Identification Strategies in the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme: Primary Teachers' Perspectives

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The University of Manchester  
Fahad Alnaim  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education  
Identification Strategies in the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme: Primary Teachers’ Perspectives  

Abstract

Saudi Arabia has been developing services for Students With Learning Disabilities (SWLD) for nearly two decades. The growing practice in this field is, however, lacking research. This study attempted to examine the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme (SLDP) in terms of the identification of SWLD, by exploring the perspectives of Learning Disabilities (LD) teachers. It attempted to provide an in-depth understanding of this social phenomenon by exploring the dynamic interaction between the teachers’ views, process and contexts. A qualitative paradigm was applied to explore teachers’ perceptions of the meaning, substance, content, process and context of LD. The sample includes male and female LD teachers from rural and urban areas. There were three steps in the data collection process: 1- to determine key issues, seven semi-structured interviews with LD teachers, have been carried out; 2- six focus groups were conducted to get a deep understanding of the issues; 3- 45 LD teachers have participated in a survey which assisted in the interpretation and exploring how widely these views are held. Data analysis was directed qualitatively and based on a thematic approach. MAXQDA software has been used in the analysis to manage, generate and classify the codes in a quick, easy and accurate way.

Findings show that different LD teachers have different identification strategies. There is an a gap between practice and policy which was caused by different reasons: such as lack of policy details about the mechanism of some processes; focusing on serving a specific number of SWLD rather than providing better quality of support for students; different influential (e.g. administration) and contextual (e.g. poor quality of education) factors; and, weaknesses in fidelity of implementation (e.g. lack of training). All these reasons have been considered in the underlying model of the study, highlighting various relations between them. This leads to a new theoretical model.

This study provides a platform for Saudi policy makers to reconsider the needs and problems of SWLD. It also contributes to the international LD research through providing insights into the context of a developing country. The study suggests revising and developing both policy and practice, as well as tackling the problems and influences which cause the gap between them. Further research should study the application of an inclusive approach to supporting SWLD in the Saudi education context in order to respond to the identified problems in the SLDP.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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**Abbreviations**

<table>
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<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
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<td>BDA</td>
<td>British Dyslexia Association</td>
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<td>BPS</td>
<td>British Psychological Society</td>
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<td>GDSE</td>
<td>General Directorate of Special Education</td>
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<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individual Education Plan</td>
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<td>IM</td>
<td>Instant Messages</td>
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<td>IQ</td>
<td>Intelligence Quotient</td>
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<td>ITPA</td>
<td>Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities</td>
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<td>LD</td>
<td>Learning Disabilities</td>
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<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education (in Saudi Arabia)</td>
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<td>REP</td>
<td>Remedial Educational Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTI</td>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
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<td>SC</td>
<td>School counsellor</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Educational needs</td>
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<td>SLDP</td>
<td>Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme</td>
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<td>SpLD</td>
<td>specific learning difficulties</td>
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<td>SWLD</td>
<td>Students With Learning Disabilities</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain the rationale and the context of this research. I will clarify that there is a gap in the literature which can be filled by this research. Then I will move on to address what I aimed to do and find through this study. After that, I will highlight the research questions accompanied with details of how to address each question.

1.2 Rationale and research context

1.2.1 Interest in the research

This research has started with the interest I developed for this field in my academic and professional experience. I completed my undergraduate studies in the School of Education in the Special Education Department at King Faisal University. My major in the last two years of the undergraduate course was "learning disabilities" (LD) which corresponds to the term "specific learning difficulties" (SpLD) or "dyslexia" in the UK. The last term of my undergraduate programme was a practical course where I had to work as a teacher of students with learning disabilities. Although this work lasted for only one term, it enriched my learning with invaluable experience. It linked what had been studied theoretically with practical work which allowed further understanding and more awareness about the differences and similarities between theory and practice. Also, this short work experience facilitated the appreciation that there are many issues in the practical field of LD that are complex and have not yet been addressed adequately. In addition, the undergraduate course allowed me to establish a personal and academic network of colleagues, who served as a friendly discussion group even after graduation, which was advantageous as most of these friends became teachers in LD schools, and this allowed me to listen to them from time and time about some issues regarding their fieldwork.

Following this, I was chosen to become a teacher in the same department which I graduated from. Then, I pursued my studies and completed a Master degree in the field of special needs. My dissertation focused on the identification of gifted students in Saudi schools, and this focused my
attention on the identifications of those who have special needs. When I started this PhD course, my university in Saudi Arabia encouraged me to focus on learning disabilities. Therefore, I looked back into my experiences and found that from teaching LD students, my colleagues and I faced some confusion and difficulties when identifying learning disabilities. Therefore, I realised that the idea of examining the identification process of LD in Saudi schools is very important and overly interesting. What provided me with more support to continue with this thesis is that when conducting the pilot study, teachers emphasised that the identification question is still not clearly addressed and needs to be examined.

1.2.2 Saudi context

The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia includes the General Directorate of Special Education (GDSE) which supervises and manages education services for people with special needs. The GDSE was launched under the name Special Education Department in 1962 and was upgraded to the General Directorate for Special Education Programme in 1972 and then to GDSE in 2006. These changes in this education sector involved development of policies and launching different departments. One of these departments is the Department of Learning Disabilities which was launched in 1996 to run special programmes and education for student with learning disabilities (SWLD).

1.2.2.1 The Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme (SLDP)

In 1996, the Department of Learning Disabilities started the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme (SLDP) in primary schools, initiated in twelve primary schools supervised by twelve teachers specialising in LD (Ministry of Education, 2016). In 2006, a ‘teacher adviser’ service started to help intermediate SWLD in certain cities. In the same year, the SLDP was established in 728 boys and 498 girls primary schools serving 15,038 students (Alhabib, 2006). The Department of Learning Disabilities approved a manual in 2012 that names 1285 primary boys schools that adopted the SLDP. In addition, these schools, which apply the SLDP, include high number of students (Almoady, Bokhary, Alhawas, Almayah, & Alabdullatif, 2013). This rapidly growing use of the SLDP in schools shows how much attention Saudi educationists pay to LD and how significant the need for this service is perceived to be, contrary to popular belief.
(a) Aim of the SLDP

The programme aims to identify SWLD in mainstream schools, assess their LD and prepare an appropriate plan for each one of them. Following the identification of a custom plan it is applied, evaluated and amended to reflect the changing needs of each SWDL. (Almoady et al., 2013; Almosa, 2008). In light of this one can appreciate that the identification is an essential part of the programme in addition to other process of services.

(b) The resources room

This is a specially designated room within a school where SWLD have access to for a period not exceeding half of their normal school day duration. The room is staffed with a teacher who is trained in LD and who provide special educational and intervention services that address the needs of SWLD as well as a platform to educate them according to their needs.

Further, this room allows SWLD to learn in their regular classroom as well facilitate the development of social and communicational skills (Almoady et al., 2013; Somaily, Al-Zoubi, & Rahman, 2012). In other words, the LD teacher has to provide teaching and related academic skills in the resources room using a pull-out service. 12 students is the minimum number of SWLD who must be served in the programme. The set-up of teaching can be in a number of different formats. For instance, this can be done through teaching 6 students in a one-to-one service and teaching three groups in which each group includes at least two students. LD teachers must consider variety of LD methods which include literacy and numeracy(Almoady et al., 2013). While the set-up of the resources room demonstrate that SWLD learn mostly in their regular classroom, it also indicates that LD of students are not addressed in their classroom in an inclusive way.

(c) Registration conditions

The manual of the SLDP (Almoady et al., 2013) listed the following points as conditions/criteria in order to register a student in the programme. Although some of them need more clarifications (which are lacking in the manual), these points are expected to provide, for readers, general ideas that are adopted by the SLDP such as a discrepancy approach (more about discrepancy approach are discussed in Section 2.5.1).

1- A student has a clear discrepancy between their abilities and academic achievement in reading, writing, speech and mathematical inference. Additionally, a student has disorders in one of the psychological processes such as: memory, attention and thinking.
2- The difficulty must not be caused by mental retardation or behavioural disorder or any other reasons that are related to lacking of appropriate educational or parental circumstances.

3- Regular educational services must be found as not suitable or ineffective for supporting these students which necessitates providing special education services.

4- Assessment is applied by a multidisciplinary team.

5- Agreement of the panel which should be chaired by the head teacher and includes LD teacher, a regular class teacher, a psychologist, a school counsellor and where possible, parents and/or student. In addition, this team is assumed to work in a cooperative, coordinated way and to have different responsibilities, such as gathering initial information about students, and conducting the identification and evaluation processes.

(d) Individual Educational Plan (IEP)

The IEP describes all educational services that are prepared for the students' needs by the multidisciplinary team based on the results of the assessment. It must include the strengths and needs of students and the long and short term goals expected to be achieved. Further, this must be applied by LD teachers and anyone who has a responsibility in providing the service according to the IEP (Almoady et al., 2013). However, Hanafi and Alraies (2008) argue that, due to its significant influence, parents’ participation in the individual educational programme in Saudi Arabia needs to be given more emphasis in the regulations. The role of the multidisciplinary team in the SLDP and the participation of the members in it are two constructs that are worthy of investigation in light of the objective of this study.

1.2.2.2  Challenges in special education in Saudi Arabia

Almosa (2008) discussed several barriers in the field of Saudi special education. In the following, I highlight three important points from his discussion that are related to the aspect of assessment.

- Lack of specialists in human resources which led to seeking support from unqualified staff.
- Challenges related to assessment and diagnosis such as lack of diagnostic tests and tools and their standardisation.
- Lack of support services such as speech therapy which is referred to the as "rareness of specialists".

In addition, Alquraini (2010) argues that one of biggest challenges in special education in Saudi Arabia is that the assessment procedures are not team-based. This viewpoint, which will be explored...
further in this study, implies probable disagreement with practical guidance, as stipulated and emphasised in the manual of SLDP, on the importance of the multidisciplinary team in assessment of SWLD.

1.2.3 Literature search

There is a lack of research in the area of LD in Saudi Arabia compared to the extensive practice that developed in the field. The growing practice should be consistent with the number of research works in order to ensure success, create development based on a scientific basis, take advantage of recent theories, and discover and reform underlying problems. The assumption of 'lack of research' has been made after investigating different databases, mainly ProQuest, PsycINFO and Google Scholar, as well as some Arabic databases provided by King Saud University, King Faisal University and Omm Al-Qura University, using the keywords ‘learning disabilities’, ‘dyslexia’, ‘specific learning difficulties’ and ‘Saudi’. This investigation resulted in different studies carried out on the subject of Saudi SWLD, with many of them related to psychology or educational psychology (Issa & Gomaa, 2010; Mohamed, 2005) but not related to the SLDP. Very few studies investigated the SLDP (Al-hano, 2006; Hussain, 2009), and particularly no research had focused on the identification of SWLD in Saudi Arabia. Identification of SWLD has been touched upon by some researchers (Al-hano, 2006). However, the depth of these researchers’ investigation was not directed to exploring the process of identification and examining reasons behind implementing such process while considering its contextual factors, complexity and significance. In this study, Al-hano conducted interviews with some stakeholders (e.g. teachers and parents) of the SDLP to explore the discourse of LD and disability from their point of view. He found that most participants did not consider LD as a category of disability. Furthermore, LD teachers presented LD students in an optimistic manner where the differences between LD students and other (normal) students were highlighted as being minimal. Consequently, the teachers appeared not to be planning or prepared to apply rigorous assessment of LD. Two important limitations were identified in Al-hano’s study. Firstly, the sample used in the study did not involve girls’ schools nor students from a variety of areas (e.g. rural areas), which limited collecting information from different contexts and understanding their impacts on perceiving LD. Secondly, the researcher utilised only one method of data collection (interviews); and arguably, using different methods is important to improve the credibility of research.

Although there is a lack of Saudi-based literature about evaluating implementation of national interventions, there are evaluations of English national strategies which highlighted the complex
issues of implementing a national initiative at a local level (Beard, Pell, Shorrocks-Taylor, & Swinnerton, 2005; Earl et al., 2003). Importantly, a gap between policy and practice in the special education sector was found in many countries (Brandt, 2011; Bringewatt & Gershoff, 2010; Poon-McBrayer, 2012). This issue raises concerns that students with special needs are not provided the intended service which is expected to meet their needs. This policy-practice gap could exist for different reasons. For example, in Hong Kong, Poon-McBrayer (2012) presents certain reasons of the policy–practice gap in learning disabilities intervention, such as "the difficulty to operationalize the definition of learning disabilities in service delivery" (Poon-McBrayer, 2012, p. 1909). Similarly, it can be seen below that the policy-practice gap is expected in the SLDP; therefore, it needs to be investigated in order to understand the reasons, obstacles or barriers behind it. There are manuals authorised by the GDSE (Almoady et al., 2013; Ministry of Education, 2002), which provide information on and explanation of the SLDP. However, this identification process is presented simplistically. This explanation lacks important details, such as what is really going on in the identification process: why these methods of identification are specifically chosen, discussing the strengths and weakness of these methods.

1.3 Research aim

This study aims to investigate the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme (SLDP) in terms of the identification of Students with Learning Disabilities (SWLD). This investigation takes place by exploring the perspectives of teachers of Learning Disabilities (LD). Two aspects are included in this exploration; firstly, discovering the identification strategies and techniques which are adopted in the SLDP in reality, and secondly, examining the effectiveness of these strategies and techniques. Here, ‘strategy’ refers to the overall plan which may include one or more techniques, whereas a technique refers to the different parts within the plan such as conducting interviews, tests or observation. LD teachers are the main source of the study because they are the main people responsible for the SLDP, including identifying, teaching and evaluating SWLD. Also, they are the only specialists in LD in schools.

1.4 Research Questions

In addition to the aims, this study intended to answer the following questions:

1- How do teachers on the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme SLDP identify Students with Learning Disabilities (SWLD)? For instance:
- Why are SWLD identified in this current process?
- Why do tutors follow certain ways to identify SWLD?
- How does the referral process take place?
- To what extent is the identification process needed and how comprehensive is it?
- How do contextual factors (family and school administration) affect the identification process?
- How do tutors find (importance, comprehensive, flexible and effective) the regulations and supervisors’ instructions for identification?

Identification refers to the assessments that are carried out on SWLD by specialised Saudi primary tutors. These assessments may be affected by various external factors, such as parents' views and school administrations' decisions and internal factors such as tutors’ beliefs and values. This study considers the effect of these factors on the assessments, if any. The investigation of how SWLD are assessed in real life is expected to clarify whether or not there is an agreement between the policy and law of SLDP and practice.

2- How do teachers view the policies around identification strategies and registration as being valid, necessary, and efficient? And why?

This question is related to the first one because what the first question investigates (e.g. identification process) is highly related to policies. In addition, this question explores how the teachers relate to the policies that govern the SLDP. It addresses the perspectives and responses of teachers regarding these policies. This investigation involves studying how policies guide teachers in selecting identification techniques and why teachers use any particular identification technique? And if they use more than one, then why? It attempts to understand how policies facilitate providing techniques and necessary provisions for teachers. The validity, necessity and efficiency of the instructions of identification strategies are explored to find out how tutors think about the capability of these strategies in giving an indication for identifying whether or not there are learning disabilities. This investigation involves studying these strategies individually and collectively, meaning that it examines the teachers’ usage of each strategy as an individual in order to clarify the reason for its usage, ways of operating, and effects. Also, this question investigates the facilities and barriers within the guidelines by giving due consideration to the pros and cons of implementing these strategies. Furthermore, it explores how teachers evaluate the necessity of adopting certain strategies if they have major pros and cons at the same time. For example, if a teacher thinks that observation is time-consuming but can provide
important information about SWLD in very few cases, it is important to know how he/she balances between these issues and why he/she considers one aspect of them more than another.

1.5 The structure of the study

The present study is divided into six chapters. The first, ‘introduction’, presents background information on the study context, discusses the need for this study with a review of previous research, articulates the aim and research questions, and clarifies the researcher's motivation for undertaking the study.

The second chapter provides a critical overview of academic literature on Learning Disabilities (LD). It starts with an examination of the history of LD, including the development of its concept and identification. The chapter discusses the complexity of defining LD with addressing some definitions from different contexts. In addition, it presents the current arguments about the approaches of addressing identification, including a discrepancy model and response to intervention. Labelling and categorising LD are discussed, highlighting their pros and cons. The chapter addresses four factors that assist in achieving excellent implementation of interventions.

Chapter Three explains the methodological design, philosophical considerations and theoretical framework of the study. This is followed by presentation of the process of conducting the pilot study. Next, the main study is addressed, including sampling, applying the research methods and consideration of ethical issues. Finally, the chapter explains the methods of analysing the collected data.

Chapter Four presents the analysis and discussion of the findings guided by the collected data. It is divided into two sections; practice and policy. In the practice section, different procedures of identification are discussed. In addition, this section addresses contextual and conceptual factors that affect intervention. The policy section examines policies of the SLDP and where they come from. It also discusses the implementation of the SLDP which includes teacher training and programme characteristics.

In Chapter Five, a discussion is presented about the underlying model which is developed throughout this study. The chapter explains the key steps of the final developed version of the model which embraces six aspects, including policy, influences and the gap between policy and practice.

The final chapter draws significant conclusions and addresses how this study contributes to knowledge and its wider implications. The chapter makes recommendations for the investigated programme and for future research, highlighting limitations of the study and personal learning.
1.6 Summary

This chapter introduced my interest, which was the main motivation to study the SLDP. Following this, the development of special education in Saudi was highlighted with more explanation of the consideration of LD which revealed a brief history of the emergence of the SLDP. Also, this chapter illustrated the need for this study; to contribute to existing literature and further the progress of LD in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the aim of the study and its research questions were highlighted, followed by an outline of the structure of the study. The next chapter is a review of the literature on LD.
Chapter 2
Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The field of learning disabilities (LD) is one of the most complex areas, which has drawn a wide range of arguments that include many issues starting from its definition, label and identification and ending with provision of education to students who have LD and treating their reading and writing problems. Different authors use different terms when discussing this phenomenon; the term used in the study is learning disabilities (LD) because this is the one utilised in Saudi Arabia. In the following sections, international and Saudi literature on LD will be reviewed. This will include discussion of the history, concept, definition, and use of the label LD. Details of the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme (SLDP) will also be provided.

2.2 History of Learning Disabilities (LD)

Understanding how a field of knowledge has developed is important for readers and researchers in that field. Firstly, investigating the history of LD can inform researchers about how Students With Learning Disabilities (SWLD) have been treated and taught during different periods of time. Secondly, exploring perspectives and consequences of previous methods of identification and teaching LD sufferers provides a strong foundation to build new thoughts and perspectives. Thirdly, it is interesting to be aware of how this field was established and developed and how much effort, time and research have been dedicated to this field until now.

This summary of LD history attempts to consider mainly terminology and identification issues of LD. I tried to present this history in a brief way because this is not the focus of the study. Also, the main issues related to the interest of the study, such as definitions, models and identification of LD, will be discussed in separate sections. Different studies divided LD history into roughly similar periods (Guardiola, 2001; Hallahan & Mercer, 2001; Lerner, 2000; Lerner & Johns, 2009; Wiederholt, 1974). I will follow a method similar to these history frames, particularly the outlines proposed by Hallahan and Mercer (2001). This is mainly because these author’s outline highlights the nations where this field mainly developed. History of LD was divided into the following four periods: European foundation (1800 to 1920), US foundation (1920 to 1965), emergent period (1965 to 1980), and revision and progression period (from 1980 until recently).
1- European foundation (1800 to 1920)

Among the many researchers (Broadbent, 1872; Gall & Spurzheim, 1810) who played important roles in this period, two researchers were very influential. Firstly, around 1877, Adolph Kussmaul was the first to identify reading inability and termed it 'word blindness’, which introduced awareness that reading may have its own disability. Kussmaul raised this concept after finding out that recognizing written words was the only problem of one of his patients who had no other disabilities (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001). Interestingly, about ten years after the term "word blindness" appeared, the term ‘dyslexia’ was produced by Berlin (1887). These two terms have similar concepts. As Kussmaul considered his patient as a special case, in Saudi, students who have difficulties in reading or writing for specific reasons (e.g. social or familial factors) are considered differently compared to students who have these difficulties because they represent special cases. The other influential researcher in this field was Pringle Morgan in the UK, which is a leading country in the area of LD research. His work involved deep-rooted research that studied LD more than a century ago. This consideration of LD has lasted up until very recently and assists to reform, construct and develop understanding of the various issues related to LD. The earliest consideration of LD in the UK first emerged in 1896 when the British Medical Journal published an article by Pringle Morgan entitled "A Case of Congenital Word Blindness" (Morgan, 1896). The article encouraged researchers and built a basis for research to study other cases of LD (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001). This relatively recent study can be considered as one of the later efforts based on much research which has built on Morgan’s article on word blindness. Similarly, the present study aims to investigate how Saudi teachers view and conceptualise cases identified as having LD and the consequences of these views.

2- US foundation (1920 to 1965)

Interest and research on LD continued in Europe (Hallgren, 1950; Hermann, 1956, 1959; Norrie, 1939) during this period. However, the most critical progress of LD research occurred in the US. There was important progress in identification, teaching methods and theories related to LD. Samuel Orton was one of the greatest LD scholars in this period in particular. Two aspects of his work should be highlighted here. Firstly, Orton worked with nearly 1000 children with reading disabilities. In his work, he observed common features such as mirror reversal of words and letters. Also, through working with these children he developed a great interest to seek appropriate methods to help them overcome reading disabilities (Pumfrey & Reason, 1991). For example, Orton (1937) produced the
first multisensory training, for which he is credited. Secondly, Orton recorded significant results based on his observation of students with reading disabilities, including their IQ test scores which were average or above average. This observation played an important role in shaping this field, particularly in the area of identification methods (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002). It is evident that SLDP has been influenced by Orton’s work as Saudi Arabia established a whole programme which includes special approaches to teaching SWLD. This is based on the premise that LD can be overcome and managed if SWLD have been taught in the correct way according to LD research.

Another prominent figure in this period was Marion Monroe whose crucial research focused on the assessment of LD. The difference between actual and expected achievement is a concept which was introduced by Monroe (1932) as an approach to identify students with reading disabilities (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002). This historical assessment still carries on in different countries; Saudi Arabia is a country where IQ is used in the SLDP as one of the identification criteria. Efforts on the identification and assessment of LD are continuously growing. Samuel Kirk enhanced the field of LD by seminal work and great contribution in defining and assessing LD such as his development of the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA) to identify specific learning disabilities in children (Kirk, McCarthy, & Kirk, 1961; Pumfrey & Reason, 1991). Although many studies mentioned the term ‘learning disabilities’ in the nineteenth century, Kirk was the first to specify this term by a definition (Kirk, 1962, 1963). This term is still used in many countries in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular. Particularly, the definition of LD that is applied in Saudi Arabia is similar to the Kirk’s, and this point will be discussed later (see Section 2.3).

3- Emergent period (1965 to 1985)

In this period, LD became politicised and no longer just an educational or theoretical issue. Also, the attention to LD started to grow in the general public and to have official sectors. In the UK, the subject of LD started to appear in policies in 1970 when acute dyslexia was covered in The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, Section 27 (Soler, 2009). This was followed by several reports that paid attention to dyslexia (Bullock Report, 1975; Department of Education and Science, 1972; Warnock, 1978). Since the implementation of the Education Act 1981, considerable increase of provision for SWLD was observed (Pumfrey & Reason, 1991).

In the US, LD was introduced and listed on the agenda of the Federal Government. The Federal Government mandated in 1969 to develop the field of learning disabilities to be a distinct entity
within special education (Hammill, 1993). Organisations related to LD were funded by parents and professionals, and different educational programmes for SWLD were initiated (Hallahan & Mercer, 2002). As many countries started politicising the issue of LD, it is not surprising that it became politicised in Saudi Arabia as well; however, this started in 1996 which is relatively late. Following this development, a model of resources room appeared which is applied in the SLDP. In the resources room, SWLD receive the required special instruction while the rest of the school time must be spent in regular classrooms. Accordingly, this official development in the education sector enhanced public awareness of LD (Lerner & Johns, 2009).

Furthermore, studies on the definitions and identification tools of LD further progressed. For example, more definitions were introduced (Hammill, Leigh, McNutt, & Larsen, 1981; U.S. Office of Education, 1968), Monroe’s discrepancy model was reproduced (Bateman, 1965) and Kirk, McCarthy, and Kirk (1968) revised the assessment tools of ITPA.

4- Revision and progression period (1985 until recently)

As LD became an official consideration as different interventions and assessments were adopted in the previous period, researchers revised the results observed in the wide range of the educational sector. Identification of LD took in wider arguments and changes in trends. In the late 1990s, there was a concern in the US that the percentage of students who have been identified as SWLD increased and exceeded 50% of students with special needs which indicated probable errors in diagnosis (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Also, the misidentification issue led researchers to doubt the effectiveness of the discrepancy approach and to investigate or develop other ways to find a more accurate method to deal with students who were suspected of having LD. One of the main models developed to overcome this problem is the response-to-intervention (RTI) model which aims to treat students in a careful, inclusive and precise manner (Kavale, Holdnack, & Mostert, 2005).

This current study is intended to explore the accuracy of the identification process applied in the SLDP programme. Discussion of the discrepancy approach and the RTI method will be presented in the following sections. A significant increase is documented in the use of assistive technology to support SWLD in different aspects of learning difficulty such as speech synthesis (text-to-speech), voice recognition (speech-to-text), organisation and memory (Draffan, 2002; Forgrave, 2002).
2.2.1 Some reflections on the history of LD

From a historical point of view, one can notice that some ideas still have an effect in the present programmes and legislations. For this reason, this study discussed how the history of LD field is related to the SLDP programme. Furthermore, it can be seen that the real beginning of the concept of LD as a specific field was about 100 years ago. This period of time for this field can be considered a short period compared to other fields of education or psychology. Therefore, significant progress and research is expected to follow, which might result in significant changes in concepts and trends related to LD. Stanovich (2005) encouraged looking for better ways in identification and focused on passing IQ related discrepancy while warning against being behind scientific progress stating that "the field suffers greatly from its tendency to base practice on concepts and psychometric technologies that have been superseded by subsequent scientific advance" (Stanovich, 2005, p. 103). What is important to say here is that the essential matter is not to look for change, but it is the need to take advantage of previous research and experiences. As LD is a new field, some developing countries might still be behind. Saudi Arabia is a developing country that paid attention to LD relatively late. The late start of SLDP is not the major problem; however, the concern is related to such questions as: does the SLDP programme consider change and develop ways of identification based on the latest research? Or does it base its practice on the instructions adopted at its first launch? This study will attempt to address the formal processes of identification and the teachers’ thoughts and views about them. Based on that, identification of whether or not policy makers and teachers take recent development of LD into account will be explored. For example, awareness about the RTI model (even if it is not used) indicates a trend of keeping pace with historical development of LD. Understanding the latest developments does not necessarily mean applying them in practice. However, this awareness might be applied to identify certain mistakes and to change and develop the initially adopted way of managing LD.

2.3 Concept and definitions

The concept and definitions of LD should be undertaken at the beginning of this study to provide more understanding, overview and significance about this issue. LD, like other complex subjects, does not have one agreed definition internationally (Sideridis, 2007; Tansey & Ní Dhomhnaill, 2002; Tunmer & Greaney, 2010). This means that these different definitions might be constructed by various perspectives influenced mainly by factors such as theories, practice, and economics. Particularly, LD is a worldwide phenomenon, a matter that makes dispute more likely. Also, the term
‘learning disabilities (LD)’ is not a subject of consensus among all nations. In the UK, LD is represented by other terms, mainly ‘specific learning difficulties (SpLD)’ and ‘dyslexia’. It was indicated (Turner, 1997; Vouroutzidou, 2011; Wedell, 2001) that SpLD includes sub-categories, mainly dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Internationally, identification, exclusionary or descriptive criteria played roles in forming definitions of LD. Importantly, the way of defining LD should depend on the purpose of the definition. One of the reasons for the multiplicity of assessment is that definition-makers have different purposes in mind. Therefore, if the goal is purely allocating resources, the definition may be formed based on the IQ-discrepancy model. On the other hand, if the aim is to look at underlying psychological factors, different definitions and assessments may be produced (Armstrong & Squires, 2015). More models of assessment will be discussed in Section 2.5.

In general, many definitions of LD consider the difficulties, in reading and spelling words fluently and accurately, as the primary ones (Rose, 2009). In addition, difficulties with aspects of phonological processing including phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing appear to be reliable signs of LD regardless of the intellectual abilities of the affected children (Rose, 2009). However, the intellectual abilities play an important role in the discrepancy model which will be tackled in the discussion of the following definitions. Two leading definitions in the UK are presented below, followed by exploratory commentaries in order to explain the basis and differences between them. It is worth noting that although ‘LD’ is the term used in this study, the British Psychological Society (BPS) and British Dyslexia Association (BDA) prefer to use the term of dyslexia. The British Psychological Society (BPS, 1999) provided a working definition of dyslexia.

Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the ‘word level’ and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. It provides the basis for a staged process of assessment through teaching (BPS, 1999, p. 8).

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) Management Board suggested in 2007 the following definition:

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual’s other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to conventional teaching methods, but its effect can be mitigated by appropriately specific
intervention, including the application of information technology and supportive counselling (BDA, 2007, online).

The BPS opted for a working definition for the following reason. Reid (2016) suggests that the BPS as a working organisation is not interested in providing causal explanation. While the working definition has no exclusionary criteria, focus on identifying traits was mainly on severe and persistent problems as well as lack of language development. These problems are more valued in the definition than other factors such as the overall ability (BPS, 1999; Frederickson & Frith, 1998). It can be seen that this definition includes, regardless of the causes, too many cases within the special needs category such as slow readers and people with autism as they suffer from severe, persistent language development problems. Therefore, when trying to use this definition for identification purposes, this will result in complications as it will be over-inclusive. Because of this broad inclusivity, Elliott and Gibbs (2008) argue that this definition will not be beneficial in informing interventions on the basis of special insights as it does not provide clarifications of the differences between reading difficulties that face different children.

The BDA definition seems to be more comprehensive. It addresses different issues in dyslexia including its forms, the age, causal factors and treatments. The reason behind this broadness of definition seems to be referring to the wide scope of the objectives and missions of the BDA. In other words, the aims of the BDA are not limited to one aspect of dyslexia such as identification or teaching; however, it seeks to address this subject as a whole. To cover the relation between this definition and identification, in particular, one should be aware that the BDA is a lobby group. So, they have conditions to achieve identification according to their definition where they provide training and certificates for this purpose. As a result, the assessment, which is based on their definition, would not have value unless it comes through them. Interestingly, the Science and Technology Committee (2009, p. 30) reports that "the Government decided to spend time and money looking specifically at dyslexia because of the strength of the dyslexia lobby, rather than because of any pre-existing, well researched, well-defined problem". This leads to the realisation that the definition-makers may set and insist on certain criteria that are consistent with their goals, even if the need for the concept itself is questionable. For example, Phil Willis (MP) warned that "the government should stop talking about specialist dyslexia teaching. Children diagnosed with dyslexia and children who struggle with reading for other reasons are taught how to read in exactly the same way" (Science and Technology Committee Announcement, 2009, online). This statement, also, can be supported by key psychologists (Elliott, 2005; Elliott & Gibbs, 2008; Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014),
who argued that difficulties in literacy can be treated through excellent teaching, without the necessity of examining the existence of LD. Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) highlighted that scientific research is distorted by lobbying activities and politics. The authors raised a concern that sometimes professionals come under commercial pressure or parent desire to label students as having LD/dyslexia in order to provide or receive special intervention. It can be clear from this discussion that definitions of LD have been formed and directed for certain purposes. However, these various directions and objectives might keep this concept in contention.

Another country should be taken into account in this area of literature is the US, particularly because many Saudi educational policies are similar to those applied in the US. Therefore, the SLDP is likely to be affected, to a certain degree, by US-based theories and practice in the field of LD. SLDP is not the only programme affected by American policy as many other countries and programmes around the world are up to date with the US progress in the area of LD in order to take advantage of its effects. Early definitions of LD adopted in the US were followed by the numerous countries (Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Sideridis, 2007). The most common definition is the one formed by the U. S. Office of Education (1977) which indicated that LD means:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning disabilities which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, or emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (U. S. Office of Education, 1977, p. 65083).

This definition presents the basis of what can be included or excluded in this term (LD). Unsurprisingly, the General Secretariat for Special Education (2002) in the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia provides a similar definition to the US one:

Disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken and written language which is manifested in disorders in listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic and it is not due to factors related to mental retardation, visual or hearing impairments, or educational, social, and familial factors (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 9).

Because of this similarity between the last two definitions, other similarities and relationships between Saudi Arabian and US practice are expected. Although the US literature should be well considered in this study, the educational and cultural variances between these two countries should be
taken into account. In other words, the US experience of LD should not be copied exactly in the SLDP; however, the education system and related conditions of these two countries should be understood when evaluating or addressing the SLDP.

Having reviewed key definitions of LD, it is important to explore the significant themes of what has been discussed in relation to the current study. The definitions indicate that reading and writing difficulties are not problems in themselves but they are signs of other complicated issues. This claim is clarified in the summaries of the definitions shown in the table below (Table 1-1); all of these definitions present the phenomenon (i.e. learning difficulties) followed by an examination of the underpinning problems (e.g. phonological processing). The BDA definition explains that development of literacy is affected by problems such as phonological processing, working memory, and automatic development of skills. The US and Saudi definitions highlight that many learning difficulties manifest as a disorder in one of the basic psychological processes. The BPS definition indicates that dyslexia is evident when there are reading or spelling difficulties. Since the BPS provided a working definition, it includes only the common features of LD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Phenomenon</th>
<th>Underpinning problems</th>
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<tr>
<td>BPS</td>
<td>Reading or spelling difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDA</td>
<td>Lack of literacy development</td>
<td>Phonological processing, working memory, and automatic development of skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US &amp; Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Many learning difficulties, e.g. reading, writing, spelling, or arithmetic</td>
<td>Disorder in one of the basic psychological processes</td>
</tr>
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Since the concept of LD raises various questions, it is important to investigate how teachers of SWLD perceive this concept. In other words, when exploring a service provided for SWLD, such as the SLDP, exploration should take into account whether teachers of SWLD are aware of the underpinning problems or whether they just consider any reading and writing difficulties as the core of the LD concept. The importance of their understanding of LD becomes clearer when identifying SWLD. For example, if teachers who are responsible for identifying SWLD think that SWLD are all students who cannot read or write very well, this would indicate that other types of slow readers are likely to be included rather than focusing on students who purely have LD.
2.4 Labelling and categorising LD

Labelling learners with LD is an important issue which is related to the categorisation and terming (giving name) as well. This question is contentious in the area of special educational needs in general and has a variety of pros and cons (Farrell, 2001; Riddck, 2012). For example, labelling assists to:

- treat the student’s needs based on understanding his/her learning differences
- gain more self-understanding
- explain strange or unusual behaviour
- find rich and appropriate information of support from research about these categories (Ibid).

Categorising SWLD facilitates searching, discussing and studying their problems, needs and treatments. By studying that, effective knowledge and findings are expected to emerge resulting in saving time, effort and resources for class tutors in addition to better educational outcomes for SWLD. However, if class tutors attempt to just test different methods, they will probably pay much more effort and achieve unsatisfactory results.

On the other hand, labelling has some disadvantages as the label might:

- lead to more stigmatization as a result of negative views by the public
- lead to inappropriate support in case a child has been labelled inaccurately
- shift the attention away from the responsible factors for the student’s difficulties, such as poor teaching, while the child is blamed
- be disliked by a student (Riddck, 2012).

In addition, labelling lead some professionals to make a general assumption that it is necessary to provide an exclusive intervention for students who are located in a specific category. However, this assumption might not be supported by strong evidence. For example, students with general difficulties in literacy are similarly benefited from teaching technics that are provided for SWLD (Farrell, 2001). Forms of inequalities, which are caused by this label, appear when extra resources are provided for children who are diagnosed as having LD/dyslexia while other poor readers have less access to such resources and support (Elliott & Gibbs, 2008; Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014). Elliott (2005) criticised the categorisation and inequitable support as:

Our current state of knowledge now suggests that all youngsters with reading difficulties should be provided with such structured intervention programs. For this reason, there is little need to split up this population into dyslexic sheep and other poor reading goats (Elliott, 2005, p. 16).
Teachers may have lower expectation of achievement of labelled students which could result in them exerting less effort to support them. Therefore, Elliott and Gibbs (2008) insist on supporting all children with literacy difficulties without labelling, regardless of the existence of dyslexia.

Basically, the impact of the label of 'dyslexic', ‘learning disabled’ or 'SWLD' should be reviewed based on research to find new approaches to benefit the most from its advantages and avoid its drawbacks. For example, Denhart (2008) conducted a study within higher education to investigate barriers faced by students labelled with LD. The results showed that barriers could be overcome through certain ways such as: raising faculty awareness about LD issues. This is an example of how labelling can be dealt with through investigating how good or bad the impacts are as well as exploring solutions to reduce any possible harm.

2.5 Approaches to identification of SWLD

Identification of LD is a significant stage which requires more caution as it might lead to wrongly excluding some students who have LD or including others who do not have it, a problem that has been documented for many students (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003). Sideridis (2007) argued that implications of LD identification can affect not only the academic achievements of the learners but also their social functioning and life success.

As discussed earlier, the subject of defining and identifying LD is still controversial. There is no one ideal or agreed identification method. The debate on identification is becoming wider as there are different tests for identification suggested by research such as the Bangor Dyslexia Test (Miles, 1997), Dyslexia Screening Test (DST) and Dyslexia Early Screening Test (DEST) (Nicolson & Fawcett, 1996), and Response to Intervention (RTI) (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2001). Pumfrey and Reason (1991) emphasised the need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the assessment instruments by its users as many of these instruments have severe shortcomings. For example, Bangor Dyslexia Test has long been referenced in the literature by many knowledgeable authors. However, the technical validity and accuracy of this test has been highly criticised by many scholars and thus necessitates more reviews and development in order to gain more confidence in its results (Pumfrey & Reason, 1991). Rose (2009) reported that blanket screening tests are viewed by some as unreliable; and he suggested that other measures (e.g. measures of phonological processing skill) are much better predictors. In addition, in the RTI model, students’ responsiveness to the intervention can assist in predicting forms of learning difficulties (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014).
Because of this variety of assessment methods, the process of identification is likely to have different outcomes. In a sense, some children might be identified as having LD according to one or more assessment methods while other methods may probably not consider them as having LD. This difference in the results has crucial consequences, such as inappropriate labelling, categorising and special intervention which involves expending resources such as budget, time and effort. Therefore, the selection of an identification approach is not an easy decision, but it needs much attention and careful examination. In addition, it is important to review the purpose of the assessment. Importantly, aiming to enable students to learn more effectively is a crucial target, while labelling is not a goal although it might happen as a consequence (Armstrong & Squires, 2015). Internationally, different ways of identification are practised; however, two types of these are mainly considered in this study, which are the discrepancy model and response to intervention (RTI) approach.

2.5.1 Description and international adoption of the discrepancy and RTI models

Discrepancy is explained by the existence of a clear gap between aptitude and achievement. This model is used in the US and defined in the federal regulations as a significant discrepancy between IQ and achievement tests scores (Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly, & Vaughn, 2004). Many, or arguably the majority of, countries adopted this model and different educators are in favour of its use (Dombrowski, 2015; Kavale et al., 2005). Sideridis (2007) investigated LD identification in eight countries and reported that the discrepancy model is the most widely used approach. Similarly, Saudi Arabia adopted the use of the discrepancy model in its policies and the present study investigates how it is adopted in practice.

RTI is defined widely as “a process in which students are provided quality instruction, their progress is monitored, those who do not respond appropriately are provided additional instruction and their progress is monitored, and those who continue to not respond appropriately are considered for special education services” (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005, p. 486). Many countries adopted the RTI model and the majority of the states in the US selected the continuous assessment framework of the RTI model. In addition, RTI is applied sometimes under different names but with the same concepts being used. For example, the UK adopted three waves of the intervention, while Ireland presented its three tiers of intervention as: support for all, support for some and school support plus. Furthermore, more countries are likely to implement this model including Australia where further support has emerged to adopt it across the country (Armstrong & Squires, 2015). Such movement towards the RTI approach will be discussed in the following section.
2.5.2 Debate and movement

Many educators and countries are still in favour of the discrepancy model. Dombrowski (2015) disagrees with views stating that there is no need to include IQ in the comprehensive evaluation process because ‘IQ is one of the most extensively researched constructs in the field of psychology’ (p. 169). However, this model is not universally accepted and significant research argues against its use. Different criticisms of the discrepancy model have been raised. For example, if the score of cognitive ability is high, it is likely to find discrepancy as a result of the wide scope of variation that occurs between means and individual scores. Conversely, discrepancy will hardly occur in the cases of low scores. In addition, differences in critical processing between SWLD with low IQs and garden-variety poor readers are almost impossible to be detected (Stanovich, 1988, 2005). In addition, the idea that students with LD/dyslexia need different form of literacy interventions from poor readers has been rejected by Elliott (2005) as there is no clear evidence to support such claim. Instead of IQ-discrepancy model, the RTI approach is proposed as an alternative model for identification (Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

The movement from IQ–achievement discrepancy toward RTI can refer to different arguments. In the following, three aspects played important roles in this movement. Firstly, because of depending on discrepancy model, SWLD have frequently been left without identification until students faced threats of failure; at this stage, services start applying the discrepancy process which is a very late intervention (Cottrell, 2014). However, the RTI model is characterised by providing early intervention to overcome school failure for all children who are at risk (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Secondly, in the US, the number of students who are identified as having LD grew from no more than 2% in the period 1976–1977 to over 6% in the period 1999–2000. This significant increase was combined with concerns of probable misidentification and high economic costs, where IQ–achievement discrepancy is considered to be the cause of these implications (Cottrell, 2014; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Thirdly, Fletcher et al. (2004) studied four reports in the US in the years 2001-2002 and found that all four reports indicated that the number of students who were identified as having LD could be decreased with providing better quality reading instruction. With regard to providing better instructions, students’ responses to such instruction or intervention should be predicted but this prediction cannot be gained through applying measures of IQ (Rose, 2009). On the other hand, RTI is effective in building an educational plan for students based on regular monitoring with paying more attention to the environmental classroom (Bradley et al., 2005; Pumfrey & Reason, 1991), particularly, reading difficulties cannot be the result of inappropriate teaching (Rose, 2009).
addition, effective teaching with progress monitoring should take place regardless of whether or not a student has special needs (Cottrell, 2014; Elliott & Gibbs, 2008) This requires emphasising on reading strategies and moving from classifications to process-oriented approach (Pumfrey & Reason, 1991). By using RTI, misidentification of LD cases is expected to be reduced significantly because of the activation of evidence-based instruction within RTI tiers.

2.5.3 Diagnostic assessment of students

Key points of a diagnostic assessment are required for better results. Firstly, the assessment should identify a student’s strengths and weaknesses as well as the underpinning cognitive indicators. Secondly, parents and a multi-professional team should be involved in this assessment. Basically, assessment should be formed in different ways to assist in decision making for subsequent issues such as the extent of need to adopt a psychometric evaluation (Armstrong & Squires, 2015). Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) emphasised avoiding taking decisions about students based on a one-off measure. Rather, different assessments should be applied in different stages. Policy-makers of LD programme (e.g. the SLDP) should consider such points and include them in the assessment framework.

Whether the discrepancy or RTI model is used, the model should be combined with discrete diagnostic assessment. Armstrong and Squires (2015) suggests that the discrepancy model cannot diagnose LD by itself. In the same vein, Reid (2016) indicates that IQ (discrepancy model) is not independently capable to identify LD although it is valuable for some reasons; mainly, it provides an informative profile which will be helpful when combined with other assessments as well as planning for teaching based on understanding learners’ strengths and weaknesses. Elliott and Gibbs (2008) indicated that cognitive tests cannot identify LD/dyslexia; however, some of these tests can be useful in recognising some reading comprehension difficulties via examining related processes such as inferencing, reasoning and logical deduction. For the RTI model, it has been highlighted (Armstrong & Squires, 2015) that there is little evidence to support the effectiveness of RTI in identifying SWLD. Kavale, Holdnack, and Mostert (2006) argue that although RTI can identify differences between learners, particularly in reading difficulties, it is not the case with more complex and multivariate problems of LD. For example, when a learner fails to respond to more intensive intervention, this might be because of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and therefore, applying a discrete diagnosis would surely be more effective with such cases. They suggest that RTI is advantageous to begin the identification with to avoid failing students, but RTI limitations (i.e. in achieving accurate identification) must be taken into account.
Taken together, it seems that the assessment of LD is very complex because its nature as such could be related to multivariate and underpinning problems. Therefore, the assessment needs to consider various factors (e.g. the key points mentioned above) and should not rely on only a single method; rather, it should be comprehensive and include different approaches to achieve better results. Although the discrepancy model and the RTI approach have advantages in the identification of LD, neither of them can provide efficient assessment if applied independently. Therefore, appropriate discrete assessments should be involved in the identification for more efficient results.

2.5.4 Summary and reflection

The discrepancy model is not complicated overall and can be easily adopted in different contexts whether or not there is an effective education system in place, which might encourage many countries to adopt it. However, there are points of criticism raised commonly against this model which led to looking for an alternative model. The points are the probability of misidentification, late identification which leads to a higher risk of failure, and the absence of providing instruction based on evidence. RTI is a promising model which can address the required points. However, it is a reasonably new model and needs a certain level of reinforcement to be widely adopted. For example, development is needed for: a common approach to define non-responsiveness (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006), preparation of all teachers to implement it (Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, & Murphy, 2007), and clearer operational process (Bradley et al., 2005). Intervention approaches, such as RTI, may have a certain process that is easy to explain theoretically, but it is important to reach agreement on operationalisation and to support this step based on scientific research.

2.6 Techniques used in the identification of LD

There are common techniques which are considered widely for the purpose of LD identification, including observation, checklists and interviews. They are sometimes used as a support to collect more information and evidence about doubtful cases. For example, teachers might be uncertain about a student who is suffering from reading and writing difficulties which might be due to temporary circumstances such as his/her condition in the classroom or due to permanent problems such as difficulties in recognising written symbols. Reid, Deponio, and Petch (2005) analysed information about identification of LD from the various educational authorities in Scotland, and the outcomes indicated that many authorities use teachers’ observation, checklists, temporary screening, discussion with parental and home visiting services as methods of identification. It can be seen that these
techniques deal with different contexts, such as the home and the classroom. Reid (2016) argues that the assessment of LD must involve various processes and sources in order to examine various possible factors that may impact on learning. Reid explains LD as being contextual, meaning it could appear clearer in some settings and contexts. For example, observing students in and out of classrooms can reveal not only learning difficulties (e.g. in attention or literacy) but also the offered learning opportunities and learning preferences. All this information assists in both assessment and planning for intervention. Because of that, applying identification techniques should be based on the purposes of the assessment (Reid, 2016). If the goals of the assessment were directed to a specific intervention, in addition to identifying LD, the processes and techniques should be selected based on their capability to serve these goals. These points are considered to be investigated in this study. The LD teachers apply some techniques of identification, and hence, it is interesting to explore on what basis these techniques were chosen and what contexts and influences they involve.

In addition, such techniques could be applied in different stages according to the RTI model. Rose (2009) provided a structured plan called ‘Three levels of identification and assessment of literacy and dyslexic difficulties’. Interestingly, Rose pointed out that this assessment is to identify students’ difficulties in literacy learning and address these difficulties without describing them as LD/dyslexia. The first level of assessment is called ‘monitor progress’. With consideration of possible big differences between students’ level of progress, class teachers observe students’ difficulties in language or literacy. In this observation, teachers must recognise which aspects to look for and try to adjust their teaching to consider particular difficulties and lack of progress. In addition, school records of previous progress must be considered with parents’ and students’ reviews. Second level is ‘skills assessment’. Here, parents are involved in the team who assess their child’s progress. Different assessments are provided such as curriculum-based assessment, standardised tests of reading and spelling, and an examination of phonological and memory processes. In the final level, ‘comprehensive assessment’ is applied. This stage necessitates seeking assistance from specialists such as educational psychologists and speech therapists (Rose, 2009). Techniques, adopted in this gradual assessment such as observation, come under a framework that is consistent with providing suitable support for students. This approach seems to be an effective one because it can save time and effort of applying unnecessary additional assessments. For example, a student might show positive response to amended teaching which is planned according to the teachers’ observation. Also, this could prevent from the danger of inaccurate diagnosis and disadvantages of giving labels.
2.7 Concerns and obstacles in identification

Regardless of the concerns about specific techniques or tests, there are general problems facing the identification process. Sideridis (2007) summarised concerns related to the identification of LD found across eight countries. Two of these concerns are associated with standardised measures of ability as either they are absent or the validity of their identification criteria is doubtful. Also, cultural and linguistic factors play roles that need to be carefully considered in identification, as the criteria might need to be amended according to a student’s background. Finally, much attention is needed for the intervention issues and practices. Although Sideridis stated the last point in a broad manner, it indicates the need for more contribution to be introduced in this area. This thesis is intended to support this contribution by addressing this subject in the Saudi context. Another related concern is the lack of qualified professionals in the diagnosis of LD. In the UK, Pumfrey and Reason (1991) reported the limited availability and expensive cost of the professionals. Armstrong and Squires (2015) explained that because of the lack of educational psychologists in the UK there has recently been greater emphasis on enhancing teachers’ skills in assessing dyslexia appeared.

Armstrong and Squires (2015) highlighted certain important influences in the identification process. Under socio-political effects, they presented conflict issues existing within English schools. These schools are evaluated based on the number of students who achieve the level of attainment that is determined by policy. A school will be considered as high performer if a high number of students achieve the required level. Because students with special needs are taken into account in the evaluation, some schools try to expand the label of special needs to include more students in order to be excused in case only a low number of students are considered achievers or to be seen in a better position in general. Another influence is the age of students. Teachers probably think that students, who are younger than their colleagues but in the same age cohort, are within the scope of special needs.

From the previous discussion, it can be seen that concerns of identification are very much associated with the context of each country. For example, difference might occur due to the presence of various accents or languages within the same class or because of issues related to the educational policy as is the case in schools in England. Therefore, understanding the context is crucial when evaluating interventions or programme of LD, a point that this thesis attempts to address.
2.8 Implementation of LD intervention

New introduced promotion and preventive approaches can be called a programme, an intervention or an innovation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Numerous educational programmes are conducted all over the world for different developmental goals which are assumed to be built on certain values worthy of spending time, effort and finances. The SLDP can be considered as a long-term intervention that has been launched by the Saudi government. Exploring implementation of an intervention and how it can be affected by influencing factors paves the way for future evaluation research. Evaluations of English national strategies highlight the complex issues of implementing a national initiative at a local level (Beard et al., 2005; Earl et al., 2003). A question can be raised about the importance of implementation evaluation because the result of outcome evaluation will be enough to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. The answer is that the outcome evaluation cannot tell us whether the results are affected by this intervention or they might be due to external factors such as information acquisition from other sources. Also, it has been previously highlighted (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Knoche, Sheridan, Edwards, & Osborn, 2010; Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012) that implementation influences outcomes, a claim that is supported by five meta-analyses which consistently suggested this argument. Therefore, it is important to ensure that an intervention has been implemented effectively. A way of ensuring effective implementation is through making ascertaining fidelity of implementation is observed (Dobson & Cook, 1980; Rogers, 1995). The term "fidelity" refers to "the degree to which teachers and other program providers implement programs as intended by the program developers" (Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003, p. 240). In other words, if the programme was not implemented as intended by the providers, it would not have a high degree of fidelity. Knoche et al. (2010) emphasised the significance of carrying out intervention implementation while exerting much effort to ensure its fidelity. Intended outcomes can be seen through the manual of intervention, and to achieve fidelity, teachers need to share the intended outcome. In reality, however, teachers might have different intended outcomes. For instance, policymakers might intend the programme to improve literacy standards of SWLD, while teachers might intend to make sure that SWLD can access the curriculum more broadly. Such differences in aims will probably result in different methods of identification and ways of teaching. Accordingly, if the aim is to improve literacy standards, the emphasis might be on how to build up words and how to recognise letters, a case where brighter students might be recognised in the first instance. However, if the emphasis is expected to be on how to extract meaning from various texts, this case is likely to include different students regardless of how bright they are.
For more depth, this discussion will cover four factors related to fidelity, which are: teacher training, programme characteristics, teacher characteristics and organisational characteristics. These factors have previously been discussed in the study conducted by Dusenbury et al. (2003). The reason for choosing this particular article is that the authors carried out an in-depth review of research literature on fidelity of implementation in last 25 years. Also, their review covers five disciplines including education, mental health and prevention of psychopathology. The authors assessed titles of about 9000 articles to determine which reports are relevant for the review. This is a highly cited article indicating its importance and high consideration by researchers in the field. Therefore, the consideration of this article in this thesis is appropriate, particularly for the subject of implementation. The four factors are discussed as follows.

2.8.1 Teacher training

There is limited research that shows the specific features that support the effectiveness of teacher training although fidelity of implementation is most likely performed by teachers who receive training than those who do not (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Carroll et al. (2007) argued that a low level of training can be adequate if the intervention were simple. Supporting teachers by providing feedback or follow-up training is essential and is associated with better quality implementation (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Dusenbury et al., 2003). In addition, teachers prefer and benefit from provision by trainers at the administrative level with successful experience of implementation methods instead of researchers or experts from outside (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Teachers in the SLDP are holders of a bachelor degree in special education, with learning disabilities as a major. However, academic studies are not adequate to practise the responsibilities of the job. Dusenbury et al. (2003) suggest that teachers should receive sufficient training, follow-up instructions and feedback. In this thesis, I will take this view and related factors into account, and will explore whether there is adequate training in place, and if not, the reasons behind this deficiency.

Another point that should be taken into account is that teachers in the SLDP work with SWLD in the resources room, but do not deal with other students or teach in regular classrooms. In other countries, some teachers acquire more qualifications to support SWLD while they still work in regular classrooms. The difference between these two situations is very significant because teachers in the SLDP focus only on this special area whereas in the other situation, teachers have to deal with many areas and various responsibilities which might result in more a difficult task of implement interventions. Also, teachers who are in schools that adopt the RTI model have responsibilities to
identify the strengths and weaknesses of their students and evaluate their progress and compare this with their peers’. Sideridis (2007) highlighted that diagnosis of LD in Botswana is carried out by teachers; however, these teachers lack important skills and training which hinders successful identification. Although Sideridis provided important information about different countries, more detail should be provided including teachers’ positions and responsibilities in their area of work with LD. For instance, it is not clear whether teachers in Botswana work with only SWLD or with all students. If such data were provided, more outcomes could be deduced and discussed.

### 2.8.2 Programme characteristics

Dusenbury et al. (2003) pointed out two points in this regard; firstly, that there must be explicit statements regarding the main aspects of the programme. The manual helps to ensure high fidelity and it should include the set goals, concepts and clear procedures. Secondly, the complexity of the intervention plays an important role in approaching those who implement it. Requesting simple tasks in the implementation process is likely to show the potential effectiveness of the intervention which will probably encourage implementers and help them to follow the instructions. For the SLDP, the manual is provided; however, to what extent the manual is clear and followed by teachers is questionable.

### 2.8.3 Organisational characteristics

Different factors within organisations have an effect on the quality of implementation. For example, support by the principal and administrators, staff morale, and teachers’ communication skills. Also, some schools have certain cultures that do not match with the intervention which hinders fidelity of implementation. In addition, sufficient time, finances and resources are crucial to overcome barriers (Dusenbury et al., 2003). The SLDP is a national intervention and a permanent programme in many schools, so many factors such as time, money and other resources should be provided. However, no ascertained information is available because no specific literature addresses these issues.

### 2.8.4 Teachers’ characteristics

As a teacher is the cornerstone of intervention delivery, his/her character is crucial for successful implementation. Key related characteristics have been highlighted (Dusenbury et al., 2003; Dusenbury, Brannigan, Hansen, Walsh, & Falco, 2005), such as teachers’ prior experience, confidence, and attitude towards the intervention. The pilot study in this thesis raised issues related to
these points where teachers were lacking conviction about some regulations. More of such issues are expected to be addressed by this study.

In general, teachers in many countries are under pressure (Armstrong & Squires, 2015; Galton & MacBeath, 2008). This pressure might influence identification of LD in different such ways as: providing inadequate quality of teaching, limited application of identification techniques (e.g. observation and monitoring students) and lack of understanding of each student’s situation, strengths and weaknesses.

2.9 Policy-practice gap

Educational policies and regulations are assumed to provide studied plans and strategies that are appropriate and effective for supporting learners; however, practice in reality can be different. Poon-McBrayer (2012) asserts that people with special needs might not receive their rights when there is a gap between policy and practice. Such a gap does exist within educational interventions across nations (Boal & Mankowski, 2014; Bringewatt & Gershoff, 2010; Forman, Olin, Hoagwood, Crowe, & Saka, 2009; Poon-McBrayer, 2012). This gap can exist because of different barriers such as lack of funding, training and other resources. Specifically, one of the biggest obstacles in practice within the LD field is related to the definition of LD (Kavale, Spaulding, & Beam, 2009); the definition of this term is still a contentious subject as has been discussed earlier. The controversial nature of LD presents obstacles to the operationalisation of the existing definitions in the practice of LD identification (Kavale et al., 2009; Poon-McBrayer, 2012). Also, this contentious area may reflect on teachers’ perceptions, as they may identify SWLD according to their understanding and interpretations of this concept. Consequently, students in the SLDP programme may become identified as having or not having LD depending on a teacher’s diagnosis. Therefore, the present study aims to explore teachers’ thoughts and perspectives about this concept.

2.10 Summary

This chapter started with a historical framework of learning disabilities (LD) and explored the many beliefs and practices that are still in effect in various countries including Saudi Arabia. After that, the different existing definitions of the term ‘LD’ were discussed suggesting a lack of agreement on defining LD as the term is shown to be used differently across various countries around the world. In addition, rejecting the concept altogether is an argument presented by some scholars. All these issues led the contentious nature of defining and perceiving LD. Because of the controversy in
conceptualising LD, there is uncertainty around the most accurate LD identification approach and consequently the identification outcomes. The most prominent approaches to address and identify LD are the IQ-achievement discrepancy and RTI models. Although the discrepancy model is practised in more countries, a movement towards RTI is gaining momentum. This is because of the drawbacks of using IQ and the advantages of RTI as an intervention. For example, identification through the discrepancy model is likely to include many students who would be wrongly labelled as SWLD. The RTI model, however, can help avoid the risk of labelling by providing suitable support. Whichever approach is chosen, the identification process should include certain techniques, such as observation, and discrete diagnostic assessment to collect more information and personal details about a student, which will help in making an appropriate decision and a personal teaching plan.

To achieve better implementation of an intervention, four factors are needed to be considered carefully: characteristics of teachers, the programme and the organization, as well as teacher training. Different difficulties might be faced in the implementation process, such as lack of time, money and resources, which might generate a policy-practice gap and subsequent loss of education support rights by eligible students. For LD interventions, one of the biggest difficulties in the implementation stage is the way operationalisation the definitions is carried out in the process of identification.
Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to explain the methodology design and philosophical considerations that were taken into this research. Then, a description of the pilot study will be provided. I will follow that by presenting the methods of sampling and data collection which were used in the main study. Justification of the usage of these methods will also be discussed. Finally, the ethical issues relevant to this research will be addressed.

3.2 Methodological design

There are three steps adopted in data collection in this research. The first one was interviews to determine key issues regarding research aim and questions. Next, focus groups were used to acquire a deeper understanding of the identified issues. Finally, a survey was used to find out how widely these views are held. The following paragraphs provide more details supporting these methods.

Since the literature does not provide a clear picture of what happens practically in the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme SLDP, rather, just its effectiveness, there is a need for a suitable exploration that answers this question. Appropriate data should provide enough clarification of the questions with a considerable range of deepness, broadness and credibility based on teachers’ experiences, ideas and attitudes. These features of data (deepness, broadness and credibility) are very important and influence the selection of methods.

**Deepness:** Since the research questions are related to understanding the phenomenon through teachers’ perspectives, it is necessary to explore their experiences, understanding and feelings about each of the related points raised. In particular, teachers probably come across many cases of Students With Learning Disabilities (SWLD) and receive different training, which can be expected to affect their experiences. In order to understand how teachers construct their perspectives, it is necessary to get these teachers involved in considering their journey in terms of the issue concerned.
Significantly, interviews and focus groups are characterised by their ability to seek in-depth data, although an interview elicits more in-depth responses and takes an interpretive perspective while a focus group allows identification of group norms and discovers various opinions within a population (Dawson, 2007). In-depth information can be gained from an interview through reflecting, prompting and probing techniques. An interview allows the interviewer to reflect on what has been said by the interviewee, which means the interview provides the opportunity to reflect on the quality, adequacy and relationships of the data provided (Patton, 2002). Subsequently, if there is an answer given that is not clear or needs more detail, the interviewer should prompt the interviewee to elaborate on the response or probe the question deeper (Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2014).

Interviews and focus groups are used to answer both research questions of this study although interviews seem to be the most appropriate method for the first question while focus groups seem more suitable for the second question. The first question requires an in-depth explanation about how the SLDP is applied as well as exploration of any related points, while the second question is meant to find out how teachers reflect on the applied methods and whether they agree or disagree with other people within the focus group.

**Broadness:** Since the questions are about teachers’ perspectives, it is necessary to collect data from a number of teachers in such a way that the quantity and diversity of the data reflect what is typical of the study population. If the participants are few, the results might lack major points or might represent odd opinions as popular perspectives. Although interviews can involve many participants, questionnaires are more capable of increasing quantity and diversity (Gray, 2014). For example, it can be difficult in Saudi culture to conduct face-to-face interviews with the opposite gender. This issue requires other means to generate data, such as approaching the participants using a different type of interview (e.g. telephone interview). However, far more suitable are questionnaires as it does not matter whether participants are near or far or whether they are of the same or different genders, they can still be approached for this study without the problems highlighted in relation to interviews.

**Credibility:** It is crucial to make sure that teachers’ perspectives are understood correctly. To achieve this, their perspectives should be perceived through different methods. As mentioned earlier, there are three main methods (interviews, focus groups and questionnaires) that need to be used. Each one of these methods would assist in collecting data in different forms, allowing clarification, confirmation and reflection. In addition, a comparison between quantitative and qualitative data was
adopted. The interpretation of numerical data was used in comparison with themes and patterns that emerged from verbal data.

3.2.1 Data collection in a progressive focus technique

This study adopted three methods (interviews, focus groups and questionnaires) of a progressive focus technique. The first method was the interviews, followed by data analysis in order to write appropriate questions for the focus groups. Similarly, the data collected from the focus groups were analysed in order to write the questionnaire items. In this way, the information was narrowed down and the investigation was more focussed on the most significant points (see Figure 3-1).

![Figure 3-1 Progressive focus technique](image)

3.3 Philosophical considerations

3.3.1 Ontology

Ontologically, this study examined a social phenomenon; the strategies used to identify SWLD in SLDP, by exploring the perspectives of individuals (SWLD tutors) involved in the situation. The tutors’ perceptions of the phenomenon and their interaction with the context and process are the core elements of social constructionist ontology (Buchanan & Bryman, 2009). Consequently, understanding the dynamic interaction between the tutors’ views, process and context is the only way one can achieve an in-depth understanding of this social phenomenon.
3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemologically, this study investigated the perspectives of tutors of SWLD (see Table 3-2). The lack of previous studies in this area in Saudi Arabia necessitated an interpretive research approach as a theoretical perspective which is used to understand and analyse the lived experience and views of people and their interpretation of what they have experienced (Kalof, Dan, & Dietz, 2008). Thus, this approach can help, in this study, to understand the tutors’ views and their interpretation of the SLDP. In other words, the reality of the SLDP is unknown to us (researchers) because it is not our world that we are exploring; rather it is the world of those who are acting there. Therefore, it is logical to allow them to explore it with us and to explain what it means for them in order to gain a better understanding of it (Kalof et al., 2008). This meets the description of exploratory studies according to Gray (2014) who stated that these studies seek to explore and investigate a phenomenon where no clear or sufficient information is known about it. The results of these studies can then be used as a basis for finding out what is important and what is not, and then the phenomenon can be explored further with a survey. Also, Gray highlighted that these studies often include focus groups and interviews with experts in the field. Any attempt to study education within a Saudi Arabian context needs to pay sufficient attention to the ways in which tutors perceive the meaning, substance, content, process and context of LD. An interpretative approach is therefore considered as the most suitable method for understanding the various dimensions of this research problem.

Methodologically, the research used a qualitative paradigm to ensure consistency between ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological approaches. The objectives and research questions aim to gain an understanding of the subject rather than simply quantify or measure aspects related to it. For more clarification about qualitative and quantitative research, it is worthwhile for a comparison between them to be highlighted (also see Table 3-1). Generally, quantitative research deals with numeric data while qualitative research focuses on the data of words; and the type of data is the distinctive feature between these two methods (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Flick (2014) explained that qualitative research aims to investigate specific issues that are more focused than in quantitative research, in a way that provides deep insight and detail into the phenomenon being studied. For data collection and analysis, Punch and Oancea (2014) clarified that it can be collected using a variety of methods such as interviews, observation and documentaries; and it requires a greater degree of critical thinking in its analysis than when undertaking quantitative research. This supports qualitative research to provide far richer details and a deeper understanding of the issues being studied (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Although quantitative research tends to be more generalisable, Ponterotto (2005) explains
that qualitative studies can be generalised through providing thick description and exploring different points of view of the phenomenon (see Section 3.6 for more related discussion).

### Table 3-1 A comparison between quantitative and qualitative paradigm

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<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The nature of the underlying logic</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
<td>(Flick, 2014; Kalof et al., 2008; Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985; Ponterotto, 2005; Punch &amp; Oancea, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The primary content</td>
<td>Numeric data</td>
<td>Words and language</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The focal means</td>
<td>It depends more on large samples and predefined instruments</td>
<td>It pays more attention in examining full context and the interaction with participants,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>To be defined before study is conducted</td>
<td>Propositions evolve throughout the research lifecycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techniques and methods</td>
<td>Mainly applies survey methods and formal methods</td>
<td>Can take many forms such as: action research, case studies and ethnography, whereby the data sources can include: observation, interviews, documents and archival records analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Statistical using analysis software such as the SPSS programmes</td>
<td>Interpretive and descriptive using analysis and data management software such the NVivo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3.3 Axiology

As in constructivism that researchers’ experience cannot be eliminated in research, their values could have influences on it (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005). There are many factors that are purported to have an influence on the construction of values; however, there are three factors that seem to be closer and more influential; firstly, my engagement in the area of LD at undergraduate level including field practice; secondly, the area of LD and special needs became closer to me after assigning me as a lecturer in this field; thirdly, I have friends who are teachers of SWLD which allowed me to chat with them about their work; finally, reading national and international literature where there are different methods to address SWLD. Accordingly, my axiology, which has been affected by these factors, had great impact on the research, starting from the selection of the subject to the method of collecting and interpreting data. Particularly, based on my axiology, two elements have been considered in this research. Firstly, my values that SWLD must be treated in a way that helps to overcome their difficulties. This might be done in different ways, but what is very important is that these ways should address all SWLD. Secondly, teachers who address SWLD have a significant responsibility which should
be dealt with in the correct way. As teachers do not hold all responsibility, the administration, which is in charge of planning to assist SWLD, should examine their planning properly in order to not become unfair to teachers or SWLD.

3.4 Theoretical framework

In order to understand how the SLDP is constructed and adopted, four important factors should be considered. Firstly, policy of the SLDP seems to be affected by international views of LD. It is important while investigating the programme to explore and evaluate how the SLDP is affected by these views. Secondly, some differences between policies and practitioners of the SLDP have been found in the pilot study (see Section 3.7). This shows that policies do not reflect what is being practised in real life. In addition, a lack of detail has been found while revising these policies. This leads to RQ2. Thirdly, some external factors (i.e. those which may be caused, for instance, by commands of school administrations as a result of a lack of consideration of the SLDP) may affect aspects such as performance. Finally, beliefs and thoughts of those who play a role in the SLDP are important, particularly those of teachers of SWLD because they are the main responsible practitioners of the SLDP. This leads to RQ1. In addition to the importance of exploring these views and beliefs, it is very important to consider how they are built up, how similar or different they are, and what influences can affect them.

It is clear that investigating every one of the above four factors is complicated. The investigation would probably be more complicated when considering the SLDP as a whole, as these factors interact with each other. This complexity causes an inability to predict interactions, views and processes in the SLDP, which necessitates analysing the phenomenon of the SLDP in order to approach it properly (see Table 3-2). An underlying model (see Figure 3-2) has been drawn to explain what the problem that the study is intended to answer is, showing influences of those four factors on the SLDP. In particular, this model presents the reason for the expected gap between practice and policy. More discussion about the model and how it has been developed in the study is addressed in Chapter 5.
Table 3-2 Theoretical framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors impact on SLDP</th>
<th>Reflect on literature and the pilot study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Internationally, various definitions of LD</td>
<td>2- Nationally, unknown compatibility between policy and practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

inability to predict interaction, views and process in the SLDP

necessitates to analyse the phenomenon in order to approach it properly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontologically</th>
<th>- Social phenomenon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epistemologically</td>
<td>Constructionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical perspectives</td>
<td>Interpretivism: symbolic interactionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Interpretive approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Interview / focus group / questionnaires</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3-2 Underlying model

Policy

Recommended identification process

Validity & utility

Modification

2- Policy ← Gap → Practice

Certain pupils involved in LD programme. Why? Which?

1- International views of LD

3- Internal factors e.g. teachers' beliefs and views

4- External factors e.g. Culture, family and school

Influence

Ontologically - Social phenomenon

Epistemologically Constructionism

Theoretical perspectives Interpretivism: symbolic interactionism

Methodology Interpretive approach

Methods Interview / focus group / questionnaires
3.5 Role of the researcher

As this research is qualitative, it is important to discuss my role as a researcher; this is particularly important because, as Leckie (2008) argues, this point is largely controversial across epistemology acceptance. This is because the roles of researchers might have an effect on participants’ thoughts. Leckie (2008) examined different situations which commonly occur in roles of researchers. Among these situations, there are three aspects which meet my role in this research which are discussed in the following points:

1- Friendship: I did my undergraduate course at King Faisal University where my major was in LD. Some of the participants in this research had studied the same course at the same time as me. This situation, therefore, created a relation of friendship between us. The concern with this relation is how a friend would view the research and how the change in his/her situation (from friend to researcher) is considered. However, I think these concerns might play a role if the friendship was very strong. In my situation, our friendship was weaker after graduation and my leaving Saudi Arabia to study English, a Master’s course and subsequently my PhD course. Fortunately, our relations did not cease; however, there was sense of appreciation and affection. This mutual affection can make the participants more willing to help and cooperate.

2- Professional aspect: The last term of my undergraduate programme was a practical course which provided me with some experience in this field. Also, I am studying a PhD course at a university of high reputation. It is possible that some participants feel that I have substantial knowledge about the subject of discussion, which might cause discouragement to explain everything with sufficient detail as they may be under the impression that I already know those aspects. I tried to eliminate this feeling by clearly showing that my experience is very limited and that what is important in this study is the participants’ perceptions. Having said that, several teachers value their own experience which they wish to share.

3- Power: After graduation, I have been assigned the role of a teacher at King Faisal University and specifically in the Special Education Department. This might lead some participants to think that I would pass their accounts to those who are in positions of power under the impression that I have a working relationship with administration. Therefore, I tried to build a bridge of trust with the participants. This was accomplished through demonstrating my empathy, honesty, and openness towards them. I assured the participants that confidentiality, anonymity and other considerations that have been explained in Section 3.9 on ethics would be maintained.
3.6 Trustworthiness criteria

To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, procedures developed by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were employed. These aforementioned authors argue that “the conventional criteria for trustworthiness are internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity” (pp. 218-219). In qualitative research, these criteria equate to research credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, respectively. The following design (Figure 3-3) shows these criteria, which have been operationalised for use in this research using different techniques and strategies proposed by scholars in literature relating to methodology.

**Creditability:** the accuracy and validity of the research

*In this research:*
- Applying various methods in data collection
- within interviews: reframing and expansion of questions on different occasions (Krefting, 1991)
- Enhancing my investigative skills through: literature review, attending qualitative research methods, piloting the data collection methods (Miles & Huberman, 1984)

**Confirmability:** presenting participants’ views objectively

*In this research:*
- The use of multiple data-sources (Krefting, 1991)
- I admitted my beliefs and interests (Shenton, 2004)
- I provided in-depth methodological description to allow integrity of this study’s results to be scrutinised (*ibid*)

**Dependability:** The reliability of the study by cultivating its consistency

*In this research:*
- Dense description of research methods (Krefting, 1991)
- the use of “overlapping methods” (Shenton, 2004)
- ‘expert’s examination’: I regularly discuss my research plan and implementation with my supervisor (Krefting, 1991)

**Transferability:** maximising the applicability of the findings to fit other contexts

*In this research:*
Offering thick descriptions of the study context (Ponterotto, 2005)

---

**Figure 3-3 Trustworthiness criteria and operationalisation in this research**
3.7 Pilot study

Pilot studies have key advantages that can assist in developing research. For example, pilot studies identify issues or questions of interest (Gray, 2014). Also, feasibility of data collection methods and techniques can be examined using pilot studies (Robson, 2011). The data collection in my pilot study was conducted in Saudi Arabia from the 10th of July to the 15th of August 2014. The target participants were from both genders. By undertaking this pilot study, I intended to achieve the following:

- To focus the research questions and hypotheses.
- To identify related and interesting issues.
- To make sure that the planned data collection methods are suitable and can collect the needed data.
- To strengthen my skills by practising the role of interviewer, moderator and a questionnaire developer.
- To test approaches to making the questionnaire clear with a reasonable length, and to practise formulating questionnaire items including the selection of suitable words and reducing unneeded questions.
- To look for the best technique to conduct data collection.
- To check the timing of interviews and focus groups.
- To know and contact some teachers and workers in this area of practice in order to facilitate the recruitment for the main study and take suggestions if needed.

3.7.1 Interviews and focus groups

3.7.1.1 Data collection from male teachers

I thought that data collection from male teachers would be easier in this pilot study. Yet, I found out that female teachers have more commitment than their male counterparts. Also, the time of data collection seemed to hinder finding teachers as it was in the summer holidays. I could conduct an interview as well as a focus group with three teachers, although I tried to recruit more teachers. In that, I contacted the teachers for a meeting but many of them apologized, and the meeting was therefore cancelled. Again, a plan for another meeting was set up but it had to be cancelled as well. Another issue that concerned me was while conducting the focus group in a friendly atmosphere of a quiet corner in a café; sometimes one or two of the teachers present would text others on their mobile
phones while others were speaking. This encouraged me to plan to conduct the focus groups for the main study in more formal environment of a school and to advise participants to switch off their mobiles or keep them in silent mode.

3.7.1.2 Data collection from female teachers  

Data collection from female teachers has an interesting story. Since it can be uncomfortable for some women in Saudi culture to conduct a face-to-face interview with a man, I tried to find an alternative way to conduct interviews and focus groups with female teachers that would be culturally sensitive to the local customs. Fortunately, I had a female relative (she would be called ‘the intermediary’ in this thesis) who works in the same area. She displayed willingness to help to communicate with other female teachers. Particularly, they have a social network to communicate with each other which helped her to send an invitation for all LD female teachers to participate in the study.

I presented different choices including: voice conversations on the telephone or via Skype, or holding the interviews with the help of the intermediary. However, the teachers were not comfortable with the first choice and the intermediary was not keen on the second one. Instead, they suggested conducting the interviews by writing through mediums such as WhatsApp (a common application used on smartphones and communication devices for chatting via text) or Skype. In particular, they suggested that they could answer questions more freely by writing. This was because they could feel reserved and shy in the case of verbal discussion which could hinder them from providing complete and open answers or discourage them from being engaged in the focus group discussions. For me, having discussions by writing was not preferred; however, I realised that this is not the case with female teachers. They highlighted the fact that they spend much more time on WhatsApp and that they enjoy using it. Eventually, five female teachers accepted to participate in a focus group and two female teachers in the interviews.

I presented the instructions highlighting the nature of the focus group at the beginning. These included the right of participants to agree or disagree with any of my presented points. The discussion in the focus group went well in general. However, there were some pros and cons of the usage of WhatsApp which will be presented next. Being aware of these pros and cons helped me to improve the usage of Whatsapp for the main study in that it assisted to employ the advantages and minimise the disadvantages as much as possible.
3.7.2 The usage of WhatsApp in data collection

3.7.2.1 Pros and cons of using WhatsApp in the pilot study

There were several advantages to using WhatsApp. Firstly, it made it easier to find time for a meeting because it could be used anywhere the participants were. Secondly, all data collected were ready for use and analysis because the discussion was already transcribed and could be sent as a file. Thirdly, with the participants’ permission, where clarification or elaboration was needed, I was able to go back to them, even one or two days after the meeting, to ask them quick questions and in turn receive their answers easily.

However, two drawbacks existed in relation to this technique. Firstly, there may have been some loss of meaning that is usually accessible to the researcher which is the observation of body language. Secondly, the interviewees and the interviewer both had to wait for each other to finish writing, which might have caused some boredom or loss of focus on the interviewee’s part. Nevertheless, I took advantage of the time available and when interviewees were writing to read their previous comments and plan my next step. In addition to this, I tried to avoid the problem of delay by preparing all the main questions that were written beforehand and then pasted them promptly. Only short questions, such as ‘why’, ‘how’, ‘could you explain more’, etc., had to be written during the discussion, which did not take too much time.

Although focus groups through WhatsApp have the same previous advantages of the interviews, I found them more challenging because of the following problems. It was more difficult to control the discussion as a result of the participants’ unknown conditions and whether or not they were following the discussion. In addition, participants might have been distracted by outside stimuli, especially if they were sitting close to their family. These thoughts drew my attention to think about how to minimise the effect of these drawbacks. Therefore, I emphasised to the participants at beginning of the focus group the following points to the participants. I shared with them a concern about these possibilities, and because of that, they were asked to find a quiet place and were asked to be considerate of the meeting time. Also, during the discussion, I tried to ask about their agreement/disagreement with the on-going discussion to ensure full engagement.

Generally, the discussion (interviews and focus groups) conducted in this way of written conversation (via WhatsApp) took more time than face-to-face discussions as there was more time spent on typing. This extra time did not seem to be an inconvenience for participants. This may be
because their situation, such as being in a home environment, helped to reduce anxiety which might otherwise be present when meeting in official places.

3.7.2.2 Literature on the usage of WhatsApp

After conducting the pilot study analysis, I wrote a report on the process including my findings on the advantages and disadvantages of using WhatsApp in interviews. Later, I searched for literature on conducting interviews via instant messages (IM). This helped me find literature that used tools such as Skype chat and MSN Messenger. Interestingly, many of the pros and cons which have been identified in my report were found in the literature. For example, it was reported that IM assists in providing privacy, self-transcription and comfort in the interview environment (Kazmer & Xie, 2008; Pearce, Thøgersen-Ntoumani, & Duda, 2013). However, IM can lack the meaning that can be contributed by body language (Pearce et al., 2013).

As this research used IM because of sensitive customs, it is guided by an important study that was conducted by Pearce et al. (2013) who used IM for a sensitive subject. The subject was surgical or natural menopause, where the participants were women who had undergone this process. Thirteen participants preferred the IM technique, two participants preferred face-to-face or webcam interviews, and two participants had no preference of any of the techniques. This suggests that participants may be more open to discuss the views using this technique, especially with sensitive matters, which also makes participants more likely to speak more freely and disclose more information.

Different studies (James & Busher, 2006; Kazmer & Xie, 2008; Opdenakker, 2006) showed that IM provides solutions for such discontinuous communication that exists in other online interview techniques such as email interviews and online discussion boards. In terms of using WhatsApp, this application was not found to have been used explicitly in interviews in the literature. However, it is now one of the most popular IM application on the market (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). As it is newer than MSN Messenger and Skype, I expect more researchers to start using it soon. For more convenience for the participants, a researcher can provide them with options between face-to-face or IM interviews, and if they choose IM, they should be provided with options of what IM applications they are most familiar with.

I was unable to find a study that used IM in focus groups. From experience, focus groups seem to work best when the participants are keen to attend, interact and participate. Using IM with focus groups would not work well if there were participants who did not interact well because the distance
created by IM can make the interaction weaker. Although this problem might partly be solved by encouraging those who are not interacting to engage in the discussion, it is difficult to deal with this problem if the participants have unsatisfactory attendance. In addition to this, it seems that using IM may be a way to deal with many obstacles in conducting interviews and focus groups e.g. sensitive customs or subjects, distance, and organising a meeting with people who have little free time. The importance of IM needs to be considered as a technique in research methodology.

3.7.3 The questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed in English after reviewing manuals of the Ministry of Education and conducting an interview with a teacher. Following this, this questionnaire was presented to my supervisor who provided valuable feedback and advised me to be very clear in writing the questionnaire in Arabic for the benefit of the participants. Consequently, I translated the questionnaire to Arabic. A teacher of LD was asked to provide comments on aspects of the questionnaire such as the language, adequacy of the questions and clarity of the questionnaire. Subsequently, I revised the questionnaire many times during data collection based on the teachers’ comments. Finally, I translated the questionnaire back into English and presented it to bilingual final year PhD students whose subject of study was English to provide more feedback. Table 3-3 includes some examples of sentence modifications.

Table 3-3 Examples of sentence modifications in the constructed questionnaire based on feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First version of the questionnaire</th>
<th>Modified version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring of failed students’ list</td>
<td>Reviewing records for students’ re-taking a course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s file</td>
<td>Student’s portfolios (which include students’ health condition along with their previous academic achievements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>Running a formal test for developmental skills <em>i.e. this item was added because interviewees suggested its importance</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s file is used for examining possible deprivation that he/she might have</td>
<td>Students’ files are used for examining possible environmental deprivation that students might confront.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school counsellor has enough information about learning disabilities</td>
<td><em>i.e. this is one of many other items that were deleted because participants suggested that the questionnaire is long. So, I looked for ways to summarise the questionnaire including deleting items where their meaning can be implied in other items</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I then sent the questionnaires to a group of male and female teachers and received five emails from female and two from male teachers with completed answers and some suggestions. Table 3-4 summarises the processes of data collection for the pilot study.
### Table 3-4 Summary of data collection in the pilot study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
<td>teacher A</td>
<td>45 m</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>40 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teacher B</td>
<td>About 30 m</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus group</strong></td>
<td>5 teachers</td>
<td>60 m</td>
<td>3 teachers</td>
<td>60 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questionnaires</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.4 Summary of the pilot study impact

The methods of this research were developed before starting the pilot. The pilot study helped to develop the central framework for the main study. Different changes and modifications came as a result of conducting the pilot study which assisted to develop this research. These are listed as follows.

- Teachers strongly supported the aim of this study and repeatedly highlighted that there are many questions that need to be studied in the matter of identification of LD (e.g. the accuracy of identification, the influential by administrations and the role of teacher training). This support encouraged me to keep going on with this study.

- Different issues and information were identified in the pilot study which led me to think, reflect, and develop my underlying model (the gap between policy and practice).

- I found the progressive technique, including the three methods discussed above, suitable to collect needed data.

- I think that I became more skilled in using the three methods because of the pilot. I listened to my interviews and focused on what I should or should not have said. I was able to redesign the questionnaire, learned about how to write statements as clear as possible, and what I should include or avoid in these statements. This learning experience came from the piloting exercise and studying literature on questionnaire rules and principles (Bradburn, Sudman, & Wansink, 2004; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982).

- A suitable technique, IM, was selected to conduct interviews and focus groups with female teachers and this technique was implemented successfully.

- I found that the usage of IM requires more discussion time. So, I planned to allow longer time for such discussion in the main study.

- Many teachers showed willingness to help in the main study whether in participation or in recruitment.
3.8  Main study

3.8.1  Overview of the fieldwork

In general, there were no major obstacles identified in the fieldwork. The proposed timeframe of the study included one additional month to ensure the study is completed. However, four months were enough to finish data collection. This was because participants were willing to participate and attend the arranged appointments which did not require much time. Also, I started working on the analysis of collected data from the start of conducting the interviews up to two weeks after data collection. After this period of analysis and repeated revisions of the data collection process and how to match it to the aims of the study and the underlying model, the results were satisfactory and assisted to move to the next step. The period between conducting focus groups and distributing questionnaires was very crucial (for constructing and designing the questionnaire based on the analysis of the collected data) and took more than one month. The construction of the questionnaire was done during data analysis where I worked on the two tasks together sometimes. More details about the questionnaire construction will be provided below (see Section 3.8.9). As I conducted a pilot study, certain changes were made to adapt the methods to Saudi culture, teachers’ suggestions and my observations.

3.8.2  The study population and sampling

3.8.2.1  Population

A lack of middle schools applying the SLDP hindered finding enough teachers to provide typical perspectives on the phenomenon. Also, the SLDP has not yet been applied in high schools. Therefore, the study considered teachers in primary schools only. The SLDP is conducted in primary schools in the majority of Saudi cities. However, the number of schools conducting the programme in each city is different. The effort needed to find teachers’ perspectives from all Saudi cities would be too much compared with the capacity and scope of the study. Thus, I chose one city that has certain criteria making it capable of providing a typical view of the SLDP as a whole. The city is reasonably big and has been applying the SLDP for a long time to ensure that the SLDP has spread considerably. Also, it is convenient for me as it facilitates data collection. Accordingly, selected the city of Alahsa, a city in the east of Saudi Arabia where the SLDP started in 1998, which is two years after its initial launch in the kingdom. According to the Learning Disabilities Centre of Alahsa (Learning Disabilities Centre of Alahsa, 2012) there are 60 boys’ primary schools running the SLDP. Unfortunately, the number of girls’ schools running it is not known. However, this number is
anticipated to be lower than that of the boys’ schools by about 32%. I have based this estimation on calculating the percentage difference between boys’ and girls’ schools that apply the SLDP (728 and 498 respectively) in all of Saudi Arabia (Alhabib, 2006). This percentage was therefore used to calculate the number of girls’ schools in Alahsa applying the SLDP; the number would roughly be 40 schools. So, the number of boys’ and girls’ schools in Alahsa that apply SLDP is expected to be nearly one hundred.

The study population includes all teachers working in the SLDP of boys’ and girls' schools in Alahsa. In Saudi Arabia, boys’ and girls’ schools are separated; and in that, male teachers teach only boys while female teachers teach only girls. This separation might have an effect on teachers’ practice. As this study population includes various experiences and areas in Alahsa, experiences of male and female teachers are intended to be investigated as well.

3.8.2.2 Sampling plan

Sampling for the study was purposeful. This type of sampling is much related to qualitative research. Russell and Gregory (2003, p. 36) stated that “most qualitative studies use purposeful (or purposive) sampling, a conscious selection of a small number of data sources that meet particular criteria”. The participants were selected to be teachers of LD. In addition, the use of random selection probably would not be suitable for this study. This is because two reasons. Firstly, there is a need to select participants for a purpose; especially, this study involves three methods, and each one of them should include participants based on its aims. Interviews’ participants should provide rich information and details about the SLDP, so participants ‘who have long experience and a good level of practice’ are expected to provide such data. Focus groups and questionnaire participants should be a mix of people from rural and urban areas with different years of experience to gain wider views. Secondly, the study population (about 100 teachers) provides a small range of sampling options in comparison to the required sample (about 50 participants). This makes random sampling difficult to be adopted especially when considering the necessity of acceptance of participation after random selection.

Purposeful sampling includes many techniques. Patton (2002) explained sampling and discussed the strategies of both random probability sampling and purposeful sampling which has been summarised by (Patton, 2002). A number of these techniques could be used in one study. Teddlie and Yu (2007, p. 83) highlighted that ‘many QUAL studies reported in the literature utilize more than one purposive sampling technique due to the complexities of the issues being examined’. This study considered different sampling techniques within the purposeful type. Intensity, snowball, opportunistic, confirm
or disconfirm cases, and homogeneous techniques can be seen in this sampling process from different angles. The use of intense cases was for interviews when looking for interviewing information-rich cases which represent teachers with more experience in teaching LD. The snowball technique was used while distributing questionnaires as participants were asked to distribute the questionnaire to their colleagues. Opportunistic sampling was used during data collection as I had to respond to unexpected participants, such as when I took the opportunity of interviewing female teachers who accepted to participate (more detail below). For focus groups, the sample could be considered as a homogeneous one because all teachers were from the same gender and working in the same field and within the same programme. Focus groups as a method is built typically on homogeneous groups to assist participants to share similar experiences about issues related to all of them (Patton, 2002). However, while participants should share similar experiences in the main aspects, I aimed to find participants who are different in other characteristics (e.g. the number of years in service and teaching in rural or urban areas) in order to acquire wider views. In addition, confirming and disconfirming cases can be seen in the progressive focus technique as the second and third methods which help to confirm or disconfirm some patterns found from previous methods. For example, the sample of focus groups might confirm or disconfirm some findings from interviews.

Eight interviews, 4-6 focus groups and 20-30 questionnaires were initially planned to be undertaken. This number of participants seemed to be enough to provide a sufficient amount of data for the purpose of each method and to provide a good range of views. However, if a smaller sample size is used, it is less likely to provide depth or a wide range of views. Also, due to the small population and lack of time and resources (there being only one researcher), undertaking more interviews and focus groups sessions is expected to be difficult and to hinder progress. Furthermore, the number of participants from each gender was intended to be almost the same in each method. However, because there was easier access to male teachers than female ones, female teachers were more likely to be under-represented.

3.8.2.3 Sampling procedures in the fieldwork

(a) Sampling for interviews

I contacted two of teachers’ supervisors and explained the research idea, pointing out that consent had been obtained from the Ministry of Education. Following this, the supervisors were asked to nominate teachers whose experience was more than three years. This condition was set to assist in gaining a greater understanding of the practices, modifications and differences that have occurred
throughout this period. There was a discussion about teachers’ level of practice; both the supervisors and I agreed that teachers who were thought to have a low level of practice should not be nominated. This was because the main aim of the interviews was to gain fundamental details about the programme; such teachers therefore would not be expected to help as much as others who had a better level of practice. I received several names and contacted them, managing to recruit four teachers; these were recruited for the interviews. I was at first concerned about this way of nominating the sample as it may be biased. However, I found out from interviewing these nominated participants that they provided both positive and negative views. Also, their statements were consistent with other participants’ and information acquired using other methods of data collection.

For female teachers, the way of sampling and conducting interviews was different. I tried in the pilot study (see Section 3.7.1) to look for another way (instead of face to face) to conduct the interviews and the focus group with the female teachers. Fortunately, my female relative (the intermediary), who works in the same field, showed willingness to be an assistