole, responses indicate inadequate qualifications among head teachers of mainstream schools when it comes to the implementation of IEPs.

The findings also suggest that the head teachers did not come into direct contact with children, despite being supposed to play an important role at the exosystem in the process of overseeing and promoting the implementation of IEPs. For example, Head Teacher 3 listed some factors that could potentially contribute to the weakening of IEP implementation:

'First is lack of time. Second, the school administration is burdened with other administrative work. Third, the difficulty of communicating with the fathers of intellectually disabled students'.

Head Teacher 2 added another reason for the failure to implement IEPs:

'I have a lot of duties relating to the teaching staff more broadly and to special education staff within the school. This puts a lot of pressure on the heads of mainstream boys' schools'.

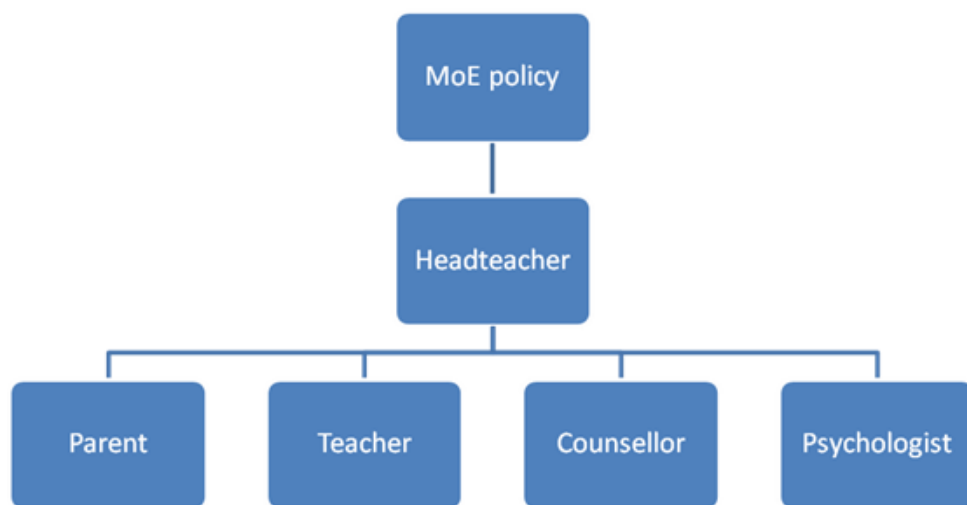
Head teachers have to take on a whole range of administrative and pastoral roles which creates role conflict and an overburdening of their time. Another finding was that head teacher interviewees tended to blame teachers who were unwilling to cooperate with them as IEP team members. For example, Head Teacher 1 said:

'Some SEN teachers are unaware of the implementation of the plans for children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream primary schools. [...]. Teachers don't involve head teachers enough in implementing IEPs'.

Thus, the head teachers interviewed in this study indicated that they failed to adhere to the RSEIP policy document regarding IEP implementation for a number of reasons, including because the local conditions did not facilitate their compliance with it. The suggestion by Teacher 2 that head teachers were insufficiently specialised is of particular interest. In this sense, it is notable that curricula for courses attended by head teachers in Saudi universities include no mandatory modules in the field of special education. Accordingly, it can be argued that head teachers graduate from university with no background knowledge either of special education, of the concept of inclusive education or of the tools required for the preparation and application of IEPs for children with special needs. It is only natural then, in the absence of training in special education, that head teachers will face a number of problems in implementing the IEP process at their schools.

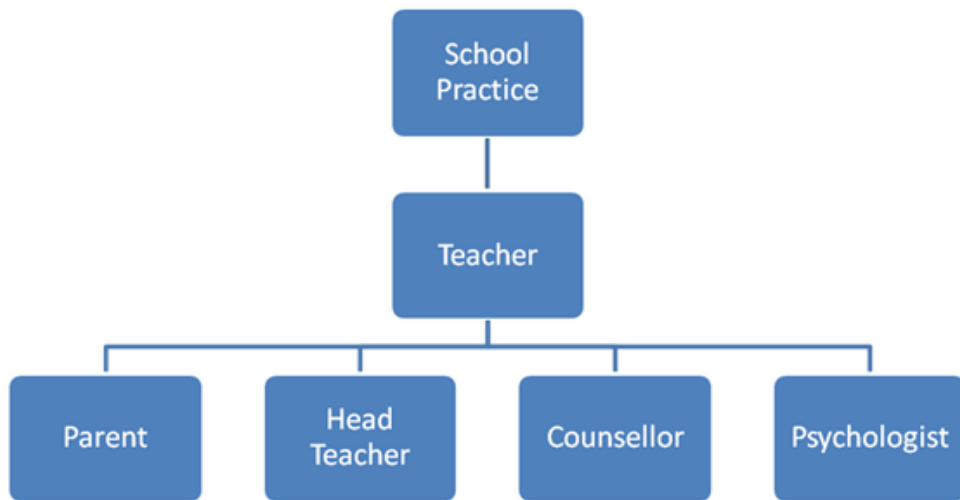
It is also noteworthy that the contributions of head teachers and SEN-qualified teachers who taught children with SEN and were interviewed in this study suggest that at present there appears to be a mismatch between official policy, whereby the head teacher is responsible for the IEP team members and IEP implementation (Figure 5.1), and school practice, where the teacher is in reality fully responsible for IEP application (Figure 5.2). Thus, Figure 5.1 depicts what the RSEIP policy document states should be the relationship between the head teacher and the other IEP team members.

Figure 5.1: MoE policy on IEP implementation



This contrasts clearly with Figure 5.2, which represents the apparent practice of IEP implementation in mainstream schools. It can be seen that in reality, it is the SEN teachers who fulfil the leadership role among the IEP team members and who exercise practical responsibility for IEP implementation in mainstream schools.

Figure 5.2: School practice in IEP implementation



The above findings suggest that the majority of head teachers did not have sufficient knowledge of their official role in the process of applying IEPs in mainstream schools. It also appears that the lack of a clear vision on the part of head teachers and teachers resulted in a gap between RSEIP policy and practice in mainstream boys' schools. In terms of the framework of this research, the policy is created at the macrosystem but is not correctly embedded at the exosystem. For example, the RSEIP document states that the head teacher has the ultimate responsibility for overseeing all education matters, guidance and counselling services required by the IEP, but this responsibility is not in fact exercised.

Finally, the findings discussed above indicate that the head teachers who were interviewed seemed not to put the child at the heart of educational planning, despite the requirement that the head teacher must meet every child's needs. Thus, for a head teacher to create an appropriate exosystem, he would have to play a significant role in improving the IEPs for students with SEN.

5.3 Roles and Responsibilities of the School Counsellor

This section will evaluate the role of the school counsellor. A comparison will be made of how the directives for school counsellors (within the RSEIP document at the macrosystem level) play out in the work of the school counsellors who are in practice

usually situated in the exosystem (as a part of social services). For example, the policy document states that the:

‘school counsellor must be preparing annual plans for guidance and counselling programmes for students with SEN in the framework of the general policy for student guidance and counselling; following up students’ academic and behavioural achievement and providing counselling services for them and working to establish closer ties between the school and parents, and informing the latter about the progress of their student’ (MoE, 2002: Article 50, 61).

So their role is defined as one of planning and of supporting students in the microsystems of the children and the parents. However, an analysis of the school counsellor’s data suggests that in supporting students they generally act only at the exosystem of the children (although by largely working with or communicating with fathers they are working in the child’s mesosystem) and only one of the counsellors interviewed got to work with children. This is partially in line with the school counsellor’s official role as defined by the RSEIP which is to operate at the exosystem, interacting with the other groups of professionals who are involved in developing the IEP. Nonetheless, it does not include the work that is supposed to be done at the micro level, working directly with the student. The policy suggests that counsellors are supposed:

‘... to empower students’ to develop their self-identity in order to help them to: build self-esteem; discover their potential; overcome the difficulties faced to achieve psychological, educational, social and professional balance. These students should also be allowed to build a strong personality, as required in the framework of Islamic teachings, and be trained to achieve self-dependence when solving problems and in discovering their own talents’ (MoE, 2002: Article 50, 60).

However, they are not getting to play a role in directly developing and implementing IEPs. For example, Counsellor 5 described his role in IEP implementation as 'very limited' and Counsellor 2, only operates at the mesosystem by communicating with fathers and does not get to do important aspects of the work. When asked about his role in IEP implementation, he said:

'I did not have any role whether this relates to developing or participating in the IEP. I do not even get involved in the decision-making process because the plan is placed by the teacher and the clinical psychologists involved. As for my role, it only involves establishing contact and cooperation between home and school, and informing parents about their son's academic achievement [...]. To put it this way, I have a communicative role'.

Counsellor 1 does get to operate at both the mesosystem (communicating with fathers) and the microsystem (working with children) but he does not involve initiating or developing the IEP. He stated that:

'My task was to implement awareness and mentoring programmes for fathers in order to help them to become fully conscious of the disability of their child and to provide advice about how to deal with their disabled child. I also aim to prepare a detailed communication procedure between fathers and their respective schools [...]. In fact, the roles of the IEP as laid out in the RSEIP document pertaining to the team has not been applied appropriately for students with intellectual disabilities'.

These participants appear to have been fulfilling a different, more general, liaison role within the school which is more distant from IEP implementation than the specific role and functions outlined within the RSEIP policy:

'Preparing annual plans related to guidance and counselling programmes for students with special educational needs as part of the overall framework of student guidance and counselling; implementing guidance and counselling programmes, along with the appropriate developmental, preventative and therapeutic service; monitoring children's learning and behavioural cases, and providing the most appropriate counselling service; studying individual cases of learners showing negative behavioural signs and appreciating their concerns; seeking to establish closer links between home and school; updating parents on the progress of their children and collaborating with families to raise the academic level of the students and to ensure that they adapt to their existing disabilities to face the learning challenges' (MoE, 2002: Article 51, 60).

This type of role would engage them in microsystem level interactions with the children which would facilitate a useful contribution to the IEP. Counsellor 3 indicated that there is role confusion which has negative consequences for development of IEPs. So in describing his involvement with one IEP team, Counsellor 3 said:

'The IEP team members were not fully aware of the roles assigned to them as stated in the rules and regulations concerning the application of the individual education plan on students with intellectual disabilities'.

Schools rarely effectively draw upon and incorporate the valuable skills and perspectives that counsellors can bring. So whilst it is true that according to the policy document, teachers should initiate communication with fathers, which would serve the stated aim of:

'Consolidating relationships of cooperation and promoting the level of coordination, as well as reinforcing the channels of communication between the parents of students with SEN and school management' (MoE, 2002: 56).

It can also be concluded from the analysis that the findings above raise other problems because if counsellors become the mediators between home and school, lines of communication between fathers and teachers remain closed. For example, SEN Teacher 1 explained in the following interview extract:

'The weak communication between SEN teachers and fathers related to the IEP might impact on the collective work team and the learning process for students with ID within school'.

This means that a lack of communication between teachers and fathers might detract from IEP teamwork and resulting outcomes for the child at school.

5.4 Roles and Responsibilities of the School Psychologist

According to the RSEIP policy document the school psychologist is an important member of the team in the implementation of IEPs at schools. Article 48 of the RSEIP defines the school psychologist's role as follows:

'A psychologist is one who implements the psychological tools, standards and methods with students and provides the appropriate psychological and behavioural treatment programmes for each case' (MoE, 2002: 59).

From the point of view of the macrosystem (RSEIP policy) level, the psychologist is supposed to play an important role in the process of developing the IEP (through administering relevant tests that might help discern what the child needs and then

engaging with the child using psychological techniques such as behavioural therapy) and supporting the process by offering a specific form of expertise and evidence that directs and supports the child. In this sense they are supposed to be operating at the exosystem and the microsystem level. The findings suggest that psychologists were, as the RSEIP suggests, carrying out tasks such as IQ tests and procedures for the measurement and diagnosis of intellectual disabilities in students. However, Psychologist 3 who was involved in this task still thought that there was an inadequate level of implementation of IEP at mainstream boys' schools:

'I did not perform all the tasks related to the psychologists as mentioned in the RSEIP document. Nevertheless, I have implemented some of the duties, such as the assessment of abilities and behaviour for students with intellectual disabilities during the diagnostic procedures'.

The above quotation indicates that this role is only partially that which is defined by the RSEIP, which assigns the following tasks to school psychologists:

'Conducting measurement and diagnosis tests on advanced students and those transferred to special schools or mainstream boys' schools, using formal measurement tools such as IQ tests and adaptive behaviour measures, as well as informal tools, such as interviews, observations and checklists; preparing psychological reports, including the most important measurements and results, recommendations, and proposals for each case; following up and monitoring students' conditions, especially the recent ones, identifying unwanted behaviours and preparing the necessary treatment plans; joining the school team assigned to the individualised educational plan and participating in work-related councils and committees' (MoE, 2002: Article 49, 59).

Furthermore, the interview data indicated that the five psychologists, on the whole, demonstrated that they believed there was poor knowledge of their role in the schools they worked in, in terms of how it is described in the RSEIP document. For example, Psychologist 1 said that there is a clear lack of adherence to the roles prescribed by the RSEIP when implementing the IEPs which has led to role ambiguity:

'I did not perform all the tasks related to the psychologists' role as mentioned in the RSEIP policy document'.

Psychologists 2, 4 and 5 reported they had similar experiences to that of Psychologist 1 and indicated that they also did not fulfil the role as defined by RSEIP. For example, Psychologist 2 stated the following:

'I must stress that my role was not activated according to the RSEIP policy document'.

As the RSEIP recommendations were not adhered to in any of the five contexts explored in this research there was no shared understanding of what psychologists involvement in IEPs should be on the ground in schools and it was felt that this impacted upon their ability to perform their tasks effectively.

Psychologists had a feeling of injustice as they consider that their efforts are not valued and that teachers of students with SEN dominate decision-making regarding IEPs. The psychologists usually believe they are not being utilised sufficiently to implement the IEPs. For example, Psychologist 5 reported that:

'I did not have any role whether this relates to developing or participating in the IEP. I also did not even get involved in the decision-making process because the plan is placed by the teachers of students with SEN'.

Psychologist 4 added that:

'I did not have a specific role because the teacher of SEN students is the leader of the IEP team within the school'.

Broadly speaking, the RSEIP policy identifies the roles of school psychologists, but the actual situation on the ground was that these psychologists performed only some of their allotted tasks, whilst this depended upon the needs of each child to some extent; they were not convinced this actually met the students' needs or fulfilled the potential of their role.

In addition, because the participants above seemed not to be working at the microsystem level with the child in the classroom, so they were hindered in effectively contributing via the exosystem to the IEP. They did not have the type of understanding that arises from working individually with children. Psychologist 1 also indicated that

communication could at times be only at the exosystem with other IEP team members and that this was also perceived as generally ineffective:

'My role basically involved identifying the extent to which a student has improved in terms of his individual learning. Regarding the IEP process, my role includes being with the teacher. In other words, I'm in charge of the analysis of diagnostic and assessment tasks, and the rest is left to the teacher'.

It seemed that there was insufficient coordination and understanding of the roles of psychologists by other IEP team members, which is likely to impact negatively on the child within his immediate environment. This is reflective of difficulties at the mesosystem, for example, the lack of professional development, which is shaping this context in which there is a lack of coherence about what the role should be.

Difficulties within the exosystem (including school administration, MoE; DGSE and the LEA in Riyadh) level appeared to have compounded issues of poor communication and poor coordination within IEP teams and there was a lack of training programmes to address the problems. For example, Psychologist 4 tended to blame MoE, DGSE and LEAs for not fulfilling their roles and for the school psychologists lack of training:

'There was a scarcity of training programmes to improve the performance of the school psychologists with respect to the implementation of the IEP'.

He also suggested that the scarcity of training programmes could be attributed to:

'Two reasons: first, the lack of training courses in the MoE or an allocation of funding for these workshops [...]. Second, there has been no attempt to follow up on the needs of mainstream schools by stakeholders of the DGSE in Saudi Arabia'.

Thus, Psychologist 4 saw that the expansion of the inclusive mainstream schools in Riyadh did not take into account the establishment of workshops and developmental programmes that would be needed for the effective implementation of IEPs. Likewise Psychologist 3 strongly supported the idea that authorities had a lack of awareness about the need for this kind of training. He also thought that if this training did not happen, IEPs would not be implemented, as illustrated in the following account:

'The government of Saudi Arabia seeks expansion of mainstreaming programmes every year in regular education schools [...]. These schools are not well prepared in the implementation of IEPs (there is a lack of preparation).'

Psychologist 5 agreed with Psychologists 1 and 4 above. For example, he claimed that the character and the extent of communication that exists among the members of the IEP team at mainstream schools and the local educational establishment across the Riyadh region is unsatisfactory as is shown in the following interview excerpt:

'There was a lack of cooperation between the school staff and the officials of the DGSE with regards to the preparation and implementation of IEPs.'

It was argued that strategic measures should be put in place to achieve this. From the analysis above, it could be argued that one challenge to collaboration is the differences in the understandings of IEP team members of their roles. Therefore, the relationships and communication between the team members were not conducive to effective collaboration and keeping the child at the centre.

From the data, one of the challenges to collaboration is deficits in training. For example, school psychologists seemed to lack training in special education: none of the five in this study had such training. The RSEIP policy stated that psychologists should support students with SEN and the rest of IEP team members in a set of ways that have an effect on students' learning outcomes in the school. The broader literature also suggests that it is beneficial if the psychologist's contribution is to apply and interpret tests for children with special needs, as well as assessing the overall situation to determine the nature of the challenges faced by the student, in addition to the possibility of introducing amendments to the classroom and educational curricula (Rebhorn, 2002). Similar to the school counsellors, it appears that SEN teachers are not effectively utilising school psychologists as participatory IEP team members.

5.5 Roles of the Fathers of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

It is important to remember that in Saudi culture, the education system is based upon the notion that men and women from different families should not speak to one another in public. Under this system, fathers are responsible for boys in the schools where as

mothers care for boys in the home but cannot communicate directly face to face with the school staff. Occasionally schools can communicate with mothers by telephone or through male relatives from the extended family, but this is rare. To simplify matters and to explore the best case scenario from the point of view of boys' schools, the fathers interviewed were the fathers of male students with ID who attended one of the special education classrooms attached to Saudi public primary schools in Riyadh.

At the macrosystem level, the father is supposed to play a critical role in relation to male students and is postulated as being a great help to the IEP team within the mesosystem. Article 76 of the RSEIP (MoE, 2002: 73-74) lists a fairly lengthy list of duties of the parents towards the school:

‘Responding to requests from the school or the IEP teams in ways that help with the diagnosis, preparation, implementation and evaluation of the plans and inform the assessment underpinning individual plans, individual intervention or follow-up of student progress; working together with the school or the IEP team by authorising diagnosis, preparation of the programmes, and referral of their child to other specialised bodies if needed. In some cases, the right for parents to refuse recommendations and actions is granted; carrying out tasks as requested by the school or IEP team, such as assisting students with their homework and helping them to maintain a certain type of behaviour’.

When fathers were asked about their responsibilities in implementing IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities, their responses varied but as with other participants, important discrepancies were revealed between beliefs, practices and policy. For example, Father 2 did not want to be involved with the IEP team because he had insufficient time:

‘I did not really pay attention to calls from the school to participate in the diagnosis, preparation, implementation and evaluation of the individual educational plan, or even in observing the schooling of my son in other areas [...]. There may be some shortcomings in this respect but my reason was a lack of time’.

In the broader literature a lack of time is often associated with parents being in work during school hours and being too busy to be able to communicate with schools. In the Saudi case this is compounded by the fact that fathers are often the only earners and are

likely to be in full-time work. It might be that this aspect of IEP implementation is more effective in Saudi Arabian girls' schools but this needs investigation as there is no research to consult regarding this.

Father 1 also was not included in IEP creation but this seemed to be more as a result of the school's approach in not inviting or consulting with him:

'I did not have any role because I had not been informed or invited by the school administration to participate, either in the diagnosis or in the preparation and implementation of an individual educational plan for my son, or even in the observation of how my son is getting on with this plan'.

He claimed later in the interview that more efforts were needed if this aim of the RSEIP policy document was to be achieved. Similarly, Father 4 agreed with the participant above. He tended to blame school staff who he says were unwilling to cooperate with him. For him, the role of father participation in the IEP had never been activated because of a lack of information about school procedures. He confirmed that:

'There has been an absence of the role of the school in the activation of father participation in the application of the individual education plans at school'.

So whilst within the macrosystem (RSEIP policy document) in Saudi Arabia fathers are considered to be formally part of the IEP team, in practice they may not see the value of this or they may be excluded by the school. Hence, whilst the RSEIP is defining these parents as being part of the team exosystem, because of their close involvement with the child's microsystem in terms of the development and implementation of the IEP, this is not really happening effectively.

However, one interviewee does indicate that father's involvement might be strongly linked to their sense that there was an effective implementation of IEPs in this context. For example, Father 3 responded:

'I had an active and important role in the preparation and implementation of the individual educational plan [...]. I actually follow whatever IEP team members ask me to do in the school [...]. I help my child at home, such as with his homework, and I am very supportive'.

It is therefore difficult to know if those parents who were negative and claimed that the schools were ineffective had a distorted view of what was happening. This response from father 3 can be said to correspond well with Article 76 of the RSEIP (MoE, 2002: 73):

'The parent has an important role in the upbringing and education of children requiring special education services. As such, the relationship between schools on the one hand and the parent on the other hand is essential and can be activated'.

In general however, contributors to the literature identify the lack of parental involvement (fathers and mothers) as one of the major barriers to IEP implementation which can have a major negative impact on the educational process, leading in turn to weak learning outcomes, as shown in the work of Al-Khashrami (2001), Abdullah (2003), Hanafi (2005) and Al-Herz (2008). In this research, the interview data demonstrates that on the whole, with the exception of one father, fathers were much less involved than most other participants within the IEP process in mainstream schools despite the emphasis given in the RSEIP policy and the wider literature suggesting that parents, both fathers and mothers, have a critical role to play.

In addition the RSEIP specifies a number of duties of the school towards parents:

'First, parents should be allowed to visit the school, to access all information related to their child's programme and to monitor or observe his progress in coordination with the administration. Secondly, the parents' permission should be requested for the purpose of diagnosis and preparation of the programme, and to approve any amendments thereto during or after implementation, or in the case of cancellation. Thirdly, the parents should be allowed to participate in the diagnosis, development and observational activities of the student programme and final evaluation. Fourthly, the parents should be supported to interact with the student by providing parent-oriented training programmes and through the distribution of simplified counselling leaflets. Finally, all parents should be respected when communicating with them or about them' (MoE, 2002: Article 76, 73).

Although this quote is not directly referring to the IEP it is clearly part of an overall framing of a symbiotic relationship between parents and schools that would support students with intellectual disabilities. Some fathers were very keen to be involved in ways that were similar to the roles defined by the RSEIP as was the case with father 3 above.

5.6 Results of Interviews with IEP Team Members about their Roles and Duties in IEP Implementation

Contrasting the analysis of IEP team members' roles in the development and implementation of the plan with those prescribed in the RSEIP (2002) revealed that, all IEP team members were not fulfilling the roles allocated to them as explained in the RSEIP policy document and did not seem to understand the value of the IEP process. Therefore, they inadvertently did not put the child first (as suggested by Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Firstly, the findings suggested that all five teachers of SEN implemented their own vision without any cooperation with the rest of the other team members within the schools (as suggested by RSEIP policy). However, teachers' views better matched those presented by the macrosystem (policy) level than did those of other IEP team members. Nevertheless, they disregarded the process which was put forward by the Saudi government as most effectively representing the child. In other words, this arguably led to poorer outcomes for the students within the microsystem level. The second finding revealed that many other professional participants (head teachers, counsellors and psychologists) appeared uninterested in playing a role in implementing IEPs, which may reflect a lack of knowledge on their behalf. For example, all but two school professionals reported an interaction with the IEP process reflecting insufficient knowledge of their responsibilities relating to IEP implementation as stated in the RSEIP (2002).

The third finding showed that fathers interviewed appeared to have insufficient knowledge of their main duties regarding IEP implementation. In addition, the findings indicated that some of the fathers and school staff failed to collaborate (mesosystem level) which is reflective of the lack of a clear understanding of the roles of IEP team

members. The responses of all of the participants support the idea that a mismatch existed between policy (the macrosystem level) and practice (at the meso and exosystem level). According to research this will eventually result in less satisfactory educational outcomes at the microsystem level for the child (Al-Khashrami, 2001). It can be concluded that the IEP process did not reflect the aims and objectives of the declared RSEIP policy, leading to the existence of a gap between policy and practice with teachers often bearing the major workload in the preparation and implementation of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities.

It can be seen from the above analysis that IEP implementation emphasises the importance of the role of IEP team members and depends on individuals to make specific commitments to this process. Indeed, none of the responses above corresponds to the policy set out in the RSEIP. In particular, participants did not report performing their duties as stipulated in Article 22, as stated in Chapter 1 (see section 1.0). The data demonstrates that the policy provides a macrosystem framework but that this was interpreted and implemented in different ways on the ground and that participants did not necessarily agree on what effective practice should look like in their local context.

5.7 Analysis of the Issues Using Bronfenbrenner's Theory

So far this chapter has shown how the desired functions and roles of the five IEP team members that are set out in the RSEIP (2002) document are not matched by the descriptions of the roles as presented by the representative IEP team members (SEN teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists, and fathers) interviewed for this study. In this section I draw out the way that the problems of the IEP team are represented when analysed using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. The following description is sub-divided according to each layer of the ecological systems theory used in this analysis. Whilst the reader is reminded of the definitions of each of the layers of society described by the theory in each section, the choices made regarding which version of the theory to use and which layers of the system to include are presented in Chapter 3.

Microsystem

The microsystem is defined as ‘a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 22). The table below represents the microsystem of the children with intellectual disabilities and it is used to represent those individuals interviewed who come into direct contact with the children.

Table 5.1: Relationship of the Bronfenbrenner’s Theory to the Microsystem Findings

Level	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Microsystem	√	X	X	X	√

Interaction



Not interaction



As discussed in the Chapter 2 the IEP team are designated members through the policy because they are felt to be representatives of groups who should be interacting with the child to support him and who, on the basis of this interaction, will have specialist knowledge about the child. Their value is in the perspective of the child which arises from their expertise and the interactions with and knowledge of the child. As the diagram above indicates, the findings suggest that the microsystem of children with an intellectual disability at Saudi Arabian mainstream boys’ school’s microinteractions with members of the IEP team mostly only included the SEN teachers (Al-Wabli, 2000; Abdullah, 2003; Hanafi, 2005 and Al-Herz, 2008) and fathers. There was one out of the four psychologists who interacted directly with the children but the trend in this small subsample of schools suggests that this is not usually the case (Al-Nahdi, 2007). Using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory provides a way of beginning to map out the microsystem and to speculate about the issues that may arise from any shortcomings. Whilst there are bi-directional influences and the microsystem of the child is influenced by failings at the exosystem and mesosystem levels. In the other direction members of the IEP team need to be functioning members of the microsystem if they are to contribute to the macrosystem. For example, parents who are effective at interacting with their children in the micro environment will be better equipped to be part of the exosystem and able to help inform the actions of the other team members at the micro

level. The more places (such as the home and the school) members of the IEP team form nurturing and encouraging relationships with the child at the microsystem level then the more likely it is that the child's needs will be represented in the exosystem and it becomes more likely an IEP will be developed that can better support the child to develop.

Mesosystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979: 25) the 'mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)'. The RSEIP denotes that the IEP team should be engaging in activities which it would seem would engage them in rich and frequent interactions around the needs of the child. However, overall the findings revealed that contrary to RSEIP recommendations, there were poor interactions between home-school generally and this included the different agents that are supposed to be involved in the IEP within the mesosystem: the interactions between team members that were (not) represented in the interviews are presented diagrammatically below.

Table 5.2: Relationship of the Bronfenbrenner's Theory to the Mesosystem Findings

Level	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Mesosystem	X Fathers	X Teachers	X Teachers	X Teachers	X Teachers
	X Head Teachers	X Counsellors	X Psychologists	X Head Teachers	X Counsellors
	X Counsellors	X Psychologists	X Head Teachers	X Counsellors	X Head Teachers
	X Psychologists	X Fathers	√ Fathers	X Fathers	X Psychologists

Interaction



Not interaction



The diagram shows how generally the IEP team representatives were not communicating with one another. Even in the one instance where communication did occur between counsellors and fathers, this was described by participants as a one way dialogue with counsellors communicating information to the family on behalf of the school. It was not a mutual discussion. Therefore, it seems apparent that serious difficulties with IEP planning are located within the middle level, mesosystem and in the failure of team members to interact with one another. Whilst the barriers to the effectiveness of IEP creation are largely discussed in Chapter 6 the data in this chapter made apparent that the mesosystem was characterised by participants' poor sense of their roles and the way the number and type of interactions they should be having with other IEP team members.

Thus, inadequate cooperation and coordination was the salient features of the way in which members of the IEP team interacted within the mesosystem.

Exosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979: 25) defines an exosystem as 'one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person'. So for the IEP teams these would be the activities they do as part of that team such as the meetings and activities they do to create the IEP. Table 5.3 illustrates the interaction of IEP team members.

Table 5.3: Relationship of the Bronfenbrenner's Theory to the Exosystem Findings

Level	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Exosystem	Teachers work alone.	Signs off decisions.	Communicate with fathers on behalf of the school.	Analyses IQ testing and directs procedures for measurement and diagnosis.	Fathers are not actively involved in implementing IEP.

Broadly speaking, the analysis of the data indicated that there was no cooperation between IEP team members within the exosystem as this is the layer at which the IEP team should work together and they should be drawing upon the interactions they have

with the child and one another at the micro and meso level. The policy advocates that the IEP teams, who represent significant contributors to the exosystem, are supposed to work flexibly and use a multidisciplinary team approach with the aim of fulfilling each child's needs. Arguably this should involve formal meetings and coordination between team members. As stated above the findings revealed that SEN teachers usually operated with a high degree of independence and initiative. They have a central and solitary role in the creation and implementation of IEPs, and often regard themselves as the leading members of IEP teams. In terms of head teachers, the RSEIP document (2002) specifies it is the head teacher who has the authoritative responsibility. Therefore it is the head teacher who should assume the lead role in organising the IEP team through careful co-operation and co-ordination. Yet, in contrast to these instructions head teachers tend not to exercise such a positive leadership role. Instead their organisation and management of IEP teams are far lower than those specified, with many of their responsibilities carried out by the SEN teachers and theirs being reduced to providing a signature. Equally the role of a school counsellor is to facilitate communication at the mesosystem level between fathers and school staff and findings indicate that they do not carry out this role.

The school psychologists are not as involved in the preparation of IEPs as instructed in the RSEIP policy document (2002) either. For example, one of the roles of the psychologist is IQ testing and procedures for the measurement and diagnosis for students with intellectual disabilities. The parents themselves are expected to support the school and other IEP team members by responding to their various requests and their more intimate knowledge of their child is supposed to be an important facet of the planning. Again, however, this process of father involvement as IEP team members is not occurring and the findings suggest that the poor interactions between IEP team members within the exosystem lead to the exosystem not functioning.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem, as defined by Bronfenbrenner, provides 'Consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro, meso, and exo) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies' (1979: 26). In the current study the part of the

macrosystem that has been focused upon as in the RSEIP document as this is specifically designed to shape what happens in IEP planning and in the life of the child with intellectual disabilities. With regards the findings pertinent to the macrosystem of the current study, it was shown that the RSEIP policy articulates principles and values and stipulates roles in a clear and comprehensive way: this is represented in the below diagram.

Table 5.4: Relationship of the Bronfenbrenner’s Theory to the Macrosystem Findings

Level	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Macrosystem	Clear and comprehensive policy.	Clear and comprehensive policy.	Clear and comprehensive policy.	Clear and comprehensive policy.	Clear and comprehensive policy.

However, using Bronfenbrenner’s model it has been possible to break down and specify what is happening which has given insight into the problems that exist within each level. As the policy seems to very clearly articulate what should be happening and this articulation is concordant with good practice internationally (Polloway and Patton, 1997) it seems that there is a problem with the flow of policy from one systemic level to another. Macro level policy needs to be supported by policies at other levels (e.g. the exosystem level) to support its implementation (Hegarty, 1997). Moreover, the macrosystem lacks adequate legislation and a regulation with respect to the degrees of enforcement (ibid).

In this chapter the current state of play in terms of what currently happens with regard to each representative participant in IEP plans and the way this plays out at different levels of the system has been described to reveal the serious extent of the problem at different levels. In Chapter 6 it will gradually be demonstrated how the application of the Bronfenbrenner (1979) model can be drawn upon to further understand the data regarding the causes of the problems with IEP creation and implementation from the participants’ perspectives. And from this insights will also be developed to assess the degree to which participants descriptions can be resolved by drawing upon

Bronfenbrenner's model to direct attention to systemic failures (and in Chapter 6 remedies). For instance, looking inside the exosystem level it might be argued it could be made more effective by increasing training at the exosystem level but via the LEA. However, it is also the case that broader macrosystem factors such as the cultural stigma attached to fathers of children with SEN makes fathers less willing to participate as IEP team members and that this needs to be addressed through other means in order to facilitate flow between the macro and other levels. Fathers of SEN students (along with the support of other IEP team members, the government and the media) could play an important role in changing these cultural beliefs and this aspect of the country's macrosystem level could be developed in a positive manner.

Generally, the overall findings of Chapter 5 seem to demonstrate that the IEP team members tended to be unsure of their role with respect to the creation and implementation of IEPs accordance to RSEIP policy document. In addition, such uncertainty appears to stem from an extensive range of causes that are associated with all levels of the system. Therefore the creation and implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools in Riyadh are poorly planned and poorly organised, with systemic failings throughout, insufficient communication, a lack of co-operation, and weak co-ordination between IEP team members.

5.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented a discussion of the findings of the study in the light of some of the existing literature and the theoretical framework as it relates to the first research question. This question focuses on the roles of team members in IEP creation and implementation and how this maps onto the policy framework set out in the RSEIP. The broad conclusion is that IEPs are not being properly designed and implemented in accordance with that policy.

Although some team members show a good level of awareness of the concept of the IEP, its objectives and how it should be applied, there was insufficient sharing of the responsibilities with other team members.

The findings indicated that only the teachers of SEN students covered their own roles and appeared to take a leading role in the coordination and implementation of IEPs. While RSEIP policy was to put the child at the centre (microsystem level), as suggested by Bronfenbrenner, this did not happen in practice, because most team members appeared to lack sufficient knowledge of their roles and even teachers did not fulfil their obligations by interacting with and drawing upon the expertise of the IEP team. There were failings at all levels of the system and there appears to be no leadership and coordination of the team at any level beyond the macro level, which ineffectively stipulates that there should be coordination. The description of the extent of the failure using the Bronfenbrenner model sets out the extent of the work needed to improve the current situation. Whilst it is clear that much work is needed it is not clear exactly what form change should take. So arguably there is a need for more policies to provide a framework for monitoring IEP process but it is important to explore the views of those currently involved in the process to understand why they think it is not working.

It is clear that implementing IEPs requires more than the RSEIP policy. It is important to understand the challenges that are faced by those who are trying to develop IEPs. The next chapter discusses the findings regarding these challenges to IEP implementation and its solutions.

Chapter Six

Barriers and Solutions of IEP Implementation

Chapter Six

Barriers and Solutions of IEP Implementation

6.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss some of the main barriers encountered by IEP members, and their suggested solutions to these issues, during the development and implementation of suitable IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh. Due to the number of issues and resolutions suggested, this chapter is comparatively lengthy. For this reason, the analysis of these interview findings in the light of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory, which provides a more systemic analysis of these issues, is provided in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 presented the discrepancy between what IEP members did and what they were expected to do in the implementation of IEPs in accordance with the RSEIP policy. These gaps between policy and practice were attributed to specific barriers that participants identified; a systematic analysis using Bronfenbrenner providing a different perspective on these issues. In this chapter the explanations that participants provided regarding the ineffectiveness of IEPs provide a third narrative that sometimes relates directly to the previous two. Participants' descriptions of the challenges to the implementation of IEP practice in their schools are discussed under four key thematic headings. These headings describe the core barriers identified and the explanations that participants gave of those barriers: the first is the lack of active parental involvement; the second refers to the lack of structural support provided by the school and the LEA; the third refers to negative attitudes towards the implementation of IEPs; and the fourth to school-level barriers. It is argued that the qualitative data that supported the development of these themes creates a more nuanced and complex view of the shortcomings in IEP planning than can be found in the extant literature on IEPs in Saudi Arabia. In many respects the number and range of issues present are almost impossible to address. However, this qualitative study is predicated upon the idea that understanding the perspectives of those who are directly involved in IEP planning offers a rich and valuable insight into what is and is not working, as well as practical routes to address these issues. As noted above, the Bronfenrenner (1979) analysis presented in

the next chapter demonstrates a more systematic way of addressing the complexity described here and in Chapter 5.

6.1 Barriers to Parental Involvement with other IEP Team Members

In this section the findings regarding the difficulties with involving parents reveals a complex picture whereby all parties seem to agree that involving parents is a good idea but they attribute non-involvement to a range of often contradictory factors. In Chapter 5 one of the practices described was that of parents having no contact or relationship with any of the IEP teams and yet all IEP team interviewees agreed on the importance of creating partnerships between parents and schools to the benefit of the upbringing and education of intellectually disabled children. For example, Counsellor 2, made the following comments:

'The working relationship between the schools and the parents should be central to the design of IEPs'.

Teacher 1 said that:

'I struggle to comprehend how strategies can be put into place that will most benefit the students, without first ensuring that the student's mothers and fathers are participating alongside school representatives in building these strategies'.

The interview findings offer some insight into how parents and others view the reasons for fathers' lack of involvement in the IEP team. While some SEN teachers felt that more interaction with parents would be beneficial, SEN Teacher 3 observed that the current form of parental involvement undermines students:

'So what I believe now is that parental involvement in the application of individual plans tended to impede the desired results for the benefit of those students'.

Therefore, the data above suggest that some members of the teaching profession may perceive that the participation of parents in the implementation of IEPs does not lead to positive outcomes for the students. The presence of this belief among select members of the wider teaching community was echoed by other participants, who cited potential

reasons including pressure to focus on classroom activities deemed suboptimal by the teachers (Teacher 1, 3), the extra time required in parental liaison distracting from teaching preparation time (Teacher 4), and parents offering excessive assistance with homework and educational activities, thereby lessening the benefits that should be derived from these by the SEN students. Other SEN Teachers believed that parents did not like to be involved. For example, Teacher 5 said that:

'I believe that the parents do not like to be involved. [...]. Fathers ignored dealing with the school concerning the application of the IEPs, [...]. These fathers are not fully aware of the application of the IEPs on students'.

Likewise, Teacher 2 shared the same view:

'There is no cohesion between the fathers when it comes to implementing of the IEPs in the school, which is also regarded as a waste of time for those fathers'.

Teacher 4 raised the same concerns:

'I think that the percentage of parental participation in the IEP represents 5%. [...]. Fathers do not have sufficient and clear understanding of the purpose behind the individual educational plan. [...]. There is a lack of interest on the part of the Fathers when it comes to the implementation of IEPs'.

Some of the SEN teachers perceived that the obstacles to the participation of parents in applying IEPs relates to parents lack of knowledge of what IEPs are and their value. For example, SEN Teachers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 said that the parents of intellectually disabled students tended to have little information given to them about the ways in which IEPs were applied.

Head Teacher 4 agreed with teachers above, arguing that the low educational level of parents was often a significant barrier to the effective application of IEPs and that it played an important role in parents' non-participation at school. He confirmed that:

'Low educational level of parents of students with intellectual disabilities effects on the implementation of IEP'.

This finding seems to be consistent with the results of a study by Al-Twajiri (2007) which concluded that the low educational level of parents is the most challenging issue in terms of the activation of family participation in the educational process. However, this research also revealed that the reasons for parents' non-participation may be more complex than suggested in this previous research. There was some disagreement about why parents did not participate. For example, Teacher 1 argued that parental participation at school was obstructed by teachers' ignoring the importance of the role that could be played by parents and not encouraging them:

'There is not much desire among the teachers of these students to encourage the participation of parents in the preparation and implementation of the IEPs'.

However, different reasons were also given for SEN teachers' reluctance to take responsibility for including parents. When Teacher 1 was asked why he believed that SEN teachers at mainstream schools were reluctant to foster relationships with their students' fathers, he said that his own practice suggested that:

'The main reason for this may be due to the teachers' lack of confidence in the fathers' ability to participate in a positive way'.

Counsellor 2 and Psychologist 3 both agreed that teachers did exclude parents by not including them in the IEP process but they suggested that one of the main obstacles to a partnership between fathers and the IEP team was the interest that teachers had in focusing on the students directly, and their tendency to ignore the value of participation by the fathers. Psychologist 3 expressed this view simply:

'The SEN teachers focus on the intellectually disabled students rather than on the fathers'.

This implies that focusing on parents should be part of the teachers' responsibility (something that could be challenged if we are to believe policy which suggests that Head Teachers should lead IEP teams) and this notion was reinforced by Counsellor 2 who stated that:

'The SEN teachers did not see the value of parents' involvement'.

He was also referring to the fact that teachers focus on their work with children and do not really think about what the parents have to offer or about their role in communicating with parents in such a way that would encourage them to participate.

Other interviewees, Psychologist 2, Counsellor 1 and Head Teacher 1, also believed that the problem with fathers' participation could be located in the teachers rather than the parents themselves. They stated that one of the obstacles to family participation in the programme was that teachers were busy with educational work, resulting in them not sharing information with parents. Counsellor 1 said:

'The interaction between teachers and parents towards the implementation of IEPs at school is weak'.

Again this type of evidence locates the problem with the teachers and is perhaps indicative of some of the problems described in Chapter 5 regarding peoples' lack of understanding as to who should be taking responsibility for which aspects of IEP work.

On the other hand, some other evidence emerged that suggest that issues were located in the systems and processes. For example, Psychologist 4 disagreed with Counsellor 2, Psychologist 3 and Teacher 1 above and conceded that mainstream boys' schools tended to neglect the role of fathers. Psychologist 4 stated that:

'The school appears not to be aware that there is a need for the participation of students' fathers in the application of the IEPs'.

What is interesting is that much of this evidence suggests that fathers' low participation in implementing IEPs should not be attributed to their low educational level as is suggested in much of the literature such as Al-Twaijri (2007). In addition to this, some of the fathers' views suggested that the school administration should be regarded as the main factor behind fathers' limited knowledge of the implementation of IEPs. For example, Father 4 complained:

'I am ready and quite interested in participating with the school regarding the IEP, but I do not have experience in the process. This is because the school administration has not explained the importance of the IEP [...]. Neither the fathers nor the IEP team have enough knowledge about the available opportunities for cooperation'.

Father 5 agreed with father 4 above. He stated that:

'The school appears not to be aware that there is a need for the participation of students' fathers in the application of the IEPs'.

Father 1 and Father 3 blamed a different aspect of the educational process, arguing that one of the most important obstacles to their participation was SEN teachers' lack of knowledge of the IEPs. Father 3 said:

'From my experience of dealing with SEN teachers, some teachers are unaware of the implementation of the plans for children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream primary schools and they also limit parents' participation'.

Father 4 articulated his expertise as follows:

'I have had many discussions about my son with professional critics of the Saudi educational system from these discussions; it seems the weak teacher preparation in the field of special education related to IEP is due to the undergraduate courses offered by universities in Saudi Arabia'.

The interview findings indicate that many SEN teachers put so much effort into the education of students with intellectual disabilities that they found it difficult to communicate with parents. For example, Teacher 4 felt that:

'There was a lack of parents' communication with the SEN teachers on IEPs process'.

SEN teacher 5 agreed with SEN teacher 4 above. He stated that:

'There was not communication of the parents with SEN teachers towards the implementation of IEPs'.

Sometimes, teachers do communicate with parents but only in a limited way and when there was an urgent need using other means such as the telephone. The interview data also indicates that the reason for this finding may be related to fathers' lack of knowledge of their expected role in IEP implementation. For instance, Father 2 said:

'It is very frustrating to me because I have not had clarification on what is expected of me...how can I contribute when communication to me is virtually non-existent?'

This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Deslands et al. (1999) that inadequate opportunities were provided for parental participation in the implementation of IEPs for their children at school.

Head Teacher 3, Counsellor 4, Counsellor 2 and Psychologist 4 added a perspective that they referred to as 'mother involvement' in IEP implementation. The problems here appears to be that mothers are the core person involved in working with the child on the activities suggested in the IEP but are not the person with whom boys' teachers communicate. Hence, this makes the flow of communication between home and school difficult. They stated that in some schools, the involvement of the mother was more significant than that of any other family member. Psychologist 4 said:

'The mothers of intellectually disabled students are more likely than the fathers to be involved in implementing IEPs in mainstream schools'.

When these interviewees were asked to explain the perceived relative importance of the mother, they provided a range of responses. For example, Counsellor 2 asserted that social factors were instrumental, as Saudi society is strongly male dominated. Counsellor 2 thought that:

'A mother of a student with intellectual disabilities is restricted in terms of her work activities. Also, her socially allocated work role deems her to be the primary carer'.

Head Teachers 1 and 2, Counsellor 1 and Psychologist 1 supported this assertion, noting that the mother is doing the work of the IEP but then is not the one communicating with

the school but that she would be the best representative on the IEP team. Psychologist 1 stated:

'The mother is the most effective person and the parent who plays the most active role in the participation aspect of the implementation of the IEP for children at home'.

However, there was no single unified answer regarding the crux of the problem. Counsellor 5 mentioned the importance of logistical problems, such as the poor literacy of fathers and the lack of childcare. For example, in relation to poor literacy, he said that:

'The key challenge to parent involvement is high levels of illiteracy.... I have attempted to go through development plans with parents in face to face meetings, but in my experience they are often unable to read the plan I have put before them'.

In addition, he felt that the fathers' inadequate awareness of the particular needs of their disabled children could hinder their participation in the application of IEPs, adding:

'Fathers of children with intellectual disabilities lack conviction as to their sons' ability'.

Others also reported that a lack of communication skills on the part of fathers that they felt might be hindering participation in the IEP. For example, Head Teacher 3 stated that the majority of fathers seemed to think that the school was solely responsible for the education of their children and for the application of IEPs. This led them to leave the school administration to deal with the entire process, abandoning their own responsibilities at the point that their children entered school:

'Fathers believe that the school is directly responsible for the education of their children and the application of the individual education plans'.

It might be that the fathers interviewed for this study were particularly engaged and that the picture painted above is as valid as fathers own responses. However, when fathers were asked whether they had any idea about how IEPs were implemented by school teams and whether they were given the chance to participate in the IEP process, their

responses indicated that they had never had the opportunity to take part, which they felt gave them insufficient knowledge of the process and was undermining the implementation of the IEPs. Some suggested that they should have been invited to attend IEP meetings to clarify the concept of IEPs and how to apply them. For example, Father 4 replied:

'Fathers are not provided with simple training courses about the ways in which IEPs are implemented in the schools'.

Father 3 agreed and expressed similar concerns:

'The lack of involvement by parents in the preparation and implementation of the IEPs is due to the system not being willing to help fathers work as members of the IEP team [...]. The implementation of the IEP is limited by the existence of regulatory and administrative factors to prevent parents from participating'.

However, Fathers 2 and 4 provided reasons why personnel working in schools may believe fathers are disinterested because they stated that they were kept busy with their own businesses and therefore had no time to become intimately involved in the IEPs of their children. Father 2 said:

'I am busy all day [...]. I've failed to follow up the individual education plans with my son [...]. I don't have time to follow up the plans'.

However it is believed that other issues have contributed to erect barriers to the involvement of fathers in the application of IEPs, among which are socioeconomic and sociocultural factors. The factor of socioeconomic includes levels of education and culture and job commitments. Reviewing the responses of participants interviews, such as Teacher 1, Psychologist 1, Counsellor 3 and Head Teacher 2, one common denominator seems to have been the socioeconomic levels of those fathers who showed little interest in monitoring their children's progress through the various stages of the IEP preparation and implementation. Head Teacher 2 believed that money was important:

'The inadequate financial resources of fathers of students with intellectual disabilities will limit their participation in the preparation and implementation of the IEPs'.

Also job commitments make it extremely difficult for the fathers of intellectually disabled children to monitor their progress with the IEPs. According to Teacher 3:

'Work commitments make it extremely difficult for the fathers of intellectually disabled children to monitor their progress with the IEPs'.

Other factors were sociocultural factors such as divorce and stigma of disability. The importance of socioeconomic and sociocultural factors seems to be supported by the evidence of Teacher 3, who suggested that difficult family circumstances, such as divorce, could play a major role in the lack of follow-up and even interest in the IEPs of children among some fathers. This is likely to be exacerbated by the cultural and legal norms in Saudi Arabia, which place the responsibility for the children upon mothers and then forbid the divorced couple from communicating with one another. The recognition of the importance of this situation can be seen in the responses of certain study participants, such as Teacher 4, who stated that:

'Among the factors preventing the fathers' involvement in implementation of IEPs was divorce issue'.

Along with the stigma of disability, these factors can significantly weaken the whole approach to IEPs. Psychologist 1 added that psychological stress due to cultural shame of having a child with a disability could also be an important socio-cultural barrier that limits participation and even prevents parents from participating in the application of IEPs in mainstream schools.

'Fathers of students with intellectual disabilities may feel as though they are carrying the shame of their children's disability, which might negatively affect their participation levels at school or at home. It could also harm their contribution, along with the team members, in the overall preparation and application of the IEPs'.

Parents suffering from stress or depression may look preoccupied, enter a state of disbelief and may feel disenchanting under the pressure of what they consider the social

stigma of a child with an intellectual disability. This could result in them attempting to avoid any discussion of disability.

The literature indicates that 'social stigma is prevalent and this impacts upon the disabled child as well as the mother' (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2007: 49), or in this case, the father. Overall, factors such as socioeconomic level, a divorce, social stigma and work commitments, can increase the father stress and reduce the amount of quality time that fathers have for their children regarding IEPs. These factors would result in fathers not being involved in monitoring their IEPs and their participation with IEP team members in the implementation of these plans, both at school and at home.

This investigation of the challenges facing parental participation in IEPs has highlighted several contributing factors in the separation of fathers from IEP roles. At the heart of these difficulties appears to be the negative approach of schools towards the collaboration of fathers and IEP team members (Mathews and Whitfield, 2001). This behaviour, sometimes attributed to a lack of confidence in fathers, may have resulted in the reported inability of many parents to interact with staff regarding the progress and needs of their children (Al-Kahtani, 2012). This factor seems likely to have been exacerbated by cultural challenges, such as those prohibiting divorced fathers from interacting with their families, and practical concerns, such as the difficulty of meeting the needs of disabled children while still meeting work commitments. Furthermore, there seems to be some evidence that a lack of interest or understanding of SEN among fathers, or even a low general education level in general, may hinder their contribution to IEP courses. It can be argued that these obstacles to effective collaboration may be at least partially attributable to a failure by either the state or educational apparatus to offer sufficient support to parents. This study has also identified a lack of awareness, communication skills and logistical problems among parents regarding the way in which their own involvement may improve learning outcomes or affect the issues of stigmatisation suffered by some children. There is dispute in the literature about whether a lower level of school participation is attributable to a low level of education among parents (Al-Thaqafi, 1997), although other studies have not established a strong connection between parental educational achievement and their level of participation at the school.

Building Collaborative Teamwork as a Solution

In this section the findings regarding what IEP members in this study thought should be done to improve the involvement of fathers and other members of the team suggest that there was a consensus of opinion that cooperation and coordination among IEP team members should be prioritised in the application of IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities. Participants offered a range of views on what should be done. The different groups of participants were not exclusively in agreement in terms of the priorities they discussed. For example, one group of participants suggested that to facilitate the cooperation needed for effective IEP work, one member of the IEP team should be designated to act as coordinator in each school: this included one teacher and one head teacher. For example, Teacher 3 suggested that the effectiveness of IEPs could be enhanced by selecting an agenda-setting coordinator from among the school staff and parents, as well as explicitly defining the roles assigned in the implementation of the IEPs:

'We should find someone to coordinate the roles within the IEP team and to follow up on all related activities like IEP meetings'.

Head Teacher 5 agreed with Teacher 3 above. He said that:

'The success of the IEP team members' involvement is to hire a coordinator within schools'.

Analysis of the interview data shows that most of the SEN teachers felt that cooperation in overcoming barriers to the application of IEPs was among the most significant factors in their success. There was also a clear consensus among the five SEN teachers who took part in the study on the need for the presence of a paraprofessional alongside the team within mainstream schools. The term 'paraprofessional' (often referred to as teaching assistants in the UK) describes individuals who provide focused, special assistance within classroom contexts. In the Saudi context, this refers to a person who 'works to help the teacher to invest his time in the performance of his primary duties' (MoE, 2002: 57). The presence of paraprofessionals was seen as playing an important, positive contribution to the implementation of IEPs. This general agreement perhaps reflects the perception of an acute shortage of educators specialised in working with children with intellectual disabilities. Factors such as the nature of SEN teachers' work,

the need to implement IEPs and the degree of intellectual disability of the students may have contributed to the perceived importance of hiring paraprofessionals both qualified and able to perform the ancillary tasks requested of them. For example, Teacher 2 stressed that:

'A paraprofessional should work alongside team members to help with the implementation of the IEPs'.

Other factors, such as performing activities on a collective and collaborative basis, and maintaining regular meetings, would also help to strengthen the bonds between members. For example, Head Teachers 1 and 3, Psychologist 3 and Counsellor 2 agreed that cooperation within the IEP team in the implementation of IEPs was particularly useful, because of the complementary nature of their roles, as specified in the RSEIP document. Head Teacher 1 said:

'The success of the IEPs relies on the cooperation and coordination of IEP team members to their roles'.

Head Teacher 5 was the only head who noted that compliance with the implementation of administrative decisions related to IEPs seemed to raise the standards of the educational process for students with intellectual disabilities. He explained this as follows:

'The school management should take decisions requiring the IEP team to work together in the preparation and implementation of IEPs'.

Therefore, other head teachers who were not aware of the RSEIP policy document, as described in Chapter 5.

There was thus an evident belief that the collaborative application of IEPs in mainstream boys' schools enabled team members to provide direct and indirect services for the students in an educational environment that was suitable for their intellectual abilities and levels.

Therefore, it was seen as essential that school staff and parents should cooperate to form a collective entity capable of ensuring that services meet the needs of these students

with SEN. The literature emphasises that parents should also be involved in the IEPs process with team members such as making key decisions at school (Tod et al., 1998; Yell, 2006).

In keeping with SEN teachers' perspectives, there was a clear consensus among participants on the need for greater parental involvement in IEPs through regular daily observations of the behaviour of children and their responses in different situations. On this topic, Father 4 noted that no unified organisational structure existed for the participation of parents in special education programmes. He believed that the school administration should make such participation by parents more organised, explaining their role in the IEPs and how to cooperate with the school staff. This would make them more active members and improve the performance of the IEPs. Thus, Father 4 asserted:

'The school administration must provide central support services for fathers to help them understand the IEP process; identify their roles and apply the IEPs, whether at school or at home'.

Father 1 agreed, suggesting that the terms under which the appropriate methods were provided for the school administration to ensure the active participation of fathers and the rest of the IEP team members could be enhanced. He added that the school administration should establish a compulsory system to enhance their participation in the preparation and implementation of IEPs:

'The school administration needs to oblige fathers to participate in IEPs in order to develop special education services to meet the needs of the students within the IEP context'.

The literature claims that the school must involve the parent as a member of the IEP team in planning decisions at school (IDEA, 1990; cited in Martin et al., 2004).

In summary, the proposal to coordinate the work of the IEP teams professionally and systematically within mainstream boys' schools showed members' awareness of their roles in terms of the implementation of the IEPs and their recognition that isolated individual efforts to prepare and apply the plans would be likely to be ineffective. As such, most teachers, other school staff and parents agreed that they should work as a united team, which suggests the need for IEP teams to work in a professional and

systematic way, as confirmed by a number of contributors to the literature. For example, Whitworth (1994), Ysseldyke et al. (2000), Gargiulo (2003), Yell (2006) and Hulett (2009) argue that team members should acquire the appropriate skills to be able to work within a group and to achieve good communication levels, that they should learn to respect each other and that each member should perform his/her duty in keeping with his/her role and job description, while being open to other disciplines so as to exchange relevant information related to the development of the student. However, whilst such objectives may be desirable for achievement, the findings of this study suggest the importance of building teamwork based on cooperation and involvement between the individual IEP team members in Saudi Arabia.

It is important to note that IEP team meetings, for example, were seen to contribute to better communication and enhanced interaction and teamwork among members, especially if parents were involved. Fathers should be invited to discuss matters related to individual cases in order to implement the best IEP to suit individual needs, as highlighted in the interview responses discussed above. Thus, the results seem consistent with those of a study by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002), who emphasise the need to implement IEP meetings within schools and to discuss the current circumstances of each child. However the findings of this study indicate that communication between Saudi Arabian IEP team members is particularly poor in terms of cooperation and coordination, perhaps suggesting that socioeconomic and cultural factors need to be taken into greater consideration, as mentioned in the previous section. Therefore these factors will be related to the Bronfenbrenner model in the next chapter.

Respondents to the present study also pointed out the importance of having a named person to coordinate tasks among IEP team members and of having paraprofessionals to help the team with school activities, including making the requisite contributions to the implementation of IEPs in mainstream schools. Overall, it was seen as important for IEP team members to make collective efforts to ensure the successful preparation and implementation of the IEPs. This is consistent with the following list of factors that Alcalá (2011: 2) found to have contributed to the success of inclusive education practices in schools:

‘...collaborative teamwork, a shared framework, family involvement, and general educator ownership, clear role relationships among professionals, effective use of support staff, meaningful Individual Education Plans, and procedures for evaluating effectiveness’.

6.2 Barriers and Solutions to Structural Support Provided by the School and the LEA

This section presents the findings related to participants’ perspectives of the barriers that are manifest within schools that are faced by IEP teams in implementing IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities and proposed solutions to these issues. Three relevant areas are identified: weaknesses in the rules and regulations related to IEPs, the lack of an assessment system and curriculum-based barriers.

Legal and Administrative Barriers

The first important structural support barrier to the implementation of IEPs in mainstream schools identified by interviewees was the failure to organise administrative regulations for team members to implement IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities. The findings of this study suggest participants believe there is a lack of legislation and administrative regulations, at a local level, requiring IEP team members to implement the IEPs in the educational process. Bearing in mind that these findings represent the participants’ personal perspectives, it was found that Teacher 2 expressed this criticism as follows:

‘The RSEIP policy document has not been followed in the application of IEPs. Therefore, they cannot be implemented, taking into consideration the current situation’.

Teacher 1 mentioned a related administrative barrier to the implementation of IEPs:

‘The MoE has not enhanced the role of the DGSE by implementing the IEPs and has failed to meet the basic requirements for the education of students with intellectual disabilities’.

Other teachers agreed that one of the administrative barriers was the lack of regulations requiring the application of the IEP process to be monitored in mainstream schools, suggesting teachers were aware of such gaps in the strategy. As Teacher 4 explained:

'There is no commitment to applying IEPs due to the lack of follow-up by the school administration on the implementation of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities'.

Teacher 5 made a broadly similar point:

'The failure to apply IEPs in an appropriate way is due to the school administration, which is responsible for regulating the functioning of the educational process'.

Moreover, teachers claimed that among the factors preventing the correct application of IEPs was a failure to implement Supreme Council for Disabled Affairs. For example, Teachers 1 and 4 stated that the decree issued by the Supreme Council for Disabled Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister, and adopted in 2001, had still not been enacted. This decree outlined the rights of children with SEN, including that of access to free education, guaranteeing that their needs would be met in mainstream schools and setting out the overall policy in the field of disability and regulation of the affairs of the disabled. Teacher 1 stated succinctly:

'The decision of the Supreme Council was not implemented in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia'.

Meanwhile, Teacher 4 believed that its enactment had been delayed by a number of topical political events, including the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA and the retaliatory 'War on Terror' which followed:

'The Decree of the Supreme Council for Disabled Affairs has still not been put into practice because of political events taking place during the period in which the decision was first made in 2001'.

Psychologist 5 and Counsellor 5 were in general agreement but felt that the main obstacle in this area was a lack of cooperation between the DGSE and the Local Education Authority (LEA) in sending copies to IEP team members in mainstream schools. For example, Psychologist 5 said:

'The DGSE needs to co-ordinate its activities and bring essential improvements, including make sure that the (RSEIP) document is distributed because this is not taking place at the moment....many have tried to access the document online but find it difficult to access it or do not know where to access it'.

Also, Counsellor 5 said:

'There is a real problem of acquiring clarification.....this appears to stem from a lack of coordination between the DGSE, LEA and mainstream schools on the implementation of IEPs'.

Psychologist 2 suggested that schools were reluctant to provide members of staff with copies of the RSEIP policy document because of the administrators' lack of familiarity with its stipulations regarding the educational process in mainstream schools. More generally, he said:

'The school management is not keen on the implementation and follow-up of all the new regulations, especially with regard to the IEP'.

Furthermore, whilst IEPs can be expected to differ from one another in terms of their content, some IEP team members have remarked that the failure to implement standardised procedures for the creation of IEPs can hinder their optimal creation. This variation may be explained by the failure, mentioned throughout this subsection, to legislate for the compulsory adoption of the RSEIP policy on applying IEPs. For example, Head Teacher 2 complained:

'There are no administrative procedures that make the application of IEPs legally binding on the team in charge of the plans, as can be seen in the regulations for the institutes and programmes of special education [...]. The head teacher has only limited powers to decide disciplinary action against IEP team members in mainstream schools'.

Head Teacher 4 agreed:

'The school administration generally deems it convenient to allow IEP team members the freedom to design and implement their plan without being disciplined'.

Father 2 and 3 concurred. Due to the way that the stipulations of the RSEIP document were applied to IEPs, they believed that there was a lack of coordination between the LEA and DGSE, preventing the school team from responding to the concerns and desires of fathers. Father 2 gave the following example of this:

'No copy or photocopy of the IEP is sent to the parents of the intellectually disabled child'.

Therefore the implication of the findings is that the process for the design/creation of IEPs is unclear to many IEP team members, and so they tend to blame each other because there is a general lack of clarity as to who is responsible for what aspects of the process. The above analysis shows that decision-making was not transparent and was often based on the divergent preferences of decision-makers such as school staff, teachers or parents. This finding is consistent with the assertion of Dale (1996: 18) that 'either the parent or the professional makes all the decisions, and there is no willingness or ability to make decisions jointly'. However, although this finding by Dale (1996) appears to have identified a similar problem, it should be noted that this research of Dale (1996) was conducted many years ago and within a different context but it relates well to what I have found in a contemporary Saudi Arabian context.

Legal and Administrative Solutions

This proposal indicated the importance of the rules and regulations for the implementation of IEPs in mainstream schools. In addition, teachers have tended to justify their roles as being particularly individualistic, and yet now the claim is that regular IEP team meetings would be beneficial. Teacher 2 noted that there was an explicit need to place the implementation of IEPs within the rules and regulations in order to educate people about special needs in Saudi Arabia:

'Working on the application of the RSEIP document would support mainstream schools in implementing IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities'.

All participating SEN teachers agreed that an instrumental factor in the success of IEPs in mainstream schools was the holding of regular IEP team meetings, which Teacher 3 said:

'The regular IEP meetings must be established in mainstream schools'.

His colleagues agreed that these meetings should be efficiently organised and run, with the members being notified of the timetable and agenda well in advance, to give them the opportunity to undertake sufficient preparation.

Another school's staff made further suggestions as to legislative and administrative measures that might help to overcome barriers to implementing IEPs in mainstream schools. For example, Psychologist 1 and Counsellor 4 recommended the provision of workshops for the IEP team, thereby providing training on the procedures for the application of the IEPs. This was Counsellor 4's suggestion:

'The administrative aspect of IEPs should be clarified in a written document for the purpose of ensuring communication through the administrative processes and this would also be a way of enforcing coordination between the parties involved in the educational process'.

Counsellor 1 agreed that there should be local administrative procedures requiring the IEP team to implement the IEPs as specified in the RSEIP document:

'All decisions and regulations issued by the school administration should be implemented with regard to the implementation of IEPs by the team'.

Psychologist 3 and Head Teachers 1, 3 and 4 also agreed on the necessity of enacting binding legislation to guarantee the participation of fathers in the IEPs and follow-ups undertaken by school administrations. Psychologist 3 spoke of 'a pressing need' for legislation to underpin the participation of parents in IEPs, 'both within the school and at home'.

It was clearly shown above that the legal obligation to facilitate the application of IEPs, in the form of the 2002 decree on the rights of children with SEN, had been in abeyance for more than 12 years, meaning that at the time of the research, Saudi Arabia had not yet provided appropriately for students with intellectual disabilities.

Psychologist 4, Counsellor 2 and Head Teacher 1 noted the importance of defining and identifying the objectives and functions of special education services to which all

children with intellectual disabilities were entitled. They also insisted that more attention should be paid to the development of special education service teams in the different fields. These could potentially assist in meeting the learning outcomes of these services, by helping students with intellectual disabilities to achieve the educational goals set for them through the provision of the appropriate special education services. Counsellor 2 said:

'School-based support services should seek to ensure that the decision to provide various services through the support team is able to achieve the outcomes set forth in the IEPs'.

Barriers and Potential Solutions for Appropriate Assessment and Diagnosis

The second barrier to the implementation of IEPs in relation to the structural support provided was the lack of an assessment system. The findings suggest that one of the basic principles underpinning the application of IEPs is that the assessment of students should be conducted by a multidisciplinary team at the school. The findings of the interview analysis also indicate that mainstream schools tended to rely exclusively on IQ tests administered by a psychologist to assess and diagnose registered students with intellectual disabilities, in clear contravention of the Saudi regulations which state that there should be no reliance on standards and tests or on a single party, but that a multidisciplinary team should assess each child's needs. Teacher 2 made the related point that mainstream schools needed rigorous scientific procedures to determine the eligibility of students for additional supporting services and to identify their individual needs, but that there were

'... shortcomings in the measurement and diagnosis process for children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools [...]. There are no accurate diagnosis tests to detect the student's condition in a scientific way [...]. All diagnostic tests in Saudi Arabia are inaccurate'.

These findings indicate perceived weaknesses in the diagnosis of children's individual educational needs, consistent with the identification by Al-Nahdi (2007) of a clear need to establish a national centre for assessment and diagnosis, having branches in all regions of Saudi Arabia, with a multidisciplinary team as the working model. Al-Nahdi (2007) recommended the creation of these unique centres to improve the quality and accuracy of SEN testing, providing strategic level support to special education services

across Saudi Arabia. The findings from this thesis indicate that these diagnostic problems remain very similar to the way they were around seven years ago. Bearing in mind that the focus of this study is aimed at boys schools in the capital Riyadh, this is of particular concern since it would have been expected that improvements would have been initiated in the capital. This suggests there are deeper problems that are present, such as possible systemic inefficiencies that are the cause of this ongoing failure to establish diagnosis centres.

Another group of interviewees partially agreed with those quoted above, complaining of shortcomings in the standards used in assessment and diagnosis, particularly in terms of their conformity to the culture of the children. For instance, Psychologist 1 said:

'Procedures of assessment and evaluation for students with intellectual disabilities do not conform to the culture either of Saudi society or of that of students with intellectual disabilities'.

He explained that all evaluation and diagnostic processes had been standardised to suit the Egyptian rather than the Saudi environment, with the risk that inappropriate conclusions would be reached as to the needs of Saudi students:

'The assessment and diagnostic procedures used in the Saudi environment are not suitable [...]. For example, the instructions of the IQ test were not clear for students of intellectual disabilities'.

These results highlight the weaknesses of the assessment system and the pressing need for large numbers of tests and measurements to be prepared locally, which is consistent with the work of Hu and Oakland (1991), who identified a great demand for better and more developed criteria and local tests. This means the researcher's findings in this thesis (regarding the lack of diagnosis centres) suggests there is a lack of agreement regarding what is needed to provide assessment that will result in adequate support.

To sum up, the results of the interview analysis indicate that mainstream schools tended to rely exclusively on IQ tests administered by a psychologist to assess and diagnose registered students with intellectual disabilities, in clear contravention of the Saudi regulations, which state that there should be no reliance on standards and tests or on a single party, but that a multidisciplinary team should assess each child's needs.

A Rigid and Narrow National Curriculum

The third theme of structural support barrier to the execution of IEPs was the national curriculum. One of the key aims of educational curricula is to set out the necessary stages for the achievement of academic and learning outcomes. Curricula were therefore reviewed, revised and reshaped under the supervision of the schools, in order to promote student development. For example, Teacher 1 said:

'There seem to have been some difficulties in terms of formulating the instructional aims of the main curriculum'.

Teacher 2 concurred, observing that the major obstacles facing teachers of SEN students were related to the content of the curriculum designed for such children, which may not have been appropriate for their abilities:

'The curriculum for children with intellectual disabilities has not been developed in terms of form and content to suit the intellectual abilities of these children'.

Indeed, he suggested that the mismatch between the curriculum and the abilities of children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools was a major factor behind the unsatisfactory implementation of IEPs. He further explained that the curriculum is important to IEPs because it represents the academic guidelines which the children would normally have been expected to follow. This academic framework of the curriculum remains relevant even if it is adapted to match the individualised aims of IEPs.

Teacher 3 made the specific criticism that the recently distributed special education curriculum had not been reviewed or updated for more than 15 years, the only difference between the latest version and the old one being the design and wording of the front cover. Teacher 4 agreed that the curriculum was unable to meet the needs and expectations of students due to difficulties in linking educational goals. He also supported the assertions of Teacher 1 that the curriculum was based on a large number of instructional goals, which unduly complicated the process of formulating the educational goals for each student:

'The school curriculum doesn't meet the expectations of students with intellectual disabilities [...]. In addition, it's not well suited to the capabilities and characteristics of children with intellectual disabilities [...]. The school curriculum is not only long and detailed, but also includes some difficult subjects that may not be in keeping with the intellectual abilities of the children, such as division and multiplication problems in maths'.

Teacher 1 added that the curriculum designers might not be qualified in the field of special education and might lack experience of dealing with students with SEN:

'There are not enough people who are qualified to design curricula for children with intellectual disabilities [...]. Also, there's a lack of training courses to improve the performance of curriculum designers in relation to special education'.

There seems to have been a consensus among participating SEN teachers about the distinct lack of differentiated curricula and textbooks tailored specifically to the needs of students with SEN. This finding is in agreement with those of Duwaysh (2000) and Ibrahim (2003) with respect to the inappropriateness of curricula and their unsuitability for the characteristics of children with intellectual disabilities in the Saudi context. It also appears that the curricula provided for students with intellectual disabilities were in need of development, as their content was outdated, consistent with the finding of Al-Mani (2002) that they had been neither modified nor updated since the first edition in 1987. Therefore these findings highlight additional issues that should be understood in relation to the problems of poor team co-operation which were discussed earlier. For example, given the negative effect that inappropriate curricula and content can have, it is necessary that a suitable individual is given the task of remedying this situation.

Another interviewee, Counsellor 4, suggested an additional possible reason for the potential inadequacy of the school curriculum to suit the individual needs of intellectually disabled students. He described his concerns about the difficulty of identifying the short and long-term goals of the school curriculum:

'There are difficulties in setting general instructional goals for each child. In addition, the national curriculum does not consider individual needs'.

Therefore, there was a degree of agreement among Counsellor 4, Teacher 1 and Teacher 4 about the difficulty of determining the educational goals for children with intellectual

disabilities in the light of the school curriculum. This suggests that the curricula should be discussed by IEP team members before its establishment in order to ensure IEPs are suitably created through such consensus.

According to another participant, Head Teacher 4, the academic curricula for students with intellectual disabilities were often too general, making them impractical and unsuitable for the needs and capabilities of the children they should serve. Psychologist 3 went so far as to describe them as *'virtually a reproduction of general education curricula, adding that only 5% of the instructional goals in the overall curriculum were thus likely to be useful for disabled children'*.

Head Teacher 3 stated that the academic curricula related to intellectual education were often designed by persons without adequate knowledge in the field of special education. More importantly, these people seemed to lack site experience, not having inspected special or mainstream schools catering to special needs children. Thus:

'Curriculum designers are not truly experts in special education [...]. As a consequence, they do not seem to engage seriously in the everyday realities and practices of special education'.

It should be noted that there was almost a consensus among the responding school staff regarding the inadequacy of the intellectual education curriculum, with the claim that the majority of its provisions were identical to those of the general education curriculum.

The findings above suggested that interviews of Teacher 1 and Head Teacher 3 above felt that curriculum designers did not seem to possess the relevant experience or expertise in special education and that no assessment had been made of the curriculum reform projects for children with intellectual disabilities in order to ascertain their feasibility and usefulness for those children. The above results are consistent with the findings of a study by Al-Othman (1995) that the most challenging issues in terms of curricula for students with intellectual disabilities lay in the absence of books and guidelines, in the failure to take account of new teaching methods for these children and in the difficulty of setting out clearly defined educational and curricular outcomes. However, although these findings support the study by Al-Othman (1995), these

findings also suggest that the curricula problems should be understood within the wider context of systemic inefficiencies and poor co-ordination between IEP team members. The issue was thus seen in a broadly similar way from the perspectives of school staff interviewed, which demonstrates a shared perception regarding this sub-theme, in contrast to the disagreements emerging from the analysis of data on parental involvement.

Solutions for Curriculum Development

This subsection analyses the suggestions of interviewees regarding appropriate curriculum development for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream schools. An IEP can be described as a syllabus that has been designed for a specific purpose and which will therefore include a modified version of the school curriculum. There was a reasonable degree of agreement among the respondents that one of the critical success factors of IEPs is the reformulation of curricula to bring them in line with the abilities and potential of children with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, curricula for children with SEN should not be designed in advance, but rather be written according to broad perspectives and frameworks that outline the educational content of these curricula.

This proposal is in line with the emphasis in Article 94 of the RSEIP policy document on the reformulation of IEPs and curricula according to the capabilities and needs of each individual student:

‘Education in the basic stages of special education should be in accordance with the established curricula, textbooks and units approved for each phase by the relevant authorities in the Ministry of Education, according to the educational plans and IEPs in place, while any necessary adjustments should be in keeping with the capacities and needs of each student’ (MoE, 2002: 91).

The National Committee for Special Education (NCSE) and the MoE’s Specialist Intellectual Disabilities Advisory Committee (SIDAC) have contributed to the improvement of special education services through the development of programmes, curricula and educational plans, the examination of recommendations and suggestions, and the preparation of scenarios and proposals related to children with special

educational needs. Since its inception in 1999, SIDAC has worked to revise the services and educational and training programmes that it has implemented by subjecting them to critical and academic discussion, which has culminated in a new procedure designed to reflect the features and characteristics of the programmes and services that should be provided by mainstream schools. These features include the reformulation of plans and curricula at the primary level, the preparation of new educational stages to include intermediate and secondary schools and finally, the development of a number of mechanisms to activate intellectual education programmes for the various educational levels in mainstream schools (SIDAC, 2005; NCSE, 2006).

In addition, Teachers 1 and 2 stressed that the successful implementation of IEPs required the preparation of special education curricula by specialised educators. These individuals should have postgraduate qualifications in curriculum design and methods of teaching children with intellectual disabilities, which would usefully complement the experience of teachers of students with intellectual disabilities who had been in the field for many years. For example, Teacher 2 said:

'It is important to form a committee that includes expertise in special education to prepare curricula for children with intellectual disabilities. The standards set should be compatible with the curricula of the intellectually disabled and in keeping with their abilities, eventually allowing them access to the general curriculum'.

Literature shows the ongoing debate about what curricula are suitable for students with SEN. For example, Ireland schools represent a platform through which the curriculum, as taught in classrooms, can be shaped. To facilitate creation of the curriculum that would be suitable for needs and specifics of individual schools, school plans are constantly re-assessed and amended or updated. To further advance the autonomy of schools with respect to the implementation of the curriculum, schools, and not the Department of Education and Science or the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, have the primary responsibility for selecting text books and other resources used in a class (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2002).

Other interview responses indicate the importance they placed in curricula being specifically oriented towards children with intellectual disabilities. Interestingly,

Counsellors 1 and 2, Psychologist 3 and Head Teacher 4 all agreed that the main element of a successful IEP would be a curriculum designed specifically for children with intellectual disabilities. This curriculum should take into account various criteria, including the selection of topics of interest and value in the lives of students, as well as organising these topics to allow them to understand the links among the themes. Effectively, such curricula should be formulated in accordance with the intellectual abilities of the children concerned. As Psychologist 3 suggested:

'A curriculum should be designed with clearly defined outcomes for the curriculum as a whole, the units in particular, and with declared instructional targets for its topics'.

In their interviews, Fathers 1 and 2 agreed on the need to modify the curriculum according to the capabilities of each child, which should enable specific instructional targets to be identified as a guide for the teacher. For example, Father 1 perceived

'... a pressing need to identify a special curriculum with the appropriate outcomes which can respond to the needs of the child in their various life activities [...]. IEPs should also be designed and implemented within the curricula provided for children with intellectual disabilities'.

Father 4 added that when designing curricula for children with intellectual disabilities, fathers should be included as part of the curriculum designers:

'The participation of fathers in designing the curriculum for a child with intellectual disabilities is essential [...]. There is also a need for the participation of fathers in the development of the instructional targets of the curriculum'.

The findings suggest that decision makers in the MoE should be aware of the importance of introducing the fathers of children with intellectual disabilities to members of curriculum design teams, to help improve the quality of their work.

Solutions to the Coordination between the MoE, DGSE and Mainstream Schools and Parents in relation to the IEP

In order to help improve coordination among the MoE, DGSE, mainstream schools and parents, the findings of this study reveal a consensus on the part of teachers and other

school staff regarding the need to introduce the role of educational supervisor. These officials could then begin to visit schools and monitor the educational process through the IEPs. IEP teams at mainstream schools could benefit from the experience of special education supervisors for the development of special education programmes and following up IEPs. That means that the main role of them is overseeing teaching and IEP implementation from a regional or national perspective. It is important to note that the educational supervisor is not a member of the IEP team in this study, as described in Chapter 2 but the role of supervisors in special education concerning the application of IEPs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is as suggested in the recommendations for future research (see Chapter 8). The findings also suggest a separate department should be created to deal with the issuance and follow-up of all new regulations related to special education. The findings of the current study suggest there is a strategic role for resident supervisor in this process. This proposal indicated the team's awareness of the importance of the parents' role in the upbringing and education of intellectually disabled students.

From the SEN teachers' perspective, the data indicates that they desired greater coordination between the MoE and the mainstream schools. For example, Teachers 1 and 2 suggested that the educational supervisor should provide ongoing follow-up and supervision for mainstream schools, to monitor their progress in the application of IEPs. In addition, there should be a strict process to follow the IEPs by the team in charge. Teacher 2 stated:

'It is important that educational supervisors pay attention to the idea of IEPs [...]. They should pursue IEPs both in terms of the preparation and the implementation of the plans'.

Other school staff interviewees were concerned that educational supervisors were conducting too few follow-up visits to mainstream schools, which were usually limited to one or two per year. They also spoke only to teachers during these visits, which interviewees felt was likely to have adverse effects on collaboration within the IEP team. To resolve this issue, Counsellors 2 and 3 suggested that the visits of educational supervisors should involve all members of the IEP team, including follow-up of their roles as team members. Counsellor 2 advocated that:

'The educational supervisor should visit all members of the school team while preparing and implementing the IEPs in coordination with members of the IEP team at school'.

This finding appears closely consistent with that of Al-Fahili (2009), who emphasises the importance of supervisory visits organised by the MoE to mainstream schools. In this study, these visits should help to coordinate and exchange experiences between the IEP team and supervisors in order to implement and follow up on all new regulations, especially with regard to IEPs. This point is discussed in turn in the data below.

Some interviewees also suggested the creation of a separate department within the MoE, whose role would be to deal with the issuance and follow-up of all new regulations regarding IEPs, as well as working to involve parents in the IEPs, which could potentially increase the effectiveness of these educational provisions. For example, Teacher 3 suggested:

'The system is in need of major changes in attitudes and policy that will not be easy or straightforward to introduce. It seems right to me that the MoE should take the leading role since it represents the government and national policy[...].It is difficult to achieve but the effort should be made. If a distinct department was established within the MoE then this would be a real improvement in the application of legal rules and requirements'.

There are many suggestions about structure. From the data, Teacher 3 noted that there seemed to be a lack of clarity in the government structures dealing with children with special needs, which had influenced the implementation of IEPs in Saudi Arabia. More than one department looked after the intellectually disabled, including the Special Education Section of the MoE and the management of the DGSE. This meant that there was no single unified authority to oversee children with special needs, leading to an overlapping of departmental roles regarding the implementation of IEPs. Therefore, with respect to suggestions regarding structure, Teacher 3 argued that:

'A single authority should be established to oversee the care and education of children with special needs at mainstream schools'.

Teacher 4 also supported the establishment of a unified body to manage the instruction of intellectually disabled students, claiming that this would help the implementation of a

uniform educational plan which that body could then supervise and which could later be applied in mainstream schools. This would be an improvement over the current situation, given the shortcomings identified in the implementation of IEPs, some of which resulted from the uncoordinated efforts of school administrations. Teacher 4 explained this issue as follows:

'A department should be created to be fully responsible for the mainstreaming programmes in mainstream schools [...]. A uniform IEP should also be prepared and applied to cover all intellectual education institutes and programmes [...]. Follow-up procedures should be maintained in terms of the education of children with intellectual disabilities in those schools'.

Teacher 1 suggested another improvement to the application of IEPs, emphasising the importance of support by the school administration. Head teachers should cooperate to allow special programmes to be accessible at mainstream schools. This might help the school staff to feel more comfortable working with disabled children, which would help them to highlight their abilities and feel valued by the school administration. Teacher 1 outlined his suggestion as follows:

'If the school administrators accepted the mainstreaming programmes in public schools, they could then be responsible for managing and supporting these programmes [...]. The school would provide the same educational aids and equipment for students in the programme as those offered to ordinary pupils [...]. Also, students enrolled in the programme would become able to participate in classroom and non-curricular activities both in and out the school [...]. This would also importantly allow the programme to take advantage of all the equipment and human resources available at school, such as resource rooms and libraries'.

The Head Teachers and other school staff also offered a number of suggestions regarding the application of the IEP at mainstream schools. For example, Head Teachers 2 and 4, noting a lack of coordination between school administrations and the MoE in the supervision of IEPs, proposed that the MoE should develop IEPs and support programmes in schools, supplemented by expert human resources in the area of support services.

Head Teacher 2 said:

'Rules and standards should be strictly presented in terms of the working mechanism for supervisors and administrators under the MoE, which would require them to follow up and supervise special education programmes and those closely linked to the IEPs [...]. The implementation of IEPs should also be monitored by the school team'.

Among the other interviewees, Psychologist 2 and Counsellor 4 supported this idea. Apparently dissatisfied with the contribution of national bodies to monitoring IEP implementation, Psychologist 2 asserted that the application of IEPs in mainstream schools depended on the local efforts of school administrators:

'There seems to be an overlap between the national education authorities in terms of monitoring the implementation of IEPs'.

Psychologist 2 made a comparison with the Department of Education in the city of Al-Ahsa in the Eastern part of Saudi Arabia, which he said had employed a special type of IEP that was different from the model applied in the Riyadh region. The Al-Ahsa IEP was compulsory and monitored on a daily basis in mainstream schools. He went on to propose that the preparation and implementation of IEPs should be unified at the national level and that one particular model should be endorsed by the MoE:

'IEPs should be made uniform in mainstream schools in cities across Saudi Arabia. [...] Educational supervisors could [then] be entrusted with the duty of monitoring the implementation of the IEPs'.

Another suggestion for overcoming this barrier to IEP implementation, made by Head Teachers 1 and 3, Counsellor 1 and Psychologist 1, was that the resident supervisor at each school should be in charge of the planning and coordination process. They also felt that this person should have the main responsibility for identifying the concept of the IEP and how it could be implemented, for reviewing the assessment of the work of students within their individual plans and for negotiating with the relevant teachers the resolution of any issues arising from such a review, as well as participating in the organising of IEP team meetings within the school. Head Teacher 1, for example, said:

'The role of the resident supervisor within the school should be made active through coordination and cooperation with the team with respect to the application of the IEPs [...]. Also, he should contribute to the organising of IEP team meetings'.

Teacher 5, Psychologist 2 and Head Teacher 4 suggested another way to improve the implementation of IEPs in mainstream schools, by recognising the importance of parental cooperation. This would involve fathers responding to requests by the school administration to help diagnose, prepare and evaluate the IEPs, in addition to conducting additional tasks at home, such as supporting their sons with homework and maintaining certain behaviour. Teacher 5 contributed to this debate by suggesting that implementing IEPs in mainstream schools required parental involvement in the development of educational plans and the identification of educational goals:

'Fathers' cooperation within mainstream schools is a main condition for the success of the IEP'.

This accord with the assertion of Mislán et al. (2008) that drawing up an effective plan requires consideration of the opinions of both teachers and parents, who should be engaged in the process of IEP application. This can be achieved by offering to help in the instruction of children in the classroom or at home and providing the necessary information for the assessment of the progress they have achieved. However, Psychologist 2 specifically urged improvements in *'the process of communication between fathers and the school administration'*.

Fathers themselves proposed a number of solutions to the issue of poor coordination among the bodies and individuals concerned with IEPs in mainstream schools. For example, four fathers who were interviewed broadly agreed with Psychologist 2 and Head Teacher 4 that communication between parents and schools should be improved. They observed that one way to overcome the barriers to parental participation would be to invite fathers to participate in the diagnosis, development and implementation of IEPs, as well as monitoring the children's programmes and their final assessment. Crucial to the success of this recommendation would be the provision of targeted awareness programmes for parents and the distribution of simplified guidance leaflets. Father 1 made this suggestion:

'An integrated plan should be designed and delivered by the school administration to determine methods of communication with fathers [...]. It should also decide on designated places where fathers could meet their children's teachers'.

The data reviewed in this subsection, like the previous one, point to the build team work that would function with more efficiency and coordination. There was widespread agreement among school staff of the need for the introduction of educational supervisors by the MoE. If the professional standard could be increased through the appointment and development of such supervisors, especially with the support of their own separate department within the MoE, then cooperation between the schools and the MoE could be improved. A more comprehensive analysis of these solutions and the associated exosystem will be provided in the next chapter.

6.3 Negative Attitudes towards the Implementation of IEPs and Solutions through better Communication between IEP Team Members and Students' Parents

One of the major barriers described by participants and a major source of negative attitudes towards the implementation of IEPs from the standpoint of teachers was related to the workload. For example, Teachers 1, 2 and 3 were not satisfied with the amount of paperwork and other supplementary tasks related to the implementation of IEPs in mainstream schools. They saw these as preventing the teacher from focusing on students with intellectual disabilities and hindering the development of the IEP strategy, as described in Chapter 5. Teacher 3 said:

'The teacher has a heavy workload in the application of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities'.

When asked to elaborate, the respondent complained that the heavy workload caused a great deal of pressure on teachers in their efforts to respond to the individual needs of their students. For example, the teacher was responsible for the implementation of the IEPs and for assessing the current level of performance among students. He also had to decide upon the appropriate annual educational targets for students, work towards such targets and finally, undertake the process of final evaluation of the student, which seems to agree with a number of studies (McLaughlin and Lewis, 1995; Williams, 1999;

Heumann and Warlick, 2000). However there appears to be a contradiction in the findings because here the teachers are complaining that their work load is too heavy for them to focus adequately on students, yet previously teachers stated that they gave so much of their time to students that this was becoming a problem. Therefore the findings of this study suggest that teachers are often working in ways that are very different from one another, with some choosing to reduce student time in order to complete their other duties. Generally, however, it is the burden of duties and responsibilities which the teachers are attempting to balance that represents the problem. This implies that their duties and responsibilities should be re-evaluated in order to ensure optimum benefit for the children.

Thus, the concerns of SEN teachers about the amount of effort and time involved in applying IEPs appears to have constituted a major source of stress for them. The literature also offers evidence of IEPs being considered a source of work-related stress with which IEP team members at schools have to contend. For example, Morgan and Rhode (1983) found that teachers' negative attitudes toward IEPs could be due to an overload of work in their preparation and application. As far as the Saudi context is concerned, Al-Khashrami (2001) reports that even SEN teachers who displayed evidence of an appropriate attitude towards IEPs in general tended to be more negative than positive during the preparation, application and evaluation stages. Therefore the findings of this thesis indicate the need to re-determine the duties and functions of SEN teachers within the RSEIP document, with the necessary amendments being established. These re-determined duties and functions of SEN teachers will then be expected to have a more positive effect in terms of the teacher-child interaction at the microsystem.

Another Teacher agreed with this view, arguing that such negative attitudes would ultimately affect the education of students with intellectual disabilities. For example, Teacher 5 was unhappy with the flawed process of accepting some students who did not meet the eligibility criteria for special education services in mainstream schools:

'The admission of some students with intellectual disabilities didn't meet the enrolment criteria of mainstream schools'.

As mentioned earlier, the analysis of interview data indicates that the IEP team members tended to agree that there had been inadequate follow-up or provision for the needs of mainstream schools by the DGSE, related perhaps to the suggestion that the expansion of mainstream schools had taken place without taking into account the creation of mechanisms of coordination suitable for these schools. Although previous findings showed that the school staff were generally willing to seek and adopt new solutions to improve the processes related to the creation/implementation of IEPs, the results also indicate that the majority of school staff held negative attitudes towards IEPs in their current form which may have weakened their commitment to the rules and regulations relating to their implementation (see section 6.2). On the other hand, it was recommended by a number of school staff that the negative attitudes could be resolved through better communication between IEP team members based in the school and students' parents, who constituted the external members of the IEP team. This appears valid because contact between school staff and parents is a process through which knowledge and information are conveyed in relation to the education, learning and fulfilment of the needs of each intellectually disabled student, theoretically enabling the formation of a shared understanding between the two parties.

6.4 Barriers and Solutions at School Level

This section presents findings on the views of interviewees about the barriers within mainstream boys' schools to the implementation of IEPs. It is divided into three subsections, dealing with challenges related to school buildings and class sizes, to the limited use of technology and teaching aids, and to the lack of training in the preparation and implementation of IEPs.

School Buildings and Class Sizes

One of the most appropriate environments for students who have disabilities is a mainstream school where they can receive an education similar to that of their non-disabled peers. This policy of inclusion may not be universally possible in the Saudi context, where it is still limited to the partial inclusion of students with mild disabilities into mainstream schools (Alquraini, 2010). In this vein, Ashencaen Crabtree argues that the disability issues and formal services for children with SEN in the Middle East are

‘usually at a rudimentary level, often due to socio-economic problems and political conflict’ (2007: 50).

More importantly, special classrooms are considered part of the mainstream school system and the right environment to meet the needs of students with intellectual disabilities. This classroom environment should be well utilised in order to prepare students for gradual inclusion into various mainstream activities and events. This subsection analyses participants’ responses when asked about aspects of the educational environment hindering the implementation of IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities, such as the unsuitability of school buildings and classrooms.

Teachers 1 and 3 agreed that one of the major difficulties experienced by teachers of students with SEN was the excessive number of these students in classrooms in mainstream schools. The number of students frequently exceeded the initially allocated number, despite the guidelines provided by the RSEIP document, specifying the number of students with intellectual disabilities in each mainstream school. This overcrowded environment contributed to an extra workload being placed on teachers, which negatively affected teaching performance in the classroom, according to Teacher 1:

‘The large number of students makes it difficult for us to provide the individual support that each student needs in their daily classroom sessions in the subjects taught in the IEPs’.

Teacher 2 expressed a similar view, noting that one of the consequences of the implementation of IEPs was the increasing number of students assessed as having intellectual disabilities in each classroom, mainly because of misdiagnosis and overly small classrooms. He observed that the number of students often exceeded the official limits and that teachers generally lacked the appropriate tools to deal with such large numbers:

‘The presence of a large number of students makes the implementation of the IEPs for each of these students a challenging task’.

These remarks are consistent with the findings of Al-Herz (2008), who affirms that one of the most important objectives of IEPs is to ensure the right of students to support

services that meet their particular needs. However, in this study, this may not be achieved if each student is not allowed an individual daily session in the subjects and skills specific to him in his IEP, because class sizes exceed those specified in Article 6 of the RSEIP policy document:

‘The number of mildly intellectually disabled (educable) pupils in any one special education class should not exceed eight, while three is the maximum number allowed in a general education classroom’ (MoE, 2002: 25).

Al-Mousa (2010: 48) remarks that a difficulty encountered by mainstreaming projects in Saudi Arabia is ‘the inadequacy of some public school buildings for the needs of all groups of children with SEN’. Again, the RSEIP policy document specifies, in Articles 4 to 13, the framework governing the spatial, equipment and human requirements for each category of students with special educational needs (MoE, 2002: 17-39). Of concern, therefore, is the fact that the findings of this study suggest that little (if any) improvement has been taking place over the last few years in order to resolve the problem of classroom sizes. Again, this study shows that problems are continuing year after year without any real positive development.

Other participants agreed that a major obstacle to the IEP process was the limited size of classrooms in mainstream schools, which was particularly problematic with larger numbers of students, as Psychologist 3 asserted:

‘The small size of classrooms for students with intellectual disabilities plays a major role in hindering IEP implementation and so do the large number of students in classrooms in mainstream schools’.

Both Psychologist 3 and Head Teacher 2 argued that one of the most important objectives of the application of IEPs was to ensure the right of each student to special education services capable of meeting all of his individual needs. These interviewees also asserted that this objective would be extremely difficult to achieve unless each student was allocated a daily individual session to identify the knowledge and skills required by his individual programme; thus, failure to provide these sessions would prevent students from achieving their annual objectives. Counsellor 1 agreed and related this problem to that of overcrowding:

'One of the major barriers preventing the effective application of the plan was the small size of classrooms and the relatively large number of students'.

Father 4 noted that:

'There are many students with intellectual disabilities within the same class in mainstream schools'.

It is clear from the above interview data that there was general agreement amongst the participants above that one of the major difficulties faced by IEP teams was the excessive number of students in each classroom, which often exceeded the clear limits set by Article 6 of the RSEIP policy document, and that this was compounded by the unsuitability of the rooms themselves.

A number of the participants interviewed made similar points and some broadened the criticism to other aspects of the school facilities. For example, Teacher 4 claimed that the mainstream school buildings did not provide the basic requirements for teaching, with structural barriers hindering their movement:

'Some public school buildings are inappropriate for the needs of children with intellectual disabilities'.

The lack of special toilet facilities was another educational environment barrier faced by some disabled children, according to Father 3:

'In some schools, classes for children with intellectual disabilities are on the second floor, while their toilets are on the ground floor'.

Head Teacher 4 supported this assertion, making a more general point:

'The Saudi government seeks the expansion of mainstreaming programmes every year in public schools, but these schools are not prepared to properly deliver the concept of mainstreaming'.

Similarly, Counsellor 5 contended that the Saudi government had sought to expand mainstream schools randomly and without prior planning. For example, some school buildings had been acquired under a lease agreement:

'Some mainstream school buildings are completely inappropriate for children with intellectual disabilities because they are not owned by the Ministry of Education but rented. That is, they weren't built for the purpose of being a school from the beginning'.

The MoE appears to have been aware at an early stage of the obstacle of the inadequacy of local school buildings. Consequently, one of the challenges recognised as facing mainstreaming in the Saudi context is the inappropriateness of most mainstream school buildings for the needs of all categories of children with SEN (Al-Mousa, 2010). As Teacher 2 explained:

'The classrooms and the general infrastructure of the school have an impact on the delivery of IEPs to students. If the classrooms and infrastructure are sub-standard or unsuitable then this can be detrimental to the teachers' ability to teach effectively and it can also be detrimental to the students' learning processes'.

In conclusion, there seems to have been a consensus among respondents on the existence of important environmental barriers, including a failure to provide suitable buildings and facilities, which can be seen as related to the issue of large classes meeting in small rooms, thus hindering the proper application of IEPs for those students who need them. This means that school-related issues, such as inadequate buildings, overcrowded classrooms, overworked students, have the strong potential to impede the child's development. Therefore these problems should be addressed and rectified through increased financial investment, improved professionalism, and better co-ordination.

Technology and Teaching Aids

The use of teaching aids and assistive technology devices is increasingly important and useful for teachers of intellectually disabled students in their daily classroom routines (Hawsawi, 2002). Interview data indicate that participants in the present study perceived a deficiency in the use of special educational technologies, hampering the IEP teams from using such techniques extensively in order to ensure the educational achievement of students with intellectual disabilities. Not being able to take advantage of such educational technologies may have restricted the opportunities for such children to benefit from the services normally provided via these technologies. Access to such

opportunities is specified at the macro level by Article 98 of the RSEIP document, which specifies the requirement for both special and mainstream schools to employ

‘... technologies and computer software systems for a number of educational purposes, organisation of acts, data and information documentation, and evaluation results’ (MoE, 2002: 91).

Interviewees saw the various obstacles to using such techniques, multimedia and support materials as a primary challenge to the implementation of IEPs. For instance, Teacher 1 indicated that there were still some major obstacles to teachers’ extensive utilisation of modern techniques that could be extremely beneficial for this category of students:

‘It can be a major difficulty for teachers if their students miss out on the benefits and services provided by using special education techniques [...]. The majority of teachers suffer from a lack of teaching techniques in the classroom, which is compounded by a shortage of in-service training courses on how to use various technologies and multimedia in teaching students with intellectual disabilities’.

Teacher 2 agreed:

‘Educational technologies within the classroom are limited [...]. There is a lack of training programmes in the use of technology within the individual teaching methods’.

Teacher 3 attributed the limited availability of such training programmes to a number of factors:

‘The majority of individual education programmes have been placed in schools that are not well equipped or properly modified to address the educational needs of their students with intellectual disabilities. In addition, despite the interest in expansion projects, these have been conducted without properly taking into account educational or technological aspects. The second main reason is lack of financial support from the government to introduce teaching aids within schools’.

Teacher 4 added another possible reason: the lack of continued support from the MoE and school administrations for the provision of technical and educational aids for use

with students with intellectual disabilities. He explained that the problem was essentially one of funding:

'Some educational and technical aids are not available to mainstream schools'.

Teacher 5 supported this comment. He stated that working with each student entailed the ability to choose and apply a number of approaches that might differ from one student to another, but that not all such approaches were adequately available. The acquisition of the requisite skills to achieve the educational objectives of the plan could therefore be extremely challenging, as he explained:

'The provision of tools, equipment and teaching aids is inadequate for the delivery of the IEPs'.

From the teachers' perspective, there were thus multiple factors underlying the inadequate supply of teaching aids to meet the needs of special and mainstream schools, including a shortage of such aids at the LEA level, the failure to allocate a sufficient budget for them and a lack of continuous follow-up and monitoring by school managements. Some teachers said that they were reluctant to request these aids from their school head teachers, while others felt that the problem had arisen because the expansion of mainstream schools had occurred without consideration of the need to provide the most appropriate teaching aids for them. These findings are consistent with those of Al-Aloui (2003) and Aldosari (2006) in terms of the paucity of appropriate teaching aids for special and mainstream schools. However these findings also suggest that a range of complex factors are at play here, which are often interacting and influencing one another in negative ways. In particular, the effect of Saudi culture should not be underestimated here when analysing the causes of poor co-ordination and other issues, such as the teachers' unwillingness to ask the head teachers for the aids that they need. Within Saudi culture it is considered highly inappropriate to answer back to a head teacher or to be seen as criticising them in any way. Instead it is expected that SEN teachers will work with what has been available to him, and that he should always appear grateful and respectful to his head teacher.

Psychologist 1 and Counsellor 4 felt that one of the major obstacles to the use of educational technologies was the inadequacy of classrooms. The main issue here was their limited size, hindering the effective use of such equipment and multimedia techniques. Psychologist 1 also asserted that classrooms were not equipped for the use of the educational technologies needed to deliver IEPs.

Head Teachers 1 and 2 expressed a shared belief that the use of educational technology required much greater effort than traditional teaching methods, which might explain the relative lack of success in preparing teachers for their use during their undergraduate and pre-service years. Head Teacher 1 therefore made this suggestion:

'The use of educational technology in the application of the IEPs needs to be given more attention and effort than conventional teaching'.

Counsellor 3, agreed with this, stressing the limited knowledge among teachers about how best to use modern technologies in the educational process:

'There are several reasons for teachers' limited knowledge and engagement with assistive technologies. There is a lack of adequate training for teachers of children with intellectual disabilities [...]. Also, teachers seem to have little knowledge and understanding of the computer programs that are accessible and appropriate for their work on IEPs with students with intellectual disabilities'.

These findings suggest a shortage of training programmes for SEN teachers in the use of IEPs, as part of their professional development, which would enable them to use the most relevant techniques to fulfil the needs of students with intellectual disabilities. They also suggest that teachers perceived this inadequate training as having the consequence of increasing their workload.

The interview responses of fathers support the above findings. Interestingly, although fathers had often associated themselves with ignorance regarding their roles as IEP team members, it was found that they had informed opinions to offer in terms of teaching aids and their application. In fact the findings of this study suggest that some fathers are highly observant of such issues, especially when visiting the school, and this suggests keenness and a desire among some of them to identify ways that can help their sons'

development. For example, Father 3 expressed his belief that the educational use of computers could be extremely beneficial in the implementation of IEPs. However, he stated that he had not yet seen these appropriately used:

'Assistive technology doesn't seem to be used in applying the IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities in the classrooms in mainstream schools'.

Other fathers tended to agree. Father 4 pointed to an apparent failure by the school administration to provide the required teaching aids:

'While on a casual visit to my son at his school, I asked the teacher about the limited use of teaching aids. He replied that teachers' demands for educational support were constantly ignored. Even when they did have access to the right equipment, it was often donated by other special education teachers. I went as far as to offer the head teacher a direct financial contribution towards the provision of technology, but he declined, saying that these kinds of contributions from fathers were strictly against the school's policy'.

When asked to elaborate, Father 4 offered this interpretation of the head teacher's refusal of his offer:

'Contributions by parents towards the provision of educational equipment can be seen as a stigma on the school administration [...]. This is likely to expose the shortcomings of the school's management to those in high positions in the MoE'.

Thus, teachers and fathers tended to agree that the provision of educational aids and assistive technology might necessitate voluntary contributions from individuals and charitable organisations, while school professionals noted a number of shortcomings in the process by which the MoE and school administrations cooperated to provide mainstream schools with the equipment necessary to employ modern teaching techniques in implementing IEPs.

The concerns expressed by team members regarding the underuse of such techniques indicate that the problem could be attributed either to the shortage of teaching aids and computers in mainstream schools, or to the lack of knowledge of how to use computers,

due to the absence of basic training in implementing IEPs. In addition, most members showed evidence of a desire to master the latest developments and technologies in keeping with the nature of their work, which would facilitate the delivery of much improved teaching for children with intellectual disabilities.

Training in IEP Implementation

Another major challenge found to face IEP teams in implementing IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities relates to the reported scarcity of training programmes, which appears to have limited their professional development and their understanding of their respective roles in applying the IEPs. The interview data indicate that the consequence was that the implementation of IEPs in mainstream schools was hindered, which emphasises the importance of setting up training programmes on how best to apply IEPs. According to the literature, there is much emphasis on training for in-service teachers; their professional development is highlighted, along with the provision of financial and moral incentives to encourage them to be creative in terms of seeking educational alternatives to suit the needs of children with intellectual disabilities (Whitworth, 1994; Al-Skarna, 1995 and Hawsawi, 2002, 2007). Indeed, the reported lack of training programmes seems to directly contravene Article 72 of the RSEIP document:

‘The implementation of training and refresher courses for members of special schools and mainstream schools must be ensured according to the approved plans’ (MoE, 2002: 71).

Arguably from a teacher’s point of view, these results may be due to the weaknesses identified in the pre-service training of teachers or to the allocation of an inadequate budget for these training programmes. Alternatively, there may have been a lack of awareness on the part of the responsible bodies of the importance of the appropriate workshops. The finding is consistent with those of Al-Khashrami (2001) and Al-Herz (2008), who reported a great deal of dissatisfaction among teachers with their ability to prepare and implement IEPs, asserting that the number of workshops provided was insufficient at both special and mainstream schools. Similarly, Morgan and Rhode (1983), Furney and Salembier, (2000) and Menlove et al. (2001) assert that one of the main obstacles facing IEP teams in particular and teachers in general is a lack of in-

service educational training programmes. Importantly, however, the findings of this thesis suggest that the lack of training may be related to the country's status as a developing country. As Teacher 3 explained:

'Saudi Arabia has modernised rapidly in many areas over the past 50 years, but this modernisation has tended to be the construction of new infrastructure; roads, hospitals, and better housing. Unfortunately investment into training the country's professional personnel has not kept pace with this.....we now have the situation where teachers are insufficiently trained and prepared'.

Interviewees felt that inadequate IEP training could create difficulty for teachers in fulfilling their educational goals, through factors such as the inability to utilise modern educational techniques. For example, Teacher 1 stated that several class teachers faced problems in keeping up to date with developments in the application of IEPs:

'The lack of training for intellectual education teachers in implementing IEPs is a major challenge'.

Teacher 1 also referred to the short duration and infrequency of these programmes, which in the Riyadh LEA were held only twice a year, usually at the end of the first and second terms. In addition, the number of places was generally limited and it was up to the head teacher of each school to nominate one teacher to attend.

Teacher 2 gave a similar account of the scant training in IEP implementation, asserting that the shortage of training programmes affected the development of teachers in terms of the IEP implementation mechanism:

'There seem to be a number of reasons for the lack of training programmes to clarify the concepts of IEPs and the appropriate mechanism for them to be applied. First, it seems that these workshops are either not available in the Department of Education or the budget for them is not sufficient. The second reason relates to expansion. New mainstream schools have opened and launched IEPs, without workshops being created to support them. It seems as though the relevant authorities are not aware of how important these programmes are'.

According to Teachers 1, 2 and 3, these training programmes were not sufficiently available in mainstream schools. Teacher 3 offered the explanation that all of the

official training programmes were currently delivered by the Department of Educational Training, which did not have the appropriate specialisation:

'The Department of Educational Training, under the LEA in Riyadh, is not specialised in holding training courses specifically related to IEPs'.

Teacher 4 echoed this complaint of the limited availability of training programmes in IEPs, as well as the unwillingness of the authorities to develop and update training workshops along with the IEPs. This was despite the person responsible being an educational supervisor at the MoE, responsible for providing training courses for teachers on the concept of IEPs and how best to apply them. Relevant to his experience with training courses, Teacher 4 said that he had had only one training opportunity, which he did not deem beneficial with regard to the IEP. In fact, his own research from the internet and other sources seemed to cover more information than the training programme he had attended:

'The training programme under the auspices of the Department of Educational Training did not help me in the implementation of IEPs'.

The findings above indicated that this lack of training is constituted one of the main educational environmental barriers to the application of IEPs within mainstream schools. Aldosari (2006) points out that the training programmes were not sufficiently available to teachers in special schools. It is also consistent with the recommendation of Rouse and Agbenu (1998) that in-service training courses on how to develop IEPs should be offered to teachers.

Among the other school professional interviewees, Head Teachers 1, 2, 3 and 4 agreed that there were inadequate training workshops on IEPs for them. All four affirmed that they had received no training on the application of IEPs. According to Head Teacher 3, an official request from the Department of Educational Training was forwarded to the school administration to select an SEN teacher to attend an IEP training programme. When asked why he had not been invited to attend such training himself, Head Teacher 3 made it clear that educational supervisors at the MoE seemed uninterested in offering IEP training courses to school administrators:

'The general trend among the supervisors is to set up training courses on the application of IEPs for teachers rather than the rest of the school staff'.

Other interviewees offered a somewhat contrasting account, depicting training courses as a one-week break from school routines. For example, Counsellor 1, Psychologist 1 and Psychologist 2 all stated that they had received training for a week per academic year. They claimed that attending these programmes was considered a mini-break from school, despite having to start and finish at the same times (8 am and 12 noon). Psychologist 1 reported:

'I went on the course in order to take a break from the daily routine of school [and from] the huge workload... '.

Another interviewee, Counsellor 1, suggested that it was not really necessary for people other than teachers to be trained in the application of the IEPs, since the system whereby IEPs should be jointly implemented by a team was not activated in practice:

'It's actually the teacher who is solely in charge of applying the IEPs [...]. In most cases, it's the classroom teacher who interacts most with students on a daily basis '.

Counsellor 3, Counsellor 4 and Psychologist 4 stated that those responsible for managing the training courses often did not seem to have sufficient experience or the relevant qualifications to deliver workshops on the application of IEPs. As an example, Counsellor 4 stated:

'There is a lack of qualified human resources to provide training workshops for the preparation and implementation of the IEPs in the Riyadh LEA '.

Among the fathers who were interviewed, there was a clear consensus of opinion about the lack of access to information on special education and particularly on IEPs. This was perceived by the interviewees as a barrier to developing their own performance and improving their approaches to dealing with their children. According to Father 4, the only reason for the lack of knowledge in Saudi Arabia about disability issues and how to use the most appropriate teaching methods was the mass media:

'The Saudi mass media doesn't raise awareness about special educational needs or do anything to alleviate some of the problems facing students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools'.

In addition, the researcher believes that while the Saudi media may indeed have failed to disseminate informed opinion about children with special needs and methods of teaching them using IEPs, the blame should not be borne by the media alone. Indeed, this issue raises some questions about the current role of both special and mainstream schools in the community, since one of the duties of these schools towards Saudi society, as defined by Article 76 of the RSEIP document, is

'... to promote awareness and knowledge among members of society and the various organisations of the roles and tasks of special and mainstream schools, and the nature of services provided for children with SEN, as well as raising awareness of members of the community regarding such children' (MoE, 2002: 72).

Father 3 suggested another reason for their inability to attend training programmes on the application of IEPs, whether held in schools or at the LEA premises in Riyadh, which they attributed to the general attitude of school administrators, who seemed to feel that the members of staff had failed to deliver parental training programmes on the IEP concept or how it should be properly implemented in schools. As far as he knew, there were

'... no training programmes to enhance the performance of fathers with regard to the preparation and implementation of IEPs'.

Again, this failure to provide training appears to have contravened Article 76 of the RSEIP document:

'Parents should be given support through family targeted training programmes so that they can actively deal with the student' (MoE, 2002: Article 76, 73).

In summary, while teachers seem to have benefitted most, in terms of attendance, from training courses related to the IEPs, the data indicate a large degree of agreement among them and other professionals such as counsellors and psychologists regarding the

shortage of training provision. All respondents agreed that there was little or no benefit in holding these courses at the Department of Education premises, citing problems including a lack of innovation, development and modernisation in terms of such workshops and courses. Head teachers and fathers did not appear to receive any IEP related training courses. The above analysis suggests that while head teachers tended to blame officials and supervisors in the Department of Education, the fathers blamed head teachers for not offering training workshops in the schools. On the other hand, of course, it could be argued that IEP team members are not in a position to offer critical analysis of what is required in order to improve the standard of training since they themselves have not been trained. If they have no knowledge or experience of what constitutes a professional training system then perhaps their comments may be considered invalid. Yet what is clear from the findings is that there is extensive agreement on the need to improve training, with the perception among many that they lack the required level of expertise. Therefore their opinions are still worthy of mention and should not be disregarded.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

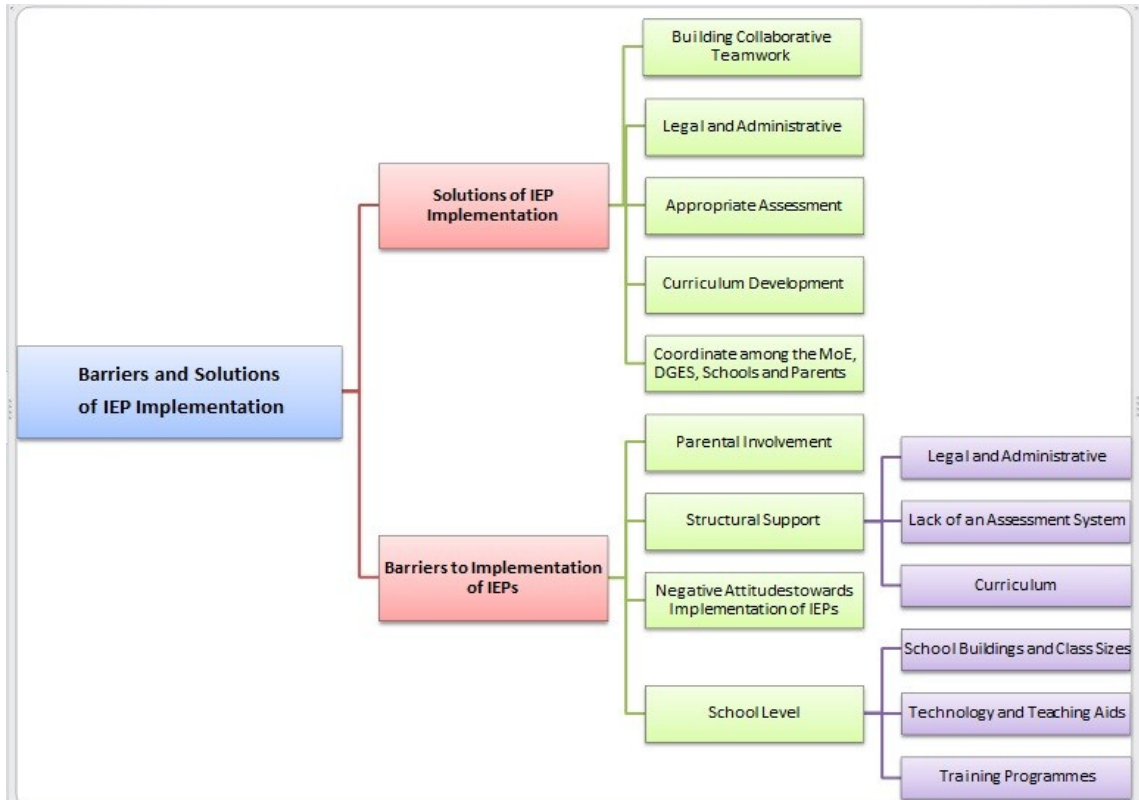
In this chapter the findings from the semi-structured interviews were discussed. The focus of the discussion was the second and third research questions. The second research question concerned the challenges that IEP team members faced while implementing IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream schools in Riyadh city, Saudi Arabia. From the viewpoints of the participants, it would appear that all of the problems related to the second theme were grounded in reality. These challenges were found to include parental involvement; obstacles pertaining to the structural support provided by the school and the LEA; negative attitudes towards the application of IEPs; and constraints associated with school level. The existence of such a range of obstacles can be taken to imply that the appropriate implementation of IEPs as described in the RSEIP document is far from having been achieved, suggesting that policy has been adopted with no follow-through as to IEP implementation. Therefore, these difficulties can be said to be a stumbling block in the path of achieving the outcomes of the IEPs, which reinforces the view that the current status of IEPs in mainstream schools is less than satisfactory. The particular nature of these obstacles to

the successful implementation of IEPs will be explored within the framework of the Bronfenbrenner (1979) model, which will be utilised to conceptualise them and the interactions between them. This chapter has contextualised the findings through the integration of results and information from relevant literature in the field. The current findings have also been found to be consistent with those of further research in the Middle East and other developing countries (e.g. Al-Skarna,1995; Paik and Healey, 1999; Lins and Miller, 2003; Christle and Yell, 2010). This study has contributed to the extant literature through the provision of the first qualitative analysis of SEN interactions in the context of Saudi Arabia. If these barriers to implementation can be comprehended clearly within the scope of this research, change can be accomplished through the realisation of particular systems and strategies.

In addition, this chapter also addresses the third question and presents findings pertinent to the solutions of IEP implementation. In this chapter the final set of findings of the study were discussed in the light of the relevant literature. The data analysed here related to proposed solutions to the barriers to successful IEP implementation identified in Chapter 6. While clear proposals were identified under five thematic headings, it was established that these had not yet been adequately put into practice in accordance with the RSEIP policy document. These proposed solutions, pertaining to the building of collaborative teamwork; legal and administrative; coordination between the MoE, DGSE, schools and parents; appropriate assessment; and curriculum development, were shown to be appropriate for the application of IEPs, as described in the RSEIP document (2002). One can thus infer from these findings the significance of the various solutions suggested by the interviewees and their major contribution to addressing current issues and to developing and improving the current state of IEPs in mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh. By applying them, it should be possible to improve the educational and support services provided for intellectually disabled children. To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to discuss the roles and challenges faced by SEN students in Saudi Arabia, as well as the perceptions of Saudi IEP team members. They highlight the important disconnect between some school staff and parents in light of existing beliefs and cultural norms; these findings can therefore more effectively inform Saudi policy design and teaching strategies, to provide the best solutions for students with intellectual disabilities in this context.

To sum up, figure 6.1 below provides the complexity of the implementation of IEPs in Saudi mainstreaming schools as shown in the results from different parts of this study. In the next chapter these barriers and solutions will be further explored using the model of Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Figure 6.1: Conceptual schema of the relevant challenges and solutions of IEP implementation in Saudi mainstreaming schools



Chapter Seven

Analysis of the Issues Using Bronfenbrenner's Theory

Chapter Seven

Analysis of the Issues Using Bronfenbrenner's Theory

7.0 Introduction

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), individual children should be placed at the centre of the world and it is their day-to-day interactions with that world that constitutes the microsystem. The microsystem therefore operates in relationship with the child (ibid). This theory allows this study to focus on the question of how the policy affecting IEP's, which was developed at the macrosystem level, is or is not constructing the IEP to be an effective 'agent' of the child in the microsystem. Individual IEP's would usually be seen as representing the child and placing his or her needs in this central position. This study set out to explore how effectively IEPs do this. This model enables an examination of how the tensions between the meso, exo and macro levels are likely to have significant implications for the child at the micro level. This is predicated upon the belief that for the IEP to be effective the necessary actions need to travel through the different systemic levels described by Bronfenbrenner.

This chapter demonstrates the effectiveness and applicability of the Bronfenbrenner model (1979) as an analytical tool to better understand the complex interactions and issues affecting the implementation of the IEP's. Therefore, it seeks to explore the findings presented in Chapter 6 using this model to examine the specific context of intellectually disabled children in Saudi Arabia. It draws upon four of the interrelated systems outlined in the theoretical framework in Chapter 3 (see section 3.6): microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. These systems are described again here, for the convenience of the reader. Each of these interrelated systems will be examined in turn and evidence drawn from the participant interviews in Chapter 6 will be used to categorise and analyse these findings. The challenges highlighted in the previous chapter were found to include parental involvement; structural support issues relating to that provided by the school and the LEA; negative attitudes of participants towards the application of IEPs; and school level constraints involving, for example, resources. A number of proposed solutions were provided for IEP optimisation and implementation, broadly pertaining to improved teamwork; legal and administrative approaches; coordination between the MoE, DGSE, schools and parents; appropriate

assessment; and curriculum development. In this chapter, these findings from Chapter 6 are diagrammatically mapped onto the model in order to bring out the major issues and recommendations arising from the Bronfenbrenner (1979) analysis. An explanation of each diagram is also provided, supplemented by a discussion of certain limitations of the diagrams and the solutions for these.

7.1 Microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979: 22) defined the microsystem as ‘a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics’. In this study, the term microsystem denotes the immediate environment of the child, the context in which the child directly relates to people and all individual interactions with them as part of the IEP plan.

This section, which is describing the problems that participants have suggested hinder IEP at a micro level, brings out the issues that relate to these interactions, such as teachers over-focusing on the children. It will be remembered from Chapter 5 that only teachers and fathers were identified as interacting with the child at a micro level. However, some of the problems identified in this chapter indicate an awareness that more should be happening at the micro level, with the inclusion of new participants (for example, paraprofessionals) and the resources with which it is proposed that children should interact. The table (7.1) below provides a summary of the issues arising within the microsystem of each of the IEP team members.

Given that this chapter seeks to examine the systems involved in the design and delivery of IEPs, this section is focused on the microsystems of all the IEP team members. As the child is at the centre of all microsystems and the IEP comprises multiple professionals working with that child, an IEP team will necessarily involve a comparatively large set of interrelated microsystems. What this means in practice is that each member of an IEP team will require an appropriate and functional microsystem if they are to be able to effectively contribute. Due to the focus of IEPs, the child will be situated at the core of all interactions. This thesis is therefore focused on these multiple microsystems, and the ways in which the various actors engage with the child, in order to identify and better understand the complex issues and barriers that might hinder the effective delivery of IEPs. This approach is predicated upon the idea that the

Bronfenbrenner (1979) model should allow an examination of the individual interactions as part of a holistic whole, even when these may be taking place in relative isolation. This analysis may support the design of optimal teaching strategies that take into account the diverse direct interactions that a child makes in their daily lives, thereby supporting the success or improvement of their individual education plan.

Table 7.1: Participants descriptions of barriers at the microsystem level

Levels	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Microsystem	Lack of parental involvement in implementing IEPs	Lack of parental involvement in implementing IEPs	Lack of parental involvement in implementing IEPs	Lack of parental involvement in implementing IEPs	Lack of parental involvement in implementing IEPs
	The rigid national curriculum	The rigid national curriculum	The rigid national curriculum	The rigid national curriculum	
	Negative attitudes	Negative attitudes	Negative attitudes.	Negative attitudes	
	-Inappropriate school buildings and class sizes, insufficient teaching aids and limited technology	-Inappropriate school buildings and class sizes, insufficient teaching aids and limited technology	-Inappropriate school buildings and class sizes, insufficient teaching aids and limited technology	-Inappropriate school buildings and class sizes, insufficient teaching aids and limited technology	-Inappropriate school buildings and class sizes, insufficient teaching aids and limited technology
			Literacy of parents		
				Teachers are ignoring the value of participation by the fathers	
		Low educational level of parents			
	Work commitments of parents				Busy and a lack of time
					Stress to parents
					A little information regarding their child and IEPs
	Heavy workload in the application of IEPs				
	Absence of paraprofessionals within schools				
	Insufficient qualified personnel				
	Lack of communication skills of parents				

The findings illustrated in table 7.1 highlight several issues reported by participants from all IEP groups. This findings data presents the responses of the Saudi IEP team members and therefore reflects their reported perception of challenges, rather than extrapolating these responses to include all of the particular groups who may be affected. Therefore, repeated instances of similar responses reflect unanimity of opinion among IEP group members across different professions, rather than indicating the parties most affected by the stated barriers. Of the varied responses regarding microsystem barriers, several were almost universally considered to be challenges, namely: limited parental involvement in IEPs, the rigid national curriculum, negative attitudes, and inappropriate school resources. All of these responses will be discussed in greater depth below.

The Bronfenbrenner analysis illustrates that the issues in the microsystem tend to relate to poor levels of education and involvement of the parents, or to insufficient levels of funding and guidance. Essentially, the microsystem contains significant barriers to a child centred application and a lack of communication between the varying levels of staff and parents who are supposed to be involved in the creation and implementation of the plan. This describes a breakdown in communication in a number of senses, including a failure by school staff to update parents on the progress of their children or a failure by parents to properly understand and implement IEP plans in the home environment. Communicative barriers can reduce the level of parental involvement, leaving parents feeling isolated and insignificant, and thereby hindering on-going open communication. Counsellors participating in this study cited that the level of parental literacy skills constitutes another barrier to their active participatory role within the IEP. The findings in Chapter 6 demonstrate that the level of stress experienced by busy parents can also reduce communication throughout the IEP structure, adversely affecting the child's overall quality of care. This lack of time and high level of stress among fathers may have contributed to the psychologists noting that some teachers fail to give sufficient weight to the value of parental participation to the learning process. It seems likely that this may affect the learning outcomes of children, who are at the centre of the IEP process (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The findings also suggested several more key problems of the microsystem: foremost among these is the 'narrow and rigid curricula', which was noted by all school staff as

constituting a particularly serious issue for the development of students with intellectual disabilities at the micro level. Factors such as excessive teacher workload and lack of expertise were also commonly reported at the microsystem level because of the need to improve efficiency through investment, development and nurtured professionalism. The oft-reported negative attitudes, as well as the current lack of development and professionalism, seem to have contributed to the poor level of cooperation reported within the exosystem and the existence of fundamental problems at that level; these attitudes are likely to have had a negative impact on students at the microsystem level. It is also likely that educational shortcomings will have negatively affected the performance of school staff, their creation of appropriate IEPs and their interactions within the mesosystem: this will almost certainly have had a negative influence upon the students via their implementation of substandard IEPs at the microsystem level.

As expressed in Chapter 6, the issue of inappropriate curriculum design affects the individual role of each member of the IEP team differently at the microsystem level. It comprises a problem for counsellors because it creates difficulty in setting and measuring the attainment of both long and short term goals, whereas teachers complained of focus on unsuitable subjects, and an inability to meet the needs of their students. This problem is echoed in the data gathered from head teachers, who cite poor curricula as creating problems in adequate course design, such as a focus on academic rather than social, emotional and behavioural needs. These problems create issues at the microsystem level by channelling interactions with children in directions that do not effectively meet their educational needs.

Although the school may be regarded as part of the child's microsystem, it is also part of his exosystem, because it is an institution that directly affects his development. This means that student development can be significantly affected by school-related issues, such as inadequate buildings (school structures), overcrowded classrooms, classroom supplies, overworked teachers, limited technology, insufficient teaching aids and multimedia, limited resources and absence of paraprofessionals within schools who support the classroom teacher. These problems are all negative aspects of the child's microsystem because they hinder the ability of teachers to implement IEPs at the microsystem level, affecting the student's development. Effectively, this means that school-home (school staff and parents) are unable to interact with the child directly as a

part of their microsystem role, or at least to interact in the most suitable manner to meet their particular needs.

This analysis of the microsystem (of intellectually disabled children at Saudi Arabian mainstream boys' schools) seems to be characterised by relatively poor structure and poor cooperation between IEP team members, which are likely to impact negatively on the child within his immediate environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) claimed that bi-directional influences are strongest within the microsystem, suggesting that the ways in which the IEP team members interact with the child at the micro level may be especially influential over their mental and social development. Essentially, the result of this is that children develop more effectively when more of their relationships and environments are safe and nurturing. The analysis of the data presented here raises questions about the treatment of the child in the microsystems they encounter on a daily basis if the practices within those systems are informed by IEP's that do not draw upon the full expertise of the team. How the child is treated within the microsystem level will have a particularly strong influence on how that child reacts to others in return.

Therefore it is with regards to the range of problems at the microsystem that solutions should be sought. In particular, this is to be attempted with reference to the unique contributions of this study including resolving those related to all of the interviewees' descriptions of the common barriers identified within the micro level above. Therefore, bearing in mind that IEP team member interviewees views offered the best solutions to overcome the common barriers to the implementation of IEPs were: increasing parent involvement in the IEP process; formulation of curriculum; appropriate school buildings and class sizes, sufficient teaching aids and more technology; and the presence of paraprofessionals, as shown in table 7.2.

Table 7.2 Participants explanations of solutions at the microsystem findings

Level	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Microsystem	Increasing parent involvement in the IEP process	Increasing parent involvement in the IEP process	Increasing parent involvement in the IEP process	Increasing parent involvement in the IEP process	Increasing parent involvement in the IEP process
	Formulation of curriculum.	Formulation of curriculum.	Formulation of curriculum.	Formulation of curriculum.	Formulation of curriculum.
	Appropriate school buildings and class sizes, sufficient teaching aids and more technology	Appropriate school buildings and class sizes, sufficient teaching aids and more technology	Appropriate school buildings and class sizes, sufficient teaching aids and more technology	Appropriate school buildings and class sizes, sufficient teaching aids and more technology	Appropriate school buildings and class sizes, sufficient teaching aids and more technology
	The presence of paraprofessionals				

The table above illustrates a high level of agreement among the participating groups, with all five groups citing increased parent involvement, curriculum design, and better resources as being key microsystem solutions.

Of note is that the findings regarding the curriculum indicate that they should also be considered part of the student’s microsystem. Therefore, although the reformulation of curricula in line with the abilities and potential of students with SEN could occur through special committees at the mesosystem level, the direct impact of curricula on the design of IEPs and the students’ development would entail the school and the curriculum becoming aspects of each student’s microsystem.

Interestingly, the members suggest that the presence of fathers who were interviewed appeared keen to play a more integrated and participative role with the other IEP team members at the exosystem level. Instead, fathers actually seemed to want more input into the creation of IEPs at the exosystem level and their implementation at the microsystem level. This would include working closely with the multidisciplinary team on diagnosis, testing and measurement at the exosystem level.

In fact, the most popular solutions within the micro level among the participants of this research are: appropriate school buildings and class sizes; sufficient teaching aids; and

more technology. These suggest the need for increased government investment and a higher level of active support from the MoE at the micro and exosystem level. This could be effectively supplemented by the presence of trained paraprofessionals, whose presence would reduce the strain on teachers in the classroom, in addition to playing an active role in helping students with SEN to achieve the aims laid out by their IEP. This correlates to the approach recommended by Bronfenbrenner (1979) who stressed the importance of ensuring that the child is kept at the centre of the microsystem setting.

From this investigation of the educational interactions at the microsystem level, this study will now examine the issues from the perspective of the mesosystem.

7.2 Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979: 25) defined the mesosystem as comprising ‘the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)’. In simple terms, a mesosystem can therefore be said to connect the microsystems of the developing person, such as parents, family or teachers. Therefore, in the context of this investigation, the term mesosystem refers to the home and school environment, and how the child interacts with these. It is also important to note that the mesosystem level is where IEPs are formulated, which makes it of fundamental importance that the interactions and failings of this level be clearly understood.

The critical examination of issues presented here demonstrates that analysis using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory facilitates useful data analysis by breaking down complex interactions into distinct levels of systems. For example, as illustrated in the table below, the school staff regularly blamed home for poor interactions with school staff within the mesosystem, as well as accusing parents of paying insufficient attention to their children within the microsystem. In contrast, home tended to blame schools for not involving them enough. However, it would be simplistic to cast blame upon the fathers for the poor performance of IEP team members. Instead, a complex set of interacting relationships and contexts should be taken into account and the model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) can be used to reach an understanding of these relationships and

contexts. This model shows that the interwoven relationships found within the mesosystem level mean that the school staff (head teacher, counsellor, SEN teacher, and the psychologist) should ideally join the home (parents) within the most inner layer of the microsystem. The theory implies that the overlapping of the four layers that explain how the different contexts and relationships will influence a child's development if IEP development and implementation is carried out effectively. Therefore the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory allows a practical investigation to be carried out, providing an understanding of how the overlapping of these four layers can profoundly affect the IEP and in turn a student's behaviour, attitude, skills, and knowledge.

It is clear from the table below that there was a feeling of reciprocal mistrust between the school staff and home with a clear absence of mutual understanding among its members demonstrated by the subsequent issue of blame being cast. The findings also revealed that there were poor interactions between IEP team members and home within the mesosystem, as shown in table 7.3 below.

Table 7.3: Participants descriptions of barriers at the mesosystem level

Levels	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Mesosystem	Lack of training programmes	Lack of training programmes	Lack of training programmes	Lack of training programmes	Lack of training programmes
	A lack of cooperation and coordination among the mainstream schools and home	A lack of cooperation and coordination among the mainstream schools and home			A lack of cooperation and coordination among the mainstream schools and home
	A lack of desires of fathers to application of IEPs				
		Fathers think that the school is responsible for the education of their children			
	Blamed fathers	Blamed fathers and MoE	Blamed fathers	Blamed fathers	
					Blamed school staff

From a broad perspective, it can be argued that the mesosystem is characterised by a blame based on a lack of understanding. This is exemplified in terms of the blame being apportioned by members of the team. Primarily, the table clearly illustrates that all participants perceived a lack of training programmes to be a significant barrier at the mesosystem level.

As noted above, the analysis presented here indicates that the head teachers, counsellors and psychologists blamed fathers for poor interactions with other IEP team members within the mesosystem. Teacher interviewees still tended to blame fathers for their low participation as IEP team members, whilst fathers tended to blame head teachers, counsellors and psychologists for not involving them enough, and fathers also blamed teachers, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists who were unwilling to cooperate with them. Similarly, the psychologists and counsellors usually believed they were not being utilised sufficiently or adequately, and head teachers often blamed the MoE for not clarifying the IEP team members' roles and for not offering the necessary support required to implement the RSEIP document. This means that the interactions between IEP team members and home in the mesosystem suffered from poor cooperation and poor coordination, which confirms the gaps identified in Chapter 5 (see section 5.2).

The mesosystem describes the coming together of two microsystems involved in the development of an individual, such as home and school or the relationship between emotional development, cognitive development and biological development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The Bronfenbrenner model (*ibid*) shows the complexity of inter-acting factors, relationships and different contexts within the child's environment. For instance, inefficiency during the creation of IEPs at the meso level will be expected to result in poorly implemented IEPs at the micro level. In essence, the Bronfenbrenner model (*ibid*) shows that the current failings across the exosystem are contributing significantly to the lack of organisation, cooperation, and coordination that currently exists between IEP team members within the mesosystem. Therefore the IEPs that are initiated and implemented in the country are not expected to reach their full potential or effectiveness as working documents, which means the subsequent reviews of IEPs as tools to monitor and fully develop the students' progress are inadequate and failing.

In other words, the findings in Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate that issues such as inadequate or unsuitable training programmes are contributing significantly to the confusion, poor communication, and inadequate cooperation that are taking place between the IEP team members at the meso level. For example, some participating psychologists and head teachers blamed the MoE, DGSE and LEAs for not properly fulfilling their roles, as well as for the lack of training given to school psychologists (see section 6.4).

The implication to then be drawn from this is that IEPs tend to be poorly formulated by IEP team members at the meso level, as well as poorly implemented at the micro level. This lack of commitment to training seemed to be visible up to the highest educational level, with head teachers claiming that the MoE seemed to be uninterested in offering IEP training courses to school administrators or school staff.

However, in terms of solutions, all IEP team members in this study stated that, among the solutions relating to the effective IEP implementation would be the encouragement and motivation of home to communicate with the school staff working in mainstream schools. If home could work with school more closely in order to meet the needs of their child this could improve the child's educational outcomes. The literature stresses the importance of this greater need for collaboration between school staff and home, claiming that these effective partnerships can enable the success of inclusive education (Mislán et al., 2008; Alcalá, 2011). School staff and fathers interviewed also reported a particular need for more guidance and training to enable them to participate more fully and effectively in the IEP process and to support students' progress at school. Training programmes are widely acknowledged as improving the kinds of performance identified here at the mesosystem, with specific examples of IEP training available from Korea (Lynch, 1994) and Canada, where training in curriculum adaptation has been given special mention (Ministry of Education British Columbia, 1995). This is supported by the literature, which states that IEP teachers should be given training for the whole educational process, from curriculum planning to classroom instruction (Thomas, 1996). The table 7.4 below represents the mesosystem of the interactions between school and home.

Table 7.4 Participants explanations of solutions at the mesosystem findings

Level	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Mesosystem	Staff schools and home collaboration	Staff schools and home collaboration	Staff schools and home collaboration	Staff schools and home collaboration	Staff schools and home collaboration
	Training programmes	Training programmes	Training programmes	Training programmes	Training programmes

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, it is recognised that there are bidirectional influences both towards and away from the student throughout all the layers of Bronfenbrenner’s model.

The solutions emerging from this layer of the Bronfenbrenner model seem to suggest the value of greater training and better communication between all parties involved in the development of the child. All participants agreed that among the factors that may contribute to the success of the IEP would be the launch of in-service workshops and training programmes for the IEP team in order to be familiarised with the rules and requirements for well-implemented IEPs and, therefore, develop highly effective IEPs at the school. This could also take the form of workshops being offered in schools on subjects such as the importance of IEP plan implementation and the potential gains that their contribution could bring, as suggested in Chapter 5. This supports the leading solution, which is to improve the degree of collaboration between school staff and home. The fact that these relationships have been examined within the context of the mesosystem enables the interactions to be clearly seen, demonstrating the potential value of changes to all school staff and home.

This thesis has discussed the mesosystem and will move on to an in-depth examination of exosystem.

7.3 Exosystem

The exosystem is defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979: 25) as referring to ‘one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person’. Therefore, the term ‘exosystem’ is utilised in this study to denote

the IEP team members (individuals) and their interactions, which comprise a social setting that can and do directly affect the development of the child without their explicit interaction. The findings suggest that poor interactions between IEP team members within the exosystem, for example, the lack of professional development and efficiency within the exosystem (including school administration, DGSE and the LEA in Riyadh) has compounded issues of poor communication and poor coordination within the mesosystem. It seems likely that the reported lack of officially organised and scheduled team meetings will have exacerbated these problems, by reducing the opportunity for effective dialogue and review of IEP performance.

In fact, the interview data indicates that such problems within the exosystem were compounded as they were transmitted through to the microsystem. Issues such as inadequate communication, cooperation and coordination among IEP team members may be interpreted as bidirectional interlinks at the mesosystem and exosystem levels. The table 7.5 below reveals the major hindrances in the implementation of IEPs by IEP team members at exosystem level.

Table 7.5: Participants descriptions of barriers at the exosystem level

Levels	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Exosystem	Poor interactions and communication between IEP team members	Poor interactions and communication between IEP team members	Poor interactions and communication between IEP team members	Poor interactions and communication between IEP team members	Poor interactions and communication between IEP team members
	Lack of formal IEP meetings	Lack of formal IEP meetings	Lack of IEP formal meetings	Lack of formal IEP meetings	Lack of formal IEP meetings
	Poorly coordinated between DGSE and LEA	Poorly coordinated between DGSE and LEA	Poorly coordinated between DGSE and LEA	Poorly coordinated between DGSE and LEA	Poorly coordinated between DGSE and LEA
	Lack of an assessment system	Lack of an assessment system	Lack of an assessment system	Lack of an assessment system	Lack of an assessment system
	Low income of the fathers and divorce		Low income of the fathers and divorce		
	Absence of Supreme Council				
	Lack of budget requests of MoE	Lack of budget requests of MoE.	Lack of budget requests of MoE.	Lack of budget requests of MoE.	Lack of budget requests of MoE.

The problems of the exosystem pertain directly to problems of the individuals involved in IEP teams. As can be seen from the table, there was broad agreement that the absence of MoE budget requests, the lack of assessment systems for IEP team members, poor IEP interactions, and poor government department coordination were the most serious concerns at the exosystem level. This suggests that IEPs tended to be poorly formulated by team members at the mesosystem level, as well as poorly implemented within microsystems. The school staff (including teachers and counsellors) indicated that the weak participation of many fathers in the work of the IEP team may be seen partially as the result of socioeconomic factors, such as low income or divorce. The teachers who participated also commented on the absence of a Supreme Council: this organisation is due to assume responsibility for the rights and development of special education services, however it has yet to be activated and its absence means the lack of an ultimate body taking responsibility for SEN and IEPs.

There are problems in the exosystem which contains the IEP team members that have direct input into the IEP, but do not necessarily have much direct contact with the child, such as head teachers, counsellors and psychologists. Although the document advocates that the IEP teams work flexibly and utilise a multidisciplinary team approach, with the aim of fulfilling each child's needs, these teams create an appropriate exosystem. In investigating the perceptions of representative agents from the exosystem, the interrelationship between this and the exo and macrosystem have also revealed issues. As an example, the table demonstrates supposed exosystems, such as lack of formal IEP meetings, which are poorly managed and so remain at the macro or micro levels, meaning that they are not effective collaborators. They do not comply with the roles as set out in the RSEIP document policy regarding how IEPs should be implemented at schools. This demonstrates that given the different types of power that operate as a consequence of actions that make up each of Bronfenbrenner's levels, exosystems have social power beyond that of individual actions.

There is a suggested set of solutions regarding the identified challenges. In order to put this policy into direct practice in dealings with the student at the microsystem level, it would first be necessary for the exosystem to be further developed and improved. For instance, many respondents emphasised the need for a central, national diagnosis centre, as well as for regional diagnosis centres, using appropriate diagnostic testing and

accurate measurement tools. Such a development would require substantial government investment, yet if carried out correctly would have the potential to dramatically improve this important aspect of the exosystem. The interactions taking place within the exosystem have also been examined in these two chapters, with further reinforcement of the need for increased participation by IEP team members and fathers at both the micro and exosystem levels, as shown in table 7.6 below.

Table 7.6 Participants explanations of solutions at the exosystem findings

Levels	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Exosystem	Provision of special education services	Provision of special education services	Provision of special education services	Provision of special education services	Provision of special education services
	Developing assessment system	Developing assessment system	Developing assessment system	Developing assessment system	
	Increasing coordination between MoE, DGSE, schools and parents regarding IEP process	Increasing coordination between MoE, DGSE, schools and parents regarding IEP process	Increasing coordination between MoE, DGSE, schools and parents regarding IEP process	Increasing coordination between MoE, DGSE, schools and parents regarding IEP process	Increasing coordination between MoE, DGSE, schools and parents regarding IEP process
	Building teamwork	Building teamwork	Building teamwork	Building teamwork	Building teamwork
	Encourage involvement at IEP meetings	Encourage involvement at IEP meetings	Encourage involvement at IEP meetings	Encourage involvement at IEP meetings	Encourage involvement at IEP meetings
	The presence of coordinator	The presence of coordinator			
		The evolution of the job performance			
		Leadership role			
	Resident supervisor		Resident supervisor	Resident supervisor	
			Educational supervisor	Educational supervisor	

This table demonstrates broad agreement about the viability of the following solutions: provision of special education services, team building, greater involvement in IEP meetings, and the development of an assessment system. However, it is not sufficient to simply attribute these problems of communication, cooperation and coordination to the

transmission of negativity from the exosystem and macrosystem levels. In particular, as discussed in Chapter 5 it is the head teachers who should take the lead and assume responsibility for organising the IEP team members so that the microsystem can positively and directly influence the students through carefully planned and coordinated IEPs (see section 5.2). The data in Chapter 5 and 6 confirms the importance of leadership, showing that head teachers are the source of authority in schools and should therefore actively manage the IEP team. This clear structure should enable professional IEP team members at the exosystem level to function with more efficiency, understanding and coordination. Head teachers should be supported in this role by the MoE. Indeed, it is the relevant representatives of the MoE at the exosystem level who should initiate the planning of ways to implement the RSEIP document, meaning that their interactions with head teachers at the mesosystem level should establish early clarity and create a strategic foundation on which head teachers can build.

The findings from all of the participant groups suggest unanimity of thought regarding the need for greater effort to be made in the area of student review meetings, which could serve to address parental concerns, discuss the progress of the child in question, and other essential functions in the educational plan. The literature shows that the importance of IEP team meetings has been recognised within the wider international context, serving to ensure that the current circumstances of each child are properly discussed and the progress of the IEP team itself assessed (Roberts and Solomons, 1970; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2004; McCausland, 2005). At these meetings, it may also be possible to establish systems that determine the need or extent of special education services to be provided to children who have been deemed to be at risk, which could be supported by a shift in policy. Similar to these arguments in favour of developing the RSEIP document with respect to aspects of the mesosystem level, it would also be useful to amend the policy in accordance with Bronfenbrenner's concept of the exosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights three exosystem levels: the parents' place of work, their social networks and the influences of the community as those expected to be most influential on the family. Thereafter, the amended RSEIP stipulations should be allowed to move from this outer level towards the inner levels suggested by the theory. This movement supports the idea of continually reviewing and developing special education policy (Itkonen, 2007; Al-Fahili, 2009).

After this initial step, representatives of the MoE and the DGSE, at the exosystem level and head teachers at the mesosystem level would have an amended RSEIP document for application. Interactions between these parties at the mesosystem level should then be followed by interactions between the head teacher and IEP team members, as building teamwork solutions, also at the mesosystem level. Throughout this process, however, it should be remembered that there are influences working in both directions which might bring further amendments or developments.

Another outcome demonstrated by this analysis is the importance of the relations between educational supervisors and school staff at the exo level becoming better coordinated and more effective, as was discussed in Chapter 6. In this situation, educational supervisors would visit schools regularly, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of IEP team members and ensuring that the processes and requirements pertaining to the IEPs were being implemented. An alternative view could be for a resident supervisor to be appointed to oversee the planning and implementation of IEPs by IEP team members. Teachers, counsellors and psychologists all agree that the exosystem level problems may be effectively managed through the use of resident supervisors within schools. Moreover, counsellors and psychologists claim that the roles of educational supervisors would be to coordinate between school and the MoE and LEA; this underlines the importance of the exosystem perspective in implementing the educational performance.

The effects of the RSEIP document and the production of IEPs through the interactions of IEP team members within the exosystem may have a positive or negative influence on the way that parents respond at their own microsystem level and above. For example, the IEPs will influence the behaviour of parents towards their children, while poorly designed or implemented IEPs may be associated with problematic behaviour on the part of the child, such as not interacting with others. In accordance with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) concept of bidirectional influences, such behaviour by the child will affect the role of the parents within the outer systems. They might feel increasingly stressed, tired or frustrated and so seek assistance from IEP team members or other professionals at the exosystem level, such as the coordinator. Parents might also have problems at the exosystem level due to higher anxiety, such as increased stress and

difficulties at work or absenteeism. This, in turn, might be reflected back onto the child at the microsystem level, as well as on the spouse and siblings.

Having discussed exosystems, this study will now examine this topic through the conceptual framework of the macrosystem.

7.4 Macrosystem

A macrosystem, as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979: 26) refers to ‘consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro, meso, and exo) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies’. Therefore, in this study, the macrosystem is represented by the RSEIP policy document, as well as various aspects of Saudi culture and the subculture of the school. Essentially, the RSEIP document may be regarded as originating at the macrosystem level, while the lack of legislation and regulations with respect to the enforcement of the document may also be regarded as applying at that level, as shown in table 7.7 below.

Table 7.7: Participants descriptions of barriers at the macrosystem level

Levels	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Macrosystem	Lack of legislation requiring the implementation of IEPs				
		The failure to legislate for compulsory adoption of the policy			
			Absence in the rules of policy regarding IEPs		
				Lack of copies of the policy to school staff	
				Social stigma	Lack of awareness in society
					Lack of parents participation in formulating RSEIP policy documents

In this case, the analysis has shown completely different perceptions on the barriers facing IEPs, indicating a fundamental need for the implementation of a legal framework for the instructions in the RSEIP document, for implementation by the IEP team members. Steps should also be taken to involve all stakeholders in the IEP in the formulation of the policy documents. Meaningful progress could be made to the educational performance and experience of children with SEN through this approach to special educational reform. It should be noted that the absence of the rules of policy regarding IEPs could be due to lack of transparency and effective communication between the MoE, DGSE and role government within exo level. Moreover, the findings suggest that the present RSEIP policy does not enforce the carrying out of the tasks assigned to the team as set out in the regulations. As such, this may affect role flexibility and team spirit and may impact negatively on the education of the children with intellectual disabilities. Thus, for a successful implementation of the IEPs, collective effort should characterise the work of the IEP team members.

Similarly, the stigma, shame and general lack of awareness in society that fathers reported feeling may have been influenced by the cultural attitudes common within Saudi Arabian society, which are also aspects of the macrosystem. Because of this, this study suggests that a government-run re-education programme could have extremely positive effects on the experience of children with special needs and their parents, through changing negative attitudes. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia still has a developing economy (Rodney et al., 2004), which implies that this aspect of the macrosystem is underdeveloped as compared to those of the Western world. Thus, underdevelopment and relative inefficiency may be expected to exist across the country's educational institutions within the exosystem. It follows that the creation and implementation of curricula, along with the interactions that occur between the different institutions and IEP team members within the mesosystem, are likely to be negatively affected by this underdevelopment and relative inefficiency. The explanations offered by participants for potential solutions to these obstacles can be seen below, in table 7.8.

Table 7.8 Participants explanations of solutions at the macrosystem findings

Level	Teachers	Head Teachers	Counsellors	Psychologists	Fathers
Macrosystem	Improving the National Policy	Improving the National Policy	Improving the National Policy	Improving the National Policy	Improving the National Policy
	Specific instructions for IEP team members	Specific instructions for IEP team members			
			Understanding of rules within the policy		
	Change the attitudes			Change the attitudes	

An examination of the barriers highlighted above suggests a number of potentially viable solutions, which will be outlined in the following discussion, although the only course upon which all participants agreed was the need for an improved national policy. Firstly, it can be stated that the policy set out in the RSEIP document (2002) should be seen as part of the macrosystem. The RSEIP document contains specific instructions for IEP team members and their roles in developing an IEP, and that an IEP is supposed to be designed with the primary purpose of helping SEN students to get the maximum benefit from their education, as shown in table 7.8 above. The inclusion of actions and targets for the student is supposed to act as a measurement guide so that IEP team members can set out progression plans, monitor the success of intended progress and encourage collaboration among IEP team members, so that the student’s learning remains the focus of attention. However, with respect to these fundamental requirements, it has been shown there were extensive failings when such objectives were applied to mainstream boys’ schools in Riyadh. This means that the IEPs initiated and implemented in Saudi Arabia might not be expected to reach their full potential or effectiveness as working documents. Therefore, the subsequent reviews of IEPs as tools to monitor and fully develop the students’ progress have been inadequate and have failed.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory is a useful analytical model, because it allows the complex tapestry of environmental factors, interactions and relationships that influence a student’s development to be examined through the overlapping and bidirectional

influences derived from the different layers of environmental systems. Therefore, in seeking to identify the causes of the problems and their possible remedies as discussed in Chapter 6, an examination of the outer layer of the macrosystem level reveals that the country's general economic development, the cultural values, beliefs and attitudes of IEP team members and the wider society, as well as these members' socioeconomic status, should all be treated as interconnecting to have a fundamental influence on those problems, causes and remedies. Thus, the theory draws our attention to the fact that Saudi Arabia is still a developing country, despite its rapid economic progress financed by huge oil revenues. In fact, whilst Saudi Arabia has modernised quickly over the past 30 or 40 years with respect to its infrastructure, it may be argued that the education and professional formation of large swathes of the population have failed to keep pace with infrastructural development.

Similarly, analysis of the macrosystem suggests that the cultural stigma that is often associated with SEN children and their families' further compounds the effects of insufficient government funding and support while doing nothing to address it. Therefore, although the RSEIP document sets out noble and worthy aims, their realisation at the microsystem level of Saudi Arabian boys with SEN is negatively influenced by factors such as those mentioned here. Therefore, it is recommended that the government should embark upon an extensive re-education programme, by effective utilisation of various media tools, in order to change such attitudes.

Importantly, it is the cumulative effect that such negativity within the macrosystem can ultimately have upon the microsystem that is of particular relevance to this thesis, because it is the microsystem which represents the most direct influence upon the student. It can also be reasoned, through the application of Bronfenbrenner's theory, that the difficulties which arise from attempting to achieve the macrosystem level objectives of the RSEIP document, at the exosystem level of IEP team members with low awareness, poor knowledge and lack of formal IEP meetings is unlikely to result in the creation of IEPs most beneficial to the students' development. Therefore, the bidirectional influences of such environmental factors should have greater emphasis within the RSEIP document and so attain increased relevance to the initiation of IEPs. Since both Bronfenbrenner's model and the RSEIP document may be situated at the

macrosystem level, so the initial step to be taken is for the RSEIP policy to be amended according to the theory.

Generally, the overall findings of Chapter 7 seem to indicate that a lack of professional development and efficiency at the exosystem level (including school administrations, the DGSE and the Riyadh LEA) had compounded issues of poor communication and poor coordination at the mesosystem level. The aim of the RSEIP document at the macrosystem level was to offer practical guidance and instructions for both the creation (mesosystem) and implementation (microsystem) of IEPs by IEP team members. However, a complex set of interacting environmental influences, such as parental shame arising from cultural attitudes within the macrosystem, combined with inefficiency at the exosystem level and poor cooperation at the mesosystem level, meant that the RSEIP policies were not being adopted as they should be, suggesting the need for extensive investment and development supported by legislative enforcement. The final argument that has emerged from the analysis of data on how IEP team members undertook the implementation of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities is that the effective integration of the exosystem and macrosystem levels is essential to ensure their successful implementation at the mesosystem level, i.e. in the school environment.

The final chapter of this thesis assesses the implications of the present study, draws overall conclusions, identifies the study's contributions to knowledge, recommends ways of closing the gap between RSEIP policy and the practice of IEP implementation in schools, and then offers suggestions for further research.

Chapter Eight

Recommendations and Conclusions

Chapter Eight

Recommendations and Conclusions

8.0 Introduction

This study has used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system model as a theoretical framework to analyse the perspectives of IEP team members on their work in creating IEPs and the barriers that they feel impeded that process. This analysis and the broader international literature were used to develop a comprehensive understanding of how IEPs could be more effective within the Saudi context. By exploring the issues related to the RSEIP document and the creation and implementation of IEPs at the level of schools and families qualitatively, the experiences and perceptions of key agents (teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and fathers) regarding their roles and duties in developing IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh have been integrated into the wide range of recommendations developed. The recommendations I have developed are based upon addressing the current gap between the policy represented in the RSEIP policy document, which is supposed to be guiding practice in schools and what is actually happening on the ground. Bronfenbrenner's (ibid) theory is helpful in systematically exploring these gaps and in conceptualising ways of addressing them.

Using the study findings, the researcher was able to respond to all the research questions and achieve the research aims.

This chapter thus concludes the study by articulating the contribution to knowledge that my research has made by producing findings that have generated:

- An improved understanding of the current roles of IEP team members in the IEP process and the shortcoming of existing practice;
- A model of how better collaboration among IEP team members within schools could improve the effectiveness of IEPs;
- An understanding of the increased coordination that is needed between the MoE, DGSE and mainstream schools in relation to IEPs in Saudi Arabia;

- An illustration of how useful Bronfenbrenner's model can be in exploring the relationship between policy and practice for other researchers exploring IEPs in the Middle East.

These findings will be of value to IEP team members, to Saudi educational policymakers and to mainstream schools in establishing the key features which will ensure the development of IEPs and in improving the level of educational services provided for students with intellectual disabilities. They will also be of value to academics, as it provides a rare qualitative study based in the Middle East for those researching this field and a worked example which demonstrates how Bronfenbrenner's (ibid) ecological theory can be used to identify gaps between policy and practice. It also helps to drive an analysis of the problems and provides a systematic approach towards addressing these gaps.

A brief overview of the general findings of Chapters 5 and 6 is presented here, supplemented by the outcomes derived from the Bronfenbrenner four system approaches in Chapter 7. The findings of Chapter 5 highlight a disconnection between academic practice and the policy guidelines stipulated in the RSEIP document. IEP team members demonstrated a lack of understanding with regards to their intended roles in the design and execution of individual education plans, resulting in these roles not being effectively carried out per the official document guidelines. In Chapter 6, a number of key challenges were identified with regards to the implementation of IEPs in Saudi Arabia. These were issues of parental involvement, negative attitudes to IEP application, insufficient support from the school and the LEA, and other school level constraints. The proposed solutions to these were to build teamwork, refine curriculum design, improve assessment models, and increase coordination between the official bodies and parties in the IEP process, and a number of key legal and administrative steps. More discussion on these findings and the Bronfenbrenner (1979) analysis used to examine them will be available in the following sections.

The chapter first summarises the findings, then examines the theoretical and practical contributions of the study in more detail. Next some practical recommendations are made and it offers suggestions for future research. It concludes with an account of the reflections of the researcher.

8.1 Summary of the Study and Major Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

The research aspired to address a problem that had been identified with the development and implementation of IEPs in Saudi Arabia. The broad aim of the study was to identify the issues that were impeding the development of IEPs with a view to improving the education and the lives of those children who depend upon them. A review of relevant literature was used to create a conceptual framework of the problem and an understanding of how best to explore the issues identified: the following research questions were based upon this understanding:

1. How do Saudi IEP team members describe their roles in terms of the implementation of IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh?
2. What do the IEP team members perceive as challenges to the effective implementation of these IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh?
3. What do the IEP team members recommend as viable solutions for the challenges identified above, with regards to IEPs for children with intellectual disabilities at mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh?

A total of four mainstream boys' schools accepting children with intellectual disabilities participated in this research, from which 20 interviews were drawn. In order to answer the above research questions, this section offers concluding statements based upon comparing these IEP team members' accounts of actual practice with the roles prescribed within the RSEIP policy document. These conclusions are organised in four subsections corresponding with the four layers of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

It is noted that other writers, such as de Valenzuela (2014), support the ideas of Bronfenbrenner (1979) by highlighting the importance of focusing on the environment (or context of learning), as sociocultural theory states that learning is achieved through the interaction between the child and the environment/context. As discussed earlier in this thesis, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory allows an exploration of how

the context of the child's surroundings impacts upon IEP development. This can vary in a number of ways depending upon various factors and the influences of bidirectional flows between different people and different layers of the system, which can be positive or negative. For instance, economic prosperity (or the lack of it) can influence the implementation of an IEP within the macrosystem. The researcher has adopted Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model as the framework for this study, because it challenges the medical model assumption that experiences of disability are fixed by the physical or psychological aspects of a condition which often makes them appear as irresolvable issues. Rejecting this assumption, Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides an alternative social model which recognises the importance of the environment and context in understanding a child's development. Bronfenbrenner later amended this model in 1992 to explicitly take account of children with disabilities (Bricout et al., 2004).

Using Bronfenbrenner's model it has been possible to break down and specify what is happening, which has given insight into problems that exist within each level. This chapter will now examine each of these layers in turn, bringing together the findings from Chapters 5 and 6 within the context of the Bronfenbrenner model.

8.1.1 Microsystem

Although the microsystem of the intellectually disabled child involves those individuals who come into direct contact with the child, such as parents, siblings, other close relatives, classmates and friends, this research has focused primarily upon the five IEP team members, as discussed throughout. Furthermore, it has noted bidirectional influences both towards and away from the student across all layers of Bronfenbrenner's model. Importantly, however, Bronfenbrenner (1979) identifies these bidirectional influences as strongest within the microsystem, suggesting that how the IEP team members interact with the student here may be especially influential over the student's mental and social development. In other words, although this research has focused attention on the five IEP team members, the findings support the contention that the more that places (such as the home and the school) and relationships (such as with and between IEP team members) nurture and encourage the student, the better the student can develop. This conclusion is especially important because it implies that how the

student is treated within the microsystem will have a particularly strong influence on how that student reacts to others in return.

In Chapter 5, the findings pertaining to the first research question identified the main roles and duties of IEP team members in relation to the implementation of IEPs. The framework divides the roles of IEP team members into five groups: teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and fathers of intellectually disabled students. IEP team interviewees gave different views about the implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools.

In the context of this study, the microsystem describes the study participants, who had direct contact with children with SEN. The analysis based upon the Bronfenbrenner (1979) model in Chapter 5 showed that in terms of the microsystem IEP interactions, only the fathers and the teachers had any meaningful level of interaction with the child. The bidirectional nature of these systems mean that in order to be effective members of the IEP team which operates at the macrosystem level, they will also need to be fulfilling their microsystem roles. An understanding of these microsystem interactions effectively describes and explains the failings of the IEPs process at the mesosystem and exosystem levels. However, despite the importance of the microsystem to the child's development, it was found that IEP team members had insufficient knowledge of how to conduct their roles within the microsystem and the team appeared not to cooperate at the exosystem level and cooperated poorly within the mesosystem (where the IEPs were actually created), causing two particularly serious problems that arose from the microsystem. Firstly, IEPs were not created according to the specifications of the RSEIP document, inasmuch as their creation was not a joint effort based upon each individual IEP team members' knowledge of the child. Most of them had no direct interaction to bring to the team. This failure meant that the IEPs were not as suitable for each child's development as they could have been.

Secondly, the direct implementation of the IEPs within the microsystem was not carried out as effectively as it should be according to the RSEIP document. In particular, with regard to behaviour and action, it was the fathers who were described by the school staff as being furthest from meeting these official specifications even though they had the most interaction with the child this was not focused on implementing the IEP. However,

whilst the SEN teachers criticised the fathers for their lack of effort and involvement within the microsystem and mesosystem, this research suggests that fathers did not lack motivation or desire to help their children. Instead, school head teachers seemed to have a large degree of responsibility for not involving the fathers as they should: according to the RSEIP they were supposed to manage the process of coordinating the IEP team. Despite the fathers' desire to play a more active role in the generation of IEPs and to gain knowledge that would help them to fulfil their parental duties within the microsystem, head teachers rarely invited them to school for consultation, nor did they offer adequate support in terms of helping them to acquire such knowledge. These findings were supported by the results presented in Chapter 7, in which many head teachers cited the poor educational levels of fathers at the microsystem level, complaining that fathers tended to have inadequate awareness or understanding of the needs of their sons. The head teachers tended to associate this problem with insufficient education and lack of motivation. Poverty, relative to Western standards of living, was assumed to compound these issues as parents struggled with the need to survive and provide for their families in a developing economy. Overall, however, this research has found no significant evidence that low incomes and poor education levels among fathers were primary causes of the inefficient creation and implementation of IEPs. Instead, many fathers expressed a desire to be more involved in the processes associated with the creation and implementation of IEPs, and were quite knowledgeable about the problems. So whilst it might be true that the general underdevelopment of the Saudi economy within the macrosystem was the underlying cause of the observed inadequate awareness, weak understanding and poor application of IEPs and of the RSEIP document this effects the system in diffuse and complex ways and for fathers it is not straightforwardly a case of it making them under-educated.

Among other common problems identified in Chapter 7 of this research within the microsystem are excessive teacher workload, a lack of parental involvement in the implementation of IEPs, and shortages in appropriately qualified personnel. This suggests that standards and efficiency need to be improved through investment, development and nurtured professionalism. These poor standards of professionalism and competence may have contributed to the negative attitudes of IEP team members at micro level and to poor cooperation among them within the mesosystem, with negative consequences for students within the microsystem in turn. In addition, this perceived

weakness in teacher training will be exacerbated by the recognised weakness and rigidity in curriculum design that was noted by participants from all school staff groups.

In fact, a more comprehensive assessment of the microsystem from the perspective of teachers suggests that the inadequate preparation of school staff at college and the inappropriate design of university courses reflect fundamental problems in pedagogical training. Any such inherent weaknesses in the education of school staff must then be expected to impair the performance of IEP team members, their creation of appropriate IEPs and their interaction with other IEP team members within the mesosystem. The findings therefore support the need for teachers to have specialised teaching skills and a broad knowledge base (Dever and Knapczyk, 1997). They must be aware of their own strengths and limitations as educators, and supplement these with an active pursuit of information, skill-building experiences and varied strategies, whether from community resources, teacher centres, professional development, or library services (Umansky and Hooper, 1998). Umansky and Hooper (1998) describe a capable teacher of students with special needs as someone who is interested in and knowledgeable about child development and disabilities, using a sound grasp of theoretical knowledge to adapt quickly to new and demanding situations. They stress the importance of these teachers being able to administer and interpret a range of test instruments and to use these to constantly review and refine the course that they are delivering.

The school may be regarded as part of the child's microsystem, because it is an institution that has a direct impact on the child's development. Microsystem problems in schools found to have significant effects on students, which include inadequate buildings, lack of paraprofessionals, overcrowded classes, overworked teachers, limited technology and insufficient teaching aids. Similarly, the father's exosystem was found to affect the development of the child, in that issues such as divorce, busy lifestyles and work commitments could increase parental stress and reduce the amount of quality time that fathers had for their children within the microsystem.

The solutions proposed in response to the challenges highlighted above will be discussed in detail in the microsystem recommendations (see section 8.3.1).

8.1.2 Mesosystem

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the mesosystem is where interactions between IEP team members take place and is the level at which IEP team meetings would occur, if they took place. Therefore it is here that the IEP team members roles should come together in order to create the IEPs, bearing in mind that the primary purpose of an IEP is to help the SEN student to get the maximum benefit from his education. The IEP plan includes actions and targets for the student and is intended to help IEP team members to draw up progression plans and monitor progress. It should also encourage collaboration among IEP team members so that the student's learning remains the central focus of attention. Yet the present analysis using the Bronfenbrenner framework indicates that failings across the exosystem have contributed significantly to the inadequacy of organisation, cooperation and coordination among IEP team members within the mesosystem. For example, the lack of regular, formal meetings that include all members of the team mean the programmes cannot be as effectively implemented between the school and the families of children with SEN. The consequence appears to be the failure of IEPs to reach their full potential as effective working documents, in turn reducing their value in monitoring and facilitating the progress of students with intellectual disabilities.

The mesosystem analysis indicated a weakness in terms of the interactions between school staff and home that contravened the guidelines laid out in the RSEIP document. Participants were shown to often misunderstand their educational responsibilities. This can be illustrated in Chapter 5, by the example of teachers designing and delivering IEPs without the contribution of other team members. In addition, they demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the way in which they should interact with the other members of their IEP teams. The findings in Chapter 5 suggest that this weak grasp of their roles is exacerbated by extremely limited IEP team interactions: in fact, the interactions were shown to only exist between counsellors and fathers. No other mesosystem interactions were found between team members and home, which given the importance of information sharing may have a potentially adverse effect on the learning outcomes of the child within their individual microsystems. Possible causes of these problems were identified in Chapter 7, with issues such as unsuitable training programmes being shown to contribute to poor communication and inadequate cooperation among IEP team members within the mesosystem. Interviewees felt that this often caused IEPs to be

badly formulated within the mesosystem and hence poorly implemented within the microsystem. Nevertheless, the findings of this research indicate that overall, the inadequacy of training programmes for IEP team members was the most serious problem affecting this level, as a lack of clarity about the importance of interaction was a primary cause of the poor interrelations among IEP team members within the mesosystem. It has also been found that school staff often blamed fathers for poor interactions with other IEP team members within the exosystem and criticised them for not paying sufficient attention to their children within the microsystem. Yet it is concluded that blame should not be simply cast onto fathers, because a complex set of interacting relationships and different contexts should be taken into account, according to the Bronfenbrenner model. For example, fathers in turn often blamed head teachers and SEN teachers for not inviting them to be more actively involved in the creation of IEPs.

Therefore, inadequate professional development within the exosystem (on the part of school administrations, the DGSE and the LEA in Riyadh) appear to have compounded issues of poor communication and poor coordination within the mesosystem. According to Umansky and Hooper (1998), SEN teachers must work well with school staff and parents in order to make best use of IEPs, to both understand the students they are working with and to provide the best level of educational growth for students with ID, in a range of environments with a diverse range of potential student needs. Moreover, SEN teachers have a number of roles, each involving several activities. Some of these are preparing to communicate with parents, adhering to ethical standards, setting up planned and cooperative learning, using partitioned modern techniques and modifying the curriculum (Wigle and Wilcox, 2003).

The solutions proposed in response to the challenges highlighted above will be discussed in detail in the mesosystem recommendations (see section 8.3.2).

8.1.3 Exosystem

In terms of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, the exosystem (of intellectually disabled children in Saudi Arabian mainstream boys' schools) is the environmental layer where educational, governmental and social services are situated, including school

administration, the DGSE and the LEA in Riyadh. In addition, this is the level at which the management of IEP teams should occur. In Chapter 5, this research identified a lack of professional development affecting these aspects of the exosystem and found that these problems contributed significantly to the further issues of poor communication and poor coordination within the mesosystem. Of particular importance is the finding that no cooperation exists between IEP team members within the exo level, despite this being the layer at which the IEP team should work together independently of the child.

These findings were supported by the analysis in Chapter 7, which reinforced the earlier assertion that the exosystem often suffered from poor coordination and cooperation between IEP team members, as well as a general lack of appropriate training. An analysis of the research data pertaining to the exosystem indicates that IEP team members were not trained to the necessary standard and that the higher education system had not been properly set up to be supportive of positive development. In searching within the exosystem for causes of unproductive practices, the findings of this research also suggest that the special educational services were of inadequate quality for achieving the aims set out in the RSEIP document. An example of this can be seen through the budgetary restraints which have resulted in the lack of appropriately qualified support service providers, which was discussed in Chapter 6.

While these recommendations set out in the national policy document appear reasonable, the infrastructure of the exosystem thus seems not to have been capable of delivering on a number of levels. For example, there was evidently a serious lack of educational leadership from the MoE and school head teachers which meant that guidance, planning and organisation were inadequate. This challenge of leadership was echoed by a recognised weakness in governmental control, with poor coordination between the LEAs and the DGSE being cited as a major obstacle to the effective implementation of IEPs. It is arguable that these governmental obstacles may explain the repeated citation of budgetary constraints, which was mentioned by participants from all groups. Finally, Chapter 7 also showed that an important exosystem issue commented on by both teachers and counsellors were the low incomes or marital status of parents, which were felt to hamper the implementation of IEPs.

The solutions proposed in response to the challenges highlighted above will be discussed in detail in the exosystem recommendations (see section 8.3.3).

8.1.4 Macrosystem

In terms of the Bronfenbrenner model, the RSEIP document and its stipulations may be regarded as part of the macrosystem for children with SEN. The findings in Chapter 5 indicate that while there may be recognised problems in implementation, the Saudi national policy clearly states the required rules of IEP team members, as well as the underlying system of principles that informs those roles. This idea was developed by the outcomes of Chapter 7, which showed that while it is possible to claim that the policy enshrined in the RSEIP reflects very good intentions and ambitions on behalf of students with SEN, the policy is not being applied effectively in mainstream boys' primary schools in Riyadh. The analysis has identified a variety of interrelated causes, largely stemming from the poor performance of IEP team members on one hand and inappropriate instructions within the RSEIP document on the other. In other words, although the macrosystem is described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as the environment furthest from the child (who is situated at the centre of a concentric model of which the macrosystem forms the outermost layer), the creation of the RSEIP document can be seen as having a number of flaws which represent the starting point of the challenges to effective IEP implementation identified by participants. Additional problems arising within the other environmental layers then tend to influence one another and so compound ineffectiveness in the creation and implementation of IEPs, especially in relation to the stipulations set out in the RSEIP document. This is further compounded by the lack of clear roles laid out in the RSEIP document and the fact that a lack of implementation makes it difficult to assess the validity of the guidelines in practice.

Respondents also provided evidence of inadequate legal and regulatory enforcement of the RSEIP document within the macrosystem. It is suggested that this has caused ineffective generation and implementation of IEPs within the mesosystem and microsystem respectively. However, the Bronfenbrenner model suggests that the legal enforcement by itself is likely to be insufficient to resolve the problems associated with the creation and implementation of IEPs, because of the multiplicity of interrelations, contexts and bidirectional flows which all influence one another across the four

environmental layers; these influences need to be understood and addressed before legal enforcement can be successful.

A further conclusion concerning the macrosystem relates to Saudi Arabia's underdeveloped economy, which implies that underdevelopment and relative inefficiency can be expected to exist throughout the country's educational organisations at the exosystem level. In other words, the Bronfenbrenner model indicates that the economic condition of the country needs to be taken into account when assessing how to facilitate a child's development. If the economy, a feature of the macrosystem, is not as developed as that of a typical Western country, it may not be reasonable to expect similar standards of practice in education. Such relative underdevelopment and inefficiency are thus likely to affect negatively the creation and implementation of IEPs, especially as regards the interactions between schools and IEP team members within the mesosystem.

The macrosystem can also be identified as the locus of Saudi cultural attitudes underlying the shame and stigma often felt by fathers of children with intellectual disabilities, which may in turn be seen as contributing to the poor involvement of fathers in the work of IEP teams. Once again, it could be reasoned that social underdevelopment may be a cause of such stigmatising attitudes.

The solutions proposed in response to the challenges highlighted above will be discussed in detail in the macrosystem recommendations (see section 8.3.4).

8.1.5 Factors Inhibiting Change: Hierarchy, Gender and Stigma

This section seeks to provide a more detailed insight into the specific implications of three fundamentally important factors. These factors are cultural but also form structures that affect interactions at different levels of society and in particular with regards to the implementation of IEPs: hierarchy, gender and stigma. Particular attention will be given to the way in which the selected factors affect the interactions between IEP team members and affect the functioning of IEP processes in meeting their aims.

Each of these factors will be explained with reference to the model presented in this thesis (illustrated in Figure 8.1), which is based upon the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979). In so doing, an explanation will be provided of the far reaching influence that these factors have across the four different levels of interaction and analysis: the micro, meso, exo and macrosystem levels. This examination is intended to be illustrative of the flexibility and analytical power of the Bronfenbrenner model in this context, as well as to briefly examine the relative intransigence and complexity of the different factors themselves in attempting to make recommendations for the improved delivery of IEPs.

The first of the factors to be discussed is hierarchy. Structures and hierarchies can be both disempowering and empowering. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the issue of status plays an important role in organising the roles of IEP team members. The structure of IEP teams within public mainstreaming schools is comparatively simple and transparent, with only the head teacher overtly occupying a higher status. This is in contrast to the structure of other educational contexts, such as those of Saudi institutions for students with intellectual disabilities (which have head, deputies, departmental heads, etc.). However, even within these very simple structures hierarchy and status affect who is likely to be able to implement changes, influence the content of IEPs or to get their voice heard. It is easier for head teachers to make changes than it is for teachers, parents or other members of the IEP team. In addition parents are comparatively powerless within the IEP team and they are least likely to be able to initiate change. If practices are to be led by all members of the IEP team concerted effort needs to be put in to ensure less powerful members can be heard and their views taken into account.

In addition to hierarchies affecting the degree to which IEP team members are listened to at all the levels they interact within, the Bronfenbrenner model reveals how the macro level hierarchies that could potentially facilitate participation by all groups do not currently do so. The national policy document stipulates that the role of the head teacher is to oversee the IEP team and ensure that all other roles within the IEP team are fulfilled. However, this study has demonstrated that this is not necessarily the reality in practice, which has important repercussions for the implementation of IEP process. As teachers are often playing a much larger role in the design and delivery of IEPs there are no checks and balances and their work is invisible. No one is paying attention to

whether practices comply with the overriding policy. In addition, because there are no formal structures managing the process there is a failure to ensure all members of the team are fully involved. Given the hierarchical nature of schools this role of the head teacher and therefore hierarchy is an important factor at the exo level, which contains the relationship between the IEP team members. Head teachers are supposed to provide strong leadership for the teams in the school, as well as for ensuring good lines of communication between the MoE and the school and home. Finally, the importance of the head teachers in overcoming the hierarchy factors can also be seen at the meso system level, as head teachers should be responsible for ensuring that a good relationship is maintained between the school and home, inviting parents for training and organising team meetings with the home. When this does not occur, it tends to result in a failing to meet the policy aims.

In contrast with the issues arising from hierarchy, strictures governing gender represent an extremely complex challenge for the implementation of IEPs. The Bronfenbrenner model is useful to understand the limitations that social rules about gender place upon the IEP team, however these rules are sacrosanct in Saudi society, so this analysis serves to inform optimal behaviour in recognition of the entrenched social norms. Therefore, the model (see Figure 8.1) is useful in understanding the constraints that culture and religion place upon IEP behaviour and implementation, which should encourage policy makers and practitioners to think creatively about how to overcome these constraints. For example, there may be ways in which mothers' views could be included without contravening cultural rules. This analysis may also be highly valuable for use within the context of girls' schools, which are likely to face many of the same challenges and obstacles facing boys' schools in Saudi Arabia as they operate within the same context and are guided by the same national policy document.

The inability to involve both parents in the educational setting presents a challenge for IEP design and implementation. While the issue of gender primarily manifests at the meso system, which describes the relationship between the school and home, the nature of IEP interactions mean that societal limitations on gender are apparent across interactions at all four levels. Gender structures at the meso level mean that IEP team members can have no direct relationship with mothers, which is the reason for this study to focus exclusively on fathers. This means that any contact that the IEP team has with the mother must be through the father and that if mothers have better insights into issues

affecting the design and implementation of IEPs these views need to be included. It raises questions about whether training can help fathers and mothers work together in order to make sure the necessary details and experiences become part of IEP planning. Also the challenges in circumstances, such as children raised by single female parents, need to be planned for. Still at the meso level, we can see that gender also prevents the mothers of boys being trained in techniques that may assist in the effective delivery of IEPs. This limited interaction can also be seen at the exo level, where the head teacher will only interact within teachers and IEP members of the same gender. This narrows potential ways for IEP implementation. All of these constraints are underpinned at the macro level by the RSEIP policy document, which provides all of the guidance about IEP design and implementation within the national cultural and religious structures.

Perhaps the most pervasive and intractable challenge facing the effective implementation of IEPs within Saudi Arabian mainstream schools is that of attitudes facing those with intellectual disabilities. As noted above, the Bronfenbrenner model illustrates that the issues of stigma most clearly manifest at the macrosystem level. The stigma and corresponding shame experienced by many Saudi parents regarding their children with SEN are likely to manifest themselves at the meso level, providing a major reason for the often limited integration of fathers into IEP teams. The poor attitude of society towards children with SEN and the corresponding stigma felt by parents may also manifest at the exo level, which describes the coordination between fathers and the appropriate national departments (MoE and DGSE). This will result in the departments having a poorer understanding of the needs of children with SEN and so provisions implemented for IEP teams and their plans will be less suitable for meeting those needs. As I have stated elsewhere, these widespread attitudes require national educational campaigns involving educational establishments and the media. IEP training for educational professionals and families would be an important part of such a programme.

8.2 Contributions of the Study

This study intended to comprehend IEPs as a complex phenomenon with its theoretical and practical domains, together with the factors identified by IEP team members who have had a considerable impact on the implementation of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities in Saudi Arabia and in the wider international context. The

findings of this study highlighted the importance of implementing IEPs pertinent for students with intellectual disabilities and provided valuable information in the local context not only for researchers but also for policy makers in the Saudi government to consider the policy and practice of IEP application for students with intellectual disabilities. These findings therefore represent a vital contribution to the existing knowledge regarding IEPs from the perspectives of key agents (teachers, head teachers, counsellors, psychologists and fathers) of intellectually disabled students. The study offers a comprehensive evaluation of their roles, as well as the effectiveness and challenges faced regarding the development and implementation of IEPs designed for students with intellectual disabilities at mainstream schools; in addition, a study of this nature has not been provided previously in the Saudi context. Hence, it can be used as a form of assessment of the current state of IEPs, enabling the understanding of the key factors for the success of the IEPs for mainstream schools. The study provides several recommendations for enhancing the quality of teaching processes and special education services for male students with intellectual disabilities within the mainstreaming schools in Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that while this study has concentrated on the relatively narrow context of mainstream boys' schools in Saudi Arabia, its findings may be relevant to other groups. For example, girls' schools in Saudi Arabia are likely to encounter many of the same challenges identified here, as they operate within the same context and are guided by the same national policy document. Schools in other Middle Eastern countries are also likely to face comparable difficulties in the implementation of IEPs, such as similar perspectives on disability or a shortage of sufficiently trained professionals to work in this sector (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2007; Weber, 2012).

This study is also informed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) with respect to intellectually disabled students in mainstreaming schools. This theoretical analysis has been helpful in attempting to raise awareness among decision makers in Saudi Arabia and will hopefully encourage a desire to remove the existing discrepancy of the RSEIP policy document and what happens on the ground in practice at mainstream boys' schools in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. However, it should be noted that the findings of this study are somewhat limited as they are derived from a research investigation conducted in boys-only primary schools because of local culture and school systems in Saudi Arabia, requiring strict gender segregation. Therefore, while there are likely to be commonalities with girls' schools, the interactions in this context will be with mothers

rather than fathers, making a comparison of these contexts potentially useful, as noted later in section 8.4.

The findings show this process to have been influenced by a broad range of factors operating at different levels and by the strategies, actions and activities of the school environment. Moreover, the effect of using ecological theory can be seen to have paid off in exploring all stages of the implementation process. The application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to the Saudi Arabian context for the first time has provided new viewpoints, wider conceptions and new interpretations from which to read and analyse IEP implementation and its implications for reviewing RSEIP policy and practices. The study has thus managed to cast light on the complex interactions between fathers and schools in the implementation of IEPs, such as the variance in participation or the apportioning of blame due to misunderstanding of expectations and roles. The theory has helped to identify the main duties of the current (IEP) team members and barriers, in accordance with the RSEIP policy document, and has suggested new ways of developing and implementing IEPs more productively within the Saudi context. Furthermore, in meeting its aims, this study has validated the Bronfenbrenner model for the coherent and effective analysis of educational needs, thereby providing a framework that others could draw upon in designing their own research. Given the similarities between Saudi Arabia and its neighbours, this process is likely to be easiest for researchers in the Middle East, however this framework may also be valuable in other regions of the world. In summary, using the study findings, the researcher was able to respond to all the research questions and achieve the research aims.

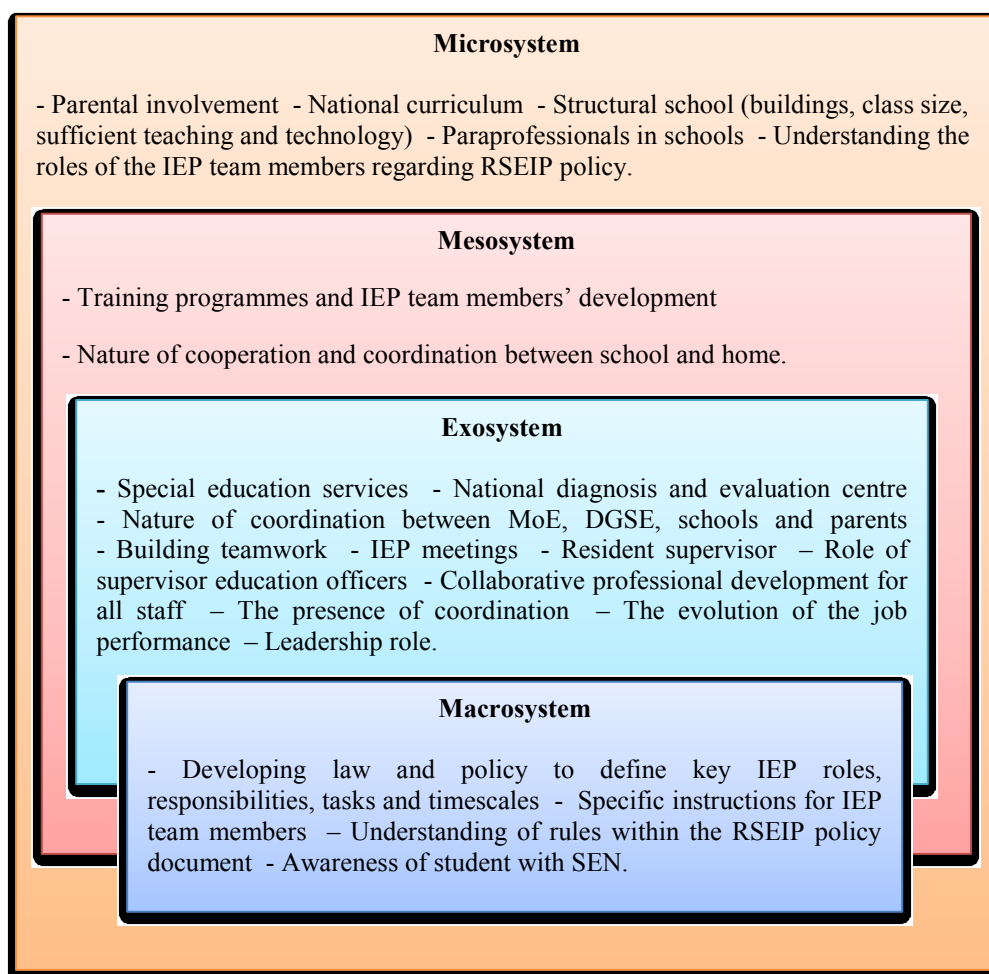
Furthermore, there are several suggestions included in the study regarding further research concerning IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities. Even though the issues related to the development of IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities are broad and numerous, I argue that the proposed model to barriers to IEP implementation (see figure 8.1) that was constructed based on the findings of this research is a practical and effective tool for dealing with these issues and improves the IEPs process. Therefore, while they may not be regarded as an alternative to the current IEP educational policy and practice, they may be helpful to IEP team members, Saudi educational policymakers and mainstream schools in establishing the key features of a

process to ensure the development of IEPs and in improving the overall level of educational services provided for students with intellectual disabilities.

Provided that the level of DGSE is committed to improving IEP practice in Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to take action and one option would be to employ the proposed model that guides mainstream schools specialising in intellectually disabled students in boy's primary schools to implement changes as proposed in this study. This is expected to lead to an improvement of inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities at public schools in Saudi Arabia. The MoE should activate the role of the DGSE and mainstream schools by providing it with specialists and by meeting a set of basic requirements for the education of students with intellectual disabilities. The focus of decision makers at the MoE should also be based upon activating regulations related to the IEPs in schools and follow-up of all the school team members in terms of identifying the tasks assigned to them in relation to the IEP. At the moment teams are not sharing responsibilities for a failure and are putting the blame on the other team members. At the same time, it is crucial that IEP team members identify the needs of all students with intellectual disabilities and help them adapt and attain better educational opportunities.

As discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, this study has identified the existence of gaps between policy and practice with regards to the delivery of IEP programs for intellectually disabled children in Saudi Arabia. Interviews with participating IEP team members have also highlighted the presence of multiple obstacles to the effective delivery of IEPs. Therefore, this study presents a number of potential solutions that have been informed by the Bronfenbrenner analysis (see figure 8.1 below).

Figure 8.1: Model of solutions to IEP implementation barriers in Saudi Arabia



Additionally, the contribution of this study with respect to research methodology has become more apparent in its final stages, insofar as the researcher can better reflect on and assess the whole project. This study, with its clear qualitative approach, has the potential to become a source of valuable data for the development of IEP implementation in Saudi Arabia. The methodology, which was based on the interpretive approach and chosen mainly because of a perceived shortage of qualitative research conducted on intellectual disability and its relations with IEPs in the Saudi context, made it possible to examine the complexities of mainstreaming programmes in Saudi Arabia. For example, a majority of the studies conducted in the context of research on special education in Saudi Arabia are dependent on questionnaires as a research data collection method (Al-Wabli, 2000; Al-Khashrami, 2001 and Hanafi, 2005) (see section 4.1.2). To the best of my knowledge, the present study is the first to deal with the experiences and perspectives of key agents (teachers, head teachers, counsellors,

psychologists and fathers) regarding their main roles and the strengths and obstacles to implementing IEP policy for students with intellectual disabilities in Saudi Arabia and also the first to utilise semi-structured interviews and documentary data as a form of a qualitative research method. By following an interpretive approach supported by the use of semi-structured interviews and documentary data, the present study constitutes a contribution towards the advancement of the range of research tools employed and methodological approaches in social research in the context of Saudi Arabia. It can be suggested on the example of this study that using the qualitative research enabled the research in-depth understanding of participants' views of IEPs in intellectually disabled students in boy's primary schools in Saudi Arabia whilst representing a base for further qualitative research in the pertinent field.

8.3 Recommendations

This study has made some major theoretical and practical contributions to the discipline of special education. First, this study contributes to the local knowledge of IEPs in the Saudi context, but it also contributes to the international research field with regards to the understanding of the implementation issues facing special education in mainstream schools. The approach in this study, with its reliance on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979), provides a useful insight into the complex relationships surrounding children with SEN, providing a valid method for contextual analysis that transcends the necessarily limited scope of this thesis. From a local perspective, the outcomes of this research may be useful to IEP team members and mainstream schools in establishing the learning needs of students with intellectual disabilities in order to ensure the development of IEPs and in improving the effectiveness of the special education services provided for students with intellectual disabilities. From a global perspective, this study offers a way in which the interrelationship of special education providers, between themselves and with the children they serve, can be better understood in different countries or contexts.

In summary, the above analysis has provided clear evidence of a gap between RSEIP policy and the practice of IEP team members in mainstream boys' schools in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the results of this study may be particularly helpful to policymakers and curriculum developers at the MoE and DGSE. These results focus specifically on

how IEP team members can develop more dynamic roles through improved collaboration among them and increased coordination between the MoE, DGSE and mainstream schools. As with the earlier summary of issues, these recommendations are categorised according to the four layers of the Bronfenbrenner model (1979).

8.3.1 Recommendations for the Microsystem

Although the RSEIP document strongly encourages relationships to be developed in a manner similar to Bronfenbrenner's concept of the microsystem, it would be useful to further develop the document with other concepts from Bronfenbrenner's hierarchy of systems. For example, it could be amended to provide better guidance and instructions on relations among peers at school, in the neighbourhood and in social life. In fact, the findings in this study highlight the importance of multi-setting participation, whereby the student interacts with others in multiple settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Moreover, the interview findings indicate that the majority of the head teachers, counsellors and psychologists were not fully knowledgeable of their roles as stipulated in the RSEIP document. In this respect, Al-Fahili (2009: 3) emphasises 'the need to review the RSEIP practice guidance to include a set of additional features that aim to help head teachers understand and be aware of their role requirements towards mainstreaming programmes in Saudi Arabia'. Therefore, based upon recognition of the poor level of interaction between IEP team members within the mesosystem (see Chapters 5 and 7), this study strongly recommends that the model of Collaborative Professional Development (CPD) be used to clarify the roles of IEP team members in the development and implementation of IEPs. The use of this model would complement the work of various parties to determine the head teacher roles of team members and improve the level of collaboration in IEP implementation. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that in the case of collaborative practices being implemented in mainstream schools, all staff members need to build competencies and skills between the parties.

It is also essential for fathers to be encouraged and supported by the MoE and head teachers in order for them to become more effective in both the mesosystem and the microsystem. According to the RSEIP document and the Bronfenbrenner model, parents should have an important and active role within both mesosystem and microsystem,

which head teachers should therefore facilitate with the necessary training, advice and invitations. It is particularly important to note that the parent is the primary source to consult in collecting the information necessary for IEP implementation in schools. Thus, fathers must be helped to understand the need for IEPs as part of the education process. One should not underestimate the importance of raising parents' awareness, as it allows children with special needs to take advantage of their rights. This study has identified a pressing need to support and improve fathers' awareness and understanding of their individual rights and those of their children, which could be achieved through both direct and indirect means. The former should include seminars, short courses and the provision of leaflets; while among appropriate indirect channels would be the use of the public mass media. In addition, within the specific limitations of the Saudi context, there are steps that could be taken to recognise the important role played by mothers in the development of their sons, while remaining sensitive to the cultural and religious rules restricting cross-gender interaction. Options such as the use of mobile phones or the exchange of written messages between school staff and home (mothers) may be a way in which their involvement in the IEP process could be increased.

Evidence from the data also found issues within schools of inadequate buildings, overcrowded classes, overworked teachers, limited technology, inadequate teaching aids and lack of paraprofessionals. The recommended solution is increased government investment in order to bring improvements in these areas of the exosystem, especially as these can also be seen as part of the microsystem through their direct influence on development of children.

8.3.2 Recommendations for the Mesosystem

No specific recommendations are made for action within the mesosystem, as the necessary improvements are very much linked to those that should first occur across the exosystem (see section 8.3.3). Increased investment to improve professionalism and the appropriateness of services will be expected to contribute to a more cooperative IEP team within the mesosystem. Importantly, as discussed in the section on the exosystem, it is head teachers, as the source of authority in schools, who should assume responsibility for organising the IEP team members so that they interact with greater efficiency, understanding and coordination within the mesosystem. This is also why

MoE officials, within the exosystem, must become more actively involved in working with head teachers. Indeed, it is their interactions with head teachers within the mesosystem that should establish early clarity and create the strategic foundation from which the head teachers should begin the work of improving the IEP process.

Similarly, government investment is required to address the lack of suitable training programmes, found to have contributed substantially to confusion, poor communication and inadequate cooperation among IEP team members within the mesosystem. The critically important role to be played by training emerged from discussions in Chapters 5 and 7. Therefore, this study recommends a deeper commitment to CPD for all IEP team members regarding the design and implementation of individual education plans, as well as their collaborations in these plans. The need for adequate preparation of IEP team members and ‘the importance of training teachers of intellectual disabilities’ have also been recognised in the extant literature (Hawsawi, 2007: 487). The research results pertaining to the mesosystem in Chapters 5 and 7 indicate that many IEP team members were not trained to the necessary standards and that the higher education system had not been properly set up to be supportive of positive development. However, due to the apparent shortage of trainers and mentors with sufficient qualifications and professionalism, it is likely that foreign experts will have to be appointed to positions of authority. After a few years, when the required standards of professionalism and efficiency have been established across the educational and social services within the exosystem, it should be possible for the number of foreign experts to be gradually reduced.

8.3.3 Recommendations for the Exosystem

The Bronfenbrenner model (1979) is helpful in facilitating an understanding of the influence of different environments on one another and of the ultimate cumulative effect of these influences upon the child’s development. For example, relative economic underdevelopment at the national (macrosystem) level will have a significant effect on standards, professionalism and efficiency across the exosystem.

The improvement and restructuring of the exosystem will also require a significant improvement in the service provided by an educational supervisor from the MoE and

school head teachers, because the existing guidance, planning and organisation are inadequate. Properly trained MoE officials should visit schools to discuss with head teachers the processes stipulated in the RSEIP document for the creation and implementation of IEPs. Head teachers should be instructed to take a strong leadership and organisational role in this, coordinating IEP team members and building a cooperative team spirit among them, as suggested in Chapter 5 (c.f. De Name, 1995; Smith, 2007). The importance of collaboration between individual professionals within the school has been explicitly recognised in Australia, which can serve as an example of best practice (McCausland, 2005). It should also be remembered that Bronfenbrenner (1979) identifies three exosystem levels (the parents' place of work, their social networks and the influences of the community) as those expected to be most influential on the family. Therefore, the bidirectional influences of such environmental factors should have greater emphasis within the RSEIP document, better reflecting their relevance to the initiation of IEPs with the mesosystem.

Overall, however, it is expected that many improvements regarding the creation and implementation of IEPs will result from the country's future economic and social development. As a wealthy country, with access to an abundance of natural wealth, primarily in the form of fossil fuels, Saudi Arabia has the potential for considerable resources to be made available for the continuing modernisation of the country. It has been noted that the weak participation of many fathers as IEP team members may be influenced by a number of factors, potentially including socioeconomic issues in the exosystem like low income and a poor level of education. As the economy improves, it is anticipated that standards of living and educational levels will rise, and that the corresponding pressure on many parents would fall, resulting in their having more opportunities to spend time on the educational needs and development of their children.

8.3.4 Recommendations for the Macrosystem

With reference to the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), it is recommended that the RSEIP document should be adapted in order to take certain aspects of Saudi culture into account. For example, detailed consideration should be given to issues such as the cultural shame felt by the parents of children with SEN. The RSEIP document should outline educational proposals that will increase awareness and understanding of such

issues. It is further proposed this should be supported by an extensive government media campaign to mitigate or eliminate this cultural shame. In other words, society needs to be educated to have sympathy and compassion for the parents of children with SEN, as well as for the children themselves. This will require extensive commitment from the government in terms of both organisational effort and financial investment.

Another factor which might be regarded as a deficiency within the macrosystem is the lack of regulations with regard to the application of the RSEIP policy document. An analysis of the document itself gives no indication of articles specifying the practical duties and tasks of the IEP team in developing and implementing IEPs in mainstream schools. There is no reference to the predefined roles and responsibilities of the various members of the team at each stage of the preparation and application of an IEP, nor is there an article specifying the relevant duties shared with other team members. To facilitate the necessary change, it is recommended that the Saudi authorities conduct intermittent reviews of existing special education legislation in the Kingdom, to ensure that it keeps abreast of changes and developments in this field. As noted in the literature review, the effectiveness and importance of ongoing reviews to assess and update policy documents has been widely recognised by studies in the international context, such as the US (Itkonen, 2007), as well as in the local context (Al-Fahili, 2009).

8.3.5 Summary of Recommendations

This study recommends that IEP team members should be required to work together in teams to develop the IEP process in a way which best benefits the student with SEN. The findings also emphasise the importance of effective partnerships between schools and parents (Mislán et al., 2008). Figure 8.2 shows how to improve IEP practice in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 8.2: Improving Core IEP Practice



Given the variations that have been recognised as possible among students with ID, there are a number of essential factors in properly fulfilling the needs of individual students and helping them to reap the benefits of education. The knowledge and skills of IEP team members, the appropriate use of behavioural interventions and an appropriately designed curriculum are all fundamental to the success of students with these difficulties. This makes generalising a universally applicable strategy difficult, other than to underline the importance of creating and implementing IEPs to ensure that instruction and curriculum design meets the needs of particular students. Figure 8.2 above illustrates the solutions proposed to barriers to IEP implementation, categorised as the respective responsibilities of the MoE, the DGSE and mainstream schools in Saudi Arabia.

The literature shows that these recommendations have been effective in the IEP systems of certain other countries. As an illustration of this, the importance of greater parental inclusion in the IEP team and more parental support services is supported by the examples of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden (McCausland, 2005). The suggestion of a national diagnostic centre of excellence can be seen to work within the context of Bangladesh, which uses a successful centralised pupil assessment programme (Lynch, 1994). Meanwhile, the recommendation to monitor and evaluate the quality of educational provision has been shown to be effective in Australia (Queensland Department of Education, 2003b). In addition, the efficacy of the suggestion to provide specific training to staff connected to IEP practice has been seen in Korea (Lynch, 1994). The importance of clearly defining roles in policy and the development of effective legal frameworks is also recognised in the literature (Hegarty, 1997; Polloway and Patton, 1997) and has been seen to be effective in the US context (Itkonen, 2007).

8.4 Suggestions for Future Research

This section gives suggestions for future research with regard to IEPs in Saudi Arabia. These suggestions stem from the findings of the research, in addition to the professional experience and knowledge of the researcher. Within the field of study occupied by this thesis, there are a number of important areas worthy of further investigation. Firstly, there is a need to consider practical improvements with respect to what Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to as the different environmental layers. For example, an investigative study and costing analysis (perhaps a cost-benefit analysis) needs to be undertaken as to how the exosystem could be further developed and improved. For instance, many respondents emphasised the need for national and regional diagnosis centres that offer appropriate diagnostic testing and use accurate measurement tools. This is an area that should be studied and carefully costed, because it would require substantial government investment. Nonetheless, such a study is deemed necessary because this research has identified a need to dramatically improve the exosystem. The same need for investigative studies also relates to the requirement for improved and suitable curricula, improvements to buildings, better training, increased professionalism and higher standards of performance. Indeed, this thesis suggests that increased and effectively

targeted government investment must be made into technology and training programmes in order to improve efficiency across the exosystem.

A study is also needed to investigate how the professional standards of the exosystem can be increased through the development and appointment of educational supervisors, especially with the support of their own separate department within the MoE. In this way, it is anticipated that cooperation between schools, the MoE and IEP team members could be improved. Following thorough and detailed further investigation, the expectation is that the interrelations among these educational supervisors and IEP team members within the exosystem will become better coordinated and more effective. Educational supervisors would visit schools regularly, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of IEP team members, and ensuring that the processes and requirements pertaining to the IEPs are being implemented.

Similar research is also needed to assess the availability and effectiveness of support services in terms of promoting the educational process for children with intellectual disabilities using IEPs, as perceived by MoE, DGSE officials and Saudi IEP team members within exosystem level.

Two limitations of the present research are that it was limited to male students and participants and that all of the participating schools were in the Riyadh region. It is therefore recommended that future research should investigate the views of IEP team members in different regions of Saudi Arabia. Similar research is also needed to include female carers of children with special educational needs who receive special education services through IEPs. Given the gender limitations of the present research, studies should also be undertaken in girls' mainstream schools and involve female IEP team members. In order to be effective in achieving this aim, and while adhering to Saudi cultural values, it would be ideal for the MoE, represented in women's colleges and departments in the various universities, to promote and support women researchers to carry out such work.

Investigative studies will also need to be carried out with respect to the interactions that take place within the mesosystem. Although this research does not cast blame upon fathers for their apparent lack of participation in the generation of IEPs and of

collaboration with other IEP team members, it is accepted that reinforcement of parental participation is needed within both the mesosystem and the microsystem. Within the mesosystem, this could include the fathers working closely with multidisciplinary teams for diagnosis, testing and measurement, as well as with the special committee for the formulation of curricula. Furthermore, although this thesis has examined the roles of five IEP team members in some detail, it is suggested that deeper research could be conducted into the influence of the child's peers and social circle. The RSEIP document places great emphasis upon the roles of the five IEP team members, especially the parents, yet the influence of the child's peers and social circle may be just as important to the child's development. This seems especially valid when consideration is given to the extensive periods of time that a child spends at school interacting with other children. The aim of further research in this area would be to enable the RSEIP document to be amended accordingly.

With regards to the officially sanctioned members of IEP teams, there may be validity in further investigation predicated upon the claim of Bronfenbrenner (1979) that the child should be at the centre of all school age learning systems. However, the Saudi Arabian RSEIP document does not explicitly involve the child in the IEP process as one of the IEP team members. Therefore, this study recommends that future studies into SEN in Saudi Arabia investigate the value of integrating children into regular IEP meetings within school, or even the importance of their involvement being recognised by the official national policy.

Finally, Bronfenbrenner model of 1979 has been shown to offer a useful and practical conceptual guide to understanding the development of children. It is therefore recommended that future research be conducted to investigate the comparative study between the legislation and regulations for Special Education needs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and a foreign country with greater experience of including children's views in the application of their own IEPs to exchange and learn from different experiences.

8.5 Reflexive Account

As this thesis draws to a close, I wish to reflect on my research journey and how my own learning experience affected it. I had chosen the implementation of IEP to research because of conversations with my supervisor, Dr Abdul-Aziz. Our first conversation regarding the matter occurred in the graduation hall of King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh, after I had been awarded my master's degree in SEN. The conversation centred on the research I had done into the fundamental aspects of SEN learning and teaching methods at KSU. My supervisor spurred me to discover a subject that I could immerse myself in during my forthcoming journey. During that conversation I favoured being a listener over being a speaker.

Afterwards, I headed home pondering additional questions. When I later had more organised conversations with my supervisor, I brought a few of these questions to him on a piece of paper. His responses bolstered my desire to take on a complex subject like the implementation of IEPs. Upon the conclusion of many of these conversations, I would go to the library and read the literature recommended by my supervisor. My foremost goal during this time was to discover passages that aligned with my own thoughts about the matter yet managed to convey them in a more organised, academic style than I could. As the first year of my PhD programme moved forward, I read more and made progress in the research methodology modules, allowing my thinking to become more sophisticated. The extent of what I would research became more apparent as well.

The above story presents only part of my extensive journey regarding my discovery of this subject. Whilst I confess that there was some hardship during my research, my passion throughout the process far outweighed my struggles. This study was also significant for my future as a researcher; upon finishing my research training at the School of Education of the University of Lincoln, I was allowed to access its vast educational resources on educational enquiry, interpretive and scientific methodologies, and communicating educational research. I have been through many stages and exposed to various domains of study at the University of Lincoln (such as Doctoral Study School Programme and Doctoral Seminars), ranging from educational research methods to analysis approaches.

This study has also improved my abilities as a qualitative researcher. I became proficient with Endnote, which allowed me to build a personal reference library, and I added to my repertoire more general skills such as time management, organising priorities, task management, performing under pressure, communicating my ideas effectively and fostering the resilience necessary to attempt different methods of problem solving. This journey has also enhanced my presentation skills; my work has required me to relate my research to both my peers and people unfamiliar with the topic at hand. Lastly, my ability to read and write in an academic manner has progressed, while the knowledge that I have gained during this journey will aid me in contributing to academia in the future.

It has been rewarding for me to share my research with my peers in the Education Department at the University of Lincoln. Throughout the research process, I have been afforded multiple opportunities to report my work at both local and international conferences, and these experiences have both shaped my own perceptions of the work and given me a taste of involvement in academia at a person-to-person level. Whilst there have been struggles along the way, having those moments and seeing the completion of the work have made any hardship worthwhile. I hope the culmination of my research benefits my field of study for years to come.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Certificate of ethical research approval

Ethical Approval Form: **Please word-process
this form, handwritten
applications will not
be accepted**

Human Research Projects



This form must be completed for each piece of research activity whether conducted by academic staff, research staff, graduate students or undergraduates. The completed form must be approved by the designated authority within CERD.

Please complete all sections. If a section is not applicable, write N/A.

Name of Applicant	Mohammed Alkahtani	
	Department: Education	Faculty: CERD
2 Position in the University	PhD student	
3 Role in relation to this research	My role is to initiate, plan, carry out, analyse and report on this research project, under the guidance of my academic supervisors. This research constitutes my PhD study. It arises out of my work as a teacher in a school for intellectually disabled student school in Saudi Arabia.	
4 Brief statement of main Research Question	<p style="text-align: center;">Research Question:</p> <p>First Research Question What are the main roles and duties of IEP team members as regards the implementation of the plans for primary mainstream schools for student with intellectual disabilities in Riyadh?</p> <p>Second Research Question What do IEP team members consider to be the barriers to implementing the IEPs with primary mainstream schools for student with intellectual disabilities in Riyadh?</p> <p>Third Research Question What do IEP team members consider to be possible and reasonable solutions to overcoming barriers to the implementing of IEPs for primary mainstream schools for student with intellectual disabilities in Riyadh?</p>	
5 Brief Description of Project	The aims of this study are firstly, to explore how IEP policy is implemented in mainstream schools in Riyadh city, Saudi Arabia. Secondly, to explore IEP team members' experiences of the implementation of IEPs designed for intellectual disabilities students at mainstream schools in Riyadh. Finally, this study tries	

to explore the best possible means for implementing IEPs for intellectual disabilities students at mainstream schools. The sample will consist of IEP team members (i.e. special education teachers, parents, head teachers, counsellors and psychologists).

(http://www.se.gov.sa/rules/se_rules/index.htm).

Using ecology theory as a framework, my study explores the micro, meso, exo and macro systems underpinning the implementation of IEPs in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (see Appendix A). This framework facilitates and informs discussion of my objectives, which are: firstly, to explore the roles and duties of different staff in relation to the implementation of IEPs; secondly, to investigate the extent to which staff are aware of their roles and duties; and thirdly, to explore any barriers that staff may face in relation to the IEP implementation. Finally, I aim to determine how IEPs can best be implemented for intellectually disabled student.

I am adopting a qualitative approach in this study. This research will use documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews to obtain data which will be analysed thematically. This should result in a rich understanding of the problems, challenges and solutions regarding the implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for primary school student with intellectual disabilities in Riyadh. I will use purposive sampling to enable me to collect data from mainstream primary schools for the intellectually disabled in Riyadh city. These will be used as the case studies for this research. Data will be gathered regarding the selection criteria which include age of IEP team, experience of teaching, teaching environment and qualifications. Accordingly, I will collect my research data from these schools which will give me an opportunity to meet with the IEP team members working directly with the intellectual disabled students. The sample is taken from a minimum of four mainstream schools in Riyadh. The semi-structured interview sample will consist of 20 participants as shown in table 1 below:

Table: Semi-Structured Interviews IEP team Samples

Primary mainstreaming schools for Intellectual disabled (I/D)	Region (Riyadh)	Semi-Structured Interview
Mainstream School	North	1 Special Education Teacher 1 Head Teacher 1 counsellor 1 Psychologists 1 parent of mild intellectual disabled student
Mainstream School	South	1 Special Education Teacher 1 Head Teacher 1 counsellor 1 Psychologists 1 parent of mild intellectual disabled

			student
Mainstream School	West	1 Special Education Teacher 1 Head Teacher 1 counsellor 1 Psychologists 1 parent of mild intellectual disabled student	
Mainstream School	East	1 Special Education Teacher 1 Head Teacher 1 counsellor 1 Psychologists 1 parent of mild intellectual disabled student	
Total	4	20	

As shown in the table above, the sample will include four teachers of student with intellectual disabilities (four from mainstream schools). These special education teachers work in four primary mainstream schools for the intellectually disabled (four primary schools containing six grades). The sample included four parents of student with intellectual disabilities (four from mainstream schools). It included four head teachers (four from mainstream schools). In addition, the sample comprised four councillors (four from mainstream schools). Finally, it included four psychologists (four from mainstream schools) for a total of 20.

Approximate Start Date:	Approximate End Date:
Sept 2011	August 2014

6 Name of Principal Investigator or Supervisor	Principal investigator: Mohammed Alkahtani Supervisor: Dr Andrea Abbas Centre for Educational Research and Development University of Lincoln
	Email address: aabbas@lincoln.ac.uk Email address: aabbas@lincoln.ac.uk

7 Names of other researchers or student investigators involved	N/A
---	-----

8 Location(s) at which project is to be carried out	In this study, the location will be the mainstream primary schools for the mild intellectually disabled in the Saudi capital, Riyadh Region.
--	--

The most significant issue taken into account in this research study is the confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability of the subjects which will be secured by the researcher. Before conducting the interviews, informed consent of all subjects will be taken into consideration (see Appendix D). Consent forms will be sent to and obtained from all participants involved in the study. These forms will include an explanation of the aims of the study and request for permission as well as the participants' right to withdraw from the study at any stage throughout the research. The letters will also contain assurances of both confidentiality and anonymity.

Promises that the information supplied by participants would only be used for the purposes of this study will also be given. In addition, one of the procedures to follow to ensure that participants will not be harmed is that they will be given the choice not to give answers to questions that they feel are sensitive. Another procedure is that all participants will be able to check their responses before analysis. In the analysis itself, participants' names will not be used. Rather will use pseudonyms instead to make sure that their identities are kept confidential. All data collected will be securely stored and only used for the aims of this current study, the data will be destroyed relevant to the university of Lincoln requirements.

It is important to note that the focus of the research is on the implementation of Individual Education Plans. However, the researcher will send consent forms to their parents who will also be participants in this study. The research is not aware of any exceptional factors which may raise ethical issues at this stage. However, should any potential issues arise; further forms will be completed and submitted to the relevant office at the University of Lincoln for approval.

Before carrying out this research, permission will be obtained from the University of Lincoln, the Saudi Ministry of Education and the IEP team members. The Ministry of Education permission will be obtained through writing an official letter. Furthermore, gaining access will be conducted in four phases. The first phase will be visiting the Directorate General of Special Education in Riyadh to obtain an authorisation letter. This consent letter will officially confirm that all my field work data will be used solely for academic purposes and will be treated with confidentiality and will comply with conventional ethical issues. Then this letter will be handed to Riyadh LEA in order to

be allowed to visit the mainstream schools. A consent letter will be sent to the parents of the student involved in the study and a written request will be made to the head teacher of each school to facilitate this.

Ethical Approval from Other Bodies

10 Does this research require the approval of an external body?

Yes

No

If “Yes”, please state which body:-

College of Education/ King Saud University

11 Has ethical approval already been obtained from that body?

Yes -Please append documentary evidence to this form.

No

If “No”, please state why not:-

I cannot obtain permission from them before receiving permission from the University of Lincoln.

Please note that any such approvals must be obtained and documented before the project begins.

APPLICANT SIGNATURE

I hereby request ethical approval for the research as described above.

I certify that I have read the University’s ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH WITH HUMANS AND OTHER ANIMALS.

Mohammed

Applicant Signature

Date 06-01-14

Mohammed

PRINT NAME

FOR STUDENT APPLICATIONS ONLY –

Academic Support for Ethics

Academic support should be sought prior to submitting this form to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

- Undergraduate / Postgraduate Taught application Academic Member of staff nominated by the School/Department (consult your project tutor)
- Postgraduate Research Application Director of Studies

I support the application for ethical approval

Andrea Abbas

06/01/14

Academic / Director of Studies Signature

Date

Andrea Abbas

FOR COMPLETION BY THE CERD RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Please select ONE of A, B, C or D below:

A. The CERD Research Ethics Committee gives ethical approval to this research.

This revised application has been approved following further clarifications requested (see comments on following page).

B. The CERD Research Ethics Committee gives conditional ethical approval to this research.

10 Please state the condition (inc. date by which condition must be satisfied if applicable)

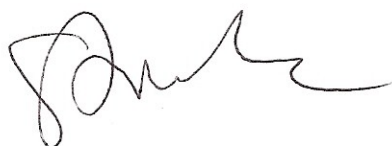
C. The CERD Research Ethics Committee cannot give ethical approval to this research but refers the application to the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for higher level consideration.

11 Please state the reason

D. The CERD Research Ethics Committee cannot give ethical approval to this research and recommends that the research should not proceed.

12 Please state the reason, bearing in mind the University's ethical framework, including the primary concern for Academic Freedom.

Signature of the Chair of the CERD Research Ethics Committee



29/1/14

Signature

Date

Reviewers' comments

The Committee was pleased to receive your responses to our initial queries, and feels that the ethical principles of the research are now clearer in so far as: (1) student themselves will not be interviewed, (2) parents are ordinarily part of the IEP teams, which explains the importance of their role in this research, and (3) members of the same IEP team will not have access to one another's interview data, thus minimising the potential for it to interfere in those relationships.

We are happy to approve the application; however, there are still two points of concern that we would like clarified. We suggest that you speak with your supervisor to discuss the wording of it, and then send your reply to Sarah Amsler (samsler@lincoln.ac.uk). There is no need to submit the EA2 form again.

- While it is useful to make the criteria for participation transparent to potential participants, we are concerned that it is potentially discriminatory to select parents on the basis of whether they themselves have an education (if the study is not specifically about their personal educational experience), and on whether they have a particular level of knowledge of the educational system. Which parent voices will have the opportunity to be heard? We would like to be clearer about the justification for these criteria – in other words, your explanation of why they are ethical, and what

the ethical justification would be for excluding people who do not meet them. We would also like to hear more about the reason that will be given to parents who want to participate but do not meet these criteria.

- With regard to the potential for malpractice being disclosed, we recommend that you are explicit on the consent and information documents, informing participants that any such problems would be beyond the boundaries of confidentiality and would therefore be passed on to the appropriate authority. We also suggest that the first ‘appropriate authority’ in this case should be your supervisor, rather than school or government officials.

I received your comments and went over them thoroughly. Consequently, I have the following clarifications related to each point raised in the comments.

As for the first point, the overall aim of the study is to enhance the quality of educational strategies for students with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, in order to achieve this goal, it is crucial to include parents who are familiar with the Individual Plan and who have a good record of attending the IEP regular meetings. This will be clearly explained to all parents who express interest in participating in the study. In addition to this, parents who will express interest in participating in the study but do not meet the selection criteria will be informed of the likelihood of negative consequences of their uninformed responses on the results of this research and consequently the quality of special needs education outcomes which this study attempts to achieve.

I understand this to mean that selection of participants will include a consideration of the parents’ or guardians’ *participation in IEP planning and meetings*, rather than their own educational background and experience, as you are interested in what happens within the context of these meetings. I presume that parents/guardians who do not have extensive formal educational experience of their own, but who participate in the IEP planning and meetings, will therefore be eligible to participate. It would be very helpful if this were made clear when you are recruiting participants and in explaining the selection criteria to them. [SA/29/1/14]

With respect to the second point, any potential issues and concerns in relation to teaching and learning that could arise from this study will be dealt with confidentially and will be only discussed with my supervisor.

Appendix B

Provisional Approval by MoE to carry out the study

الرقم: ٢٧٤٤٤
التاريخ: ١٤٣٢ هـ
المرفقات:
الموضوع:

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم العالي
جامعة الملك سعود
كلية المجتمع في الرياض

سعادة مدير إدارة التربية والتعليم
حفظه الله

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،،، وبعد:

نفيد سعادتكم بأن محمد علي القحطاني طالب دكتوراه في تخصص التربية الخاصة بكلية المجتمع ولديها رحلة علمية إلى مدينة الرياض لتطبيق دراسته الميدانية في معاهد وبرامج التربية الخاصة وعنوان رسالته (الخطة التربوية الفردية : المعوقات والحلول).

أرجو من سعادتكم تسهيل مهمة الباحث في إجراء مقابلات مع فريق الخطة التربوية الفردية بالمعاهد وبرامج التربية الخاصة التابعة لإدارة التعليم بمنطقة الرياض..

وتقبلوا تحياتي وتقديري،،، والسلام.

وكيل الكلية
رئيس لجنة المعيدن والمحاضرين
د. عبد الله بن عطية الزهراني

هادي

ص. ب. ٢٤٤٤ الرياض ١١٤٥١ هاتف: ٤٧٢٥٢٧٧ فاكس: ٤٧٢٥٢٤٨ الرياض شارع صلاح الدين الأيوبي
P. O. Box 2454 Riyadh 11451 Tel.: 4735277 Fax.: 4735248 Riyadh S. Al-Ayubi Street
Email: rca@ksu.edu.sa

Appendix C

Final Approval by MoE to carry out the study

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الملك عبدالعزيز بن سعود آل سعود
وزارة التربية والتعليم
Ministry of Education

الرقم :
التاريخ :
المشروعات :

تسهيل مهمة باحث

بطاقة السجل المدني		الاسم	
١٠٠١٣٩٨٦٨٢		محمد علي القحطاني	
الجامعة	الكلية	الدرجة العلمية	العام الدراسي
الملك سعود	كلية المجتمع	دكتوراه	١٤٣٣/١٤٣٢ هـ
نوع الأداة : مقابلة		عنوان الدراسة: الخطة التربوية الفردية المعوقات والحلول	
عينة الدراسة : مدير / معلم / إداري / ولي أمر طالب.			

المكرم مدير مدرسة وفقه الله

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ، وبعد :

بناء على تعميم معالي الوزير رقم ٥٥/٦١٠ وتاريخ ١٧/٩/١٤١٦ هـ بشأن تفويض الإدارات العامة للتربية والتعليم بإصدار خطابات السماح للباحثين بإجراء البحوث والدراسات ، وحيث تقدم إلينا الباحث (الموضحة بياناته أعلاه) بطلب إجراء دراسته ، ونظراً لاكتمال الأوراق المطلوبة نأمل تسهيل مهمته مع ملاحظة أن الباحث يتحمل كامل المسؤولية المتعلقة بمختلف جوانب البحث ، ولا يعني سماح الإدارة العامة للتربية والتعليم موافقتها بالضرورة على مشكلة البحث أو على الطرق والأساليب المستخدمة في دراستها ومعالجتها.

شاكرين لكم وتقبلوا تحياتي ، ، ،

مدير إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

عبدالله السبحان

Appendix D

IEP team members informed consent forms

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الإخوة العاملون بمعاهد وبرامج التربية الفكرية

حفظهم الله

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ... وبعد

في البداية أود أن أعبر لك عن خالص شكري وتقديري لموافقتك المبدئية للاشتراك في هذه الدراسة . أقوم حالياً بالتحضير لدرجة الدكتوراة في جامعة لنكولن في بريطانيا في مجال التربية الخاصة (أعاقة عقلية). وكجزء من التحضير للدرجة العلمية أقوم بعمل دراسة علمية لمعرفة الوضع الحالي لتطبيق الخطة التربوية الفردية في منطقة الرياض بالمملكة العربية السعودية .بالأضافة الى ذلك تهدف الدراسة الى معرفة معوقات تطبيق الخطة التربوية الفردية وكذلك معرفه أفضل الطرق والاساليب التي قد تساعد على تطبيق الخطة التربوية الفردية للطلاب ذوي الاعاقه العقلية لتحقيق الاهداف المرجوه منها.

وللعلم فان اجراءات المقابلة لا تزيد عن 60 دقيقة وسوف يتم التعامل مع المعلومات التي ستزودنا بها بسرية تامه ولن يتم استخدامها الا للأغراض المبينه اعلاه. وبامكانك الانسحاب من المشاركة في أي وقت دون ان تؤثر على ادائك الوظيفي , كما يمكنك الاطلاع على نتائج هذا البحث بعد الانتهاء من تحليلها.

أشكرك مقدما على حسن تعاونك

أخوك: محمد بن علي القحطاني

- 1- أسم المشارك: -----
- 2- سنوات الخبرة.....سنة
- 3- الوظيفة:

مدير

معلم تربية خاصة

ولي أمر الطالب

إخصائي نفسي

مرشد طلابي

4- المؤهل التعليمي

بكالوريوس تربية خاصة

بكالوريوس تربية

دبلوم تربية خاصة بعد المرحلة الجامعية

ماجستير

أخرى ، حدد.....

Appendix E

IEP team members interview schedule

Interview Guide

1 Examination of recent and current of Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

- 1.1 Could you please tell me a little bit about the Individual Education Plan (IEP)? If we start broadly, what is the current status of the IEP in Saudi Arabia?
- 1.2 Do you have experience of applying the IEP? If so, at what level? And for how long?
- 1.3 Is IEP practised in your school? If yes, how? If not, why not?
- 1.4 Based on your experience in teaching student with intellectual disabilities, what is your personal opinion regarding the implementation of the individual plan in the current environment, as well as in the past? Why is that?

2 Roles of the IEP team members towards the implementation of the Plans

- 2.1 In your opinion, why do you need the IEP and would you please tell me a little bit about your role within the implementation of IEP?
- 2.2 What have been the major driving forces behind implementing the IEP in special education? How, and why?
- 2.3 What are the impacts of implementing IEPs on special education services provision? How?
- 2.4 How are you treated and perceived by other IEP team members?

3 Attitudes of the IEP team members towards the implementation of the Individual Education Plans

- 3.1 Do you think that services related to the individual educational program might get help from special educational programs? (E.g. Early Identification, School Health Services, etc.). How?
- 3.2 Do you think that the school or institute allowed you to fully participate in the decision making processes in the IEP for each child with intellectual disability and are you satisfied with that? If so, why?

- 3.3 What factors promote positive and/or negative attitudes towards the implementation of the IEP?
- 3.4 What do you expect from parents in order to collaborate effectively with the Implementation of IEP and vice versa?

4 IEP Difficulties

- 4.1 What do you think are the main problems for the school/institution which limit the implementation of IEP? Why?
- 4.2 How do you think these problems vary according to environment variables such as the type of institution or school, academic qualifications and experience of team members?

5 IEP solutions

- 5.1 According to your own perspective, what approaches and mechanisms do you suggest for the improvement of the IEP practices in Saudi Arabia?
- 5.2 What are the factors that may improve mutual communications between the parents of student with intellectual disabilities and the IEP team for successful implementation of the plan?
- 5.3 Have you ever been trained on how to apply the individual plan to student with intellectual disabilities? How many training courses you attended? Please explain what the programs included?
- 5.4 What are the components that promote effective collaboration perceived by IEP team members in the IEP process?
- 5.5 What is the IEP team member's collaboration model that meets the requirements of an effective IEP for the institutes or mainstream school of student with intellectual disabilities?

That is the last question, is there anything that you would care to add?

- Would you like to receive a copy of the transcript of this interview?
- Would you like to receive a summary of findings?

Thank you for your time today. I appreciate you giving up your time to talk to me.

Appendix F

Themes and Coding Framework for Thematic Analysis

	Themes	Coding Framework
T1	Roles of the IEP Team (RolIEPT)	RolT
		RolP
		RolPs
		RolC
		RolH
T2	Barriers to IEP (BarrIEP)	
		Barrierpinvolve
		BarrierStruct
		BarrierNegAtt
		BarrierSL
T3	Solutions for IEPs (SolIEP)	BuilTeam
		LegAdmin
		Coord among the MoE, DGES, Scho and Par
		ApproAssess CurrDevelo

Theme: **Roles of IEP team members**

Code: **RoIIIEPT**

Code: **RoIIIEPT** describes the views of IEP team members regarding their roles and duties in the implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools vis-à-vis the declared Regulations of Special Education Institutes and Programmes (RSEIP) Document.

RoIT describes the views of teachers regarding their roles and duties in the implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools.

RoIP describes the views of parents regarding their roles and duties in the implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools.

RoIPs describes the views of psychologists regarding their roles and duties in the implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools.

RoIC describes the views of counsellors regarding their roles and duties in the implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools.

RoIH describes the views of head teachers regarding their roles and duties in the implementation of IEPs at mainstream schools.

Theme: **Barriers to IEP**

Code: **BarrIEP**

Code: **BarrIEP** describes the challenges and barriers that may limit the implementation of IEPs for intellectually disabled primary school student in Riyadh, as perceived by Saudi IEP team members.

Barrierpinvolve describes the views of the IEP team about barriers to activating or increasing parental involvement with IEP in mainstream schools.

BarrierStruct describes the views of the IEP team about structural support barriers facing IEP in mainstream schools.

BarrierNegAtt describes the views of the IEP team about negative attitudes towards the implementation of IEP in mainstream schools.

BarrierSL describes the views of the IEP team about school level barriers to IEP in mainstream schools.

Theme: **Solutions to problems with IEPs**

Code: **SoIIEP**

Code: **SoIIEP** describes the views of the IEP team about the best possible means for implementing IEPs for students with intellectual disabilities at mainstream schools.

BuilTeam describes the views of the IEP team about the solutions based upon building collaborative teamwork within the IEP team for implementing IEP at mainstream schools.

LegAdmin describes the views of the IEP team about the legislative (legal and administrative) solutions for IEP at mainstream schools.

Coord among the MoE, DGES, Scho and Par describes the views of the IEP team about coordination based solutions between IEP team members regarding students with intellectual disabilities and their parents at mainstream schools.

SoIEE describes the views of the IEP team about the appropriate assessment solutions for IEP at mainstream schools.

CurrDevelo explores the perspectives of the IEP team members regarding curriculum development solutions at mainstream schools in Riyadh.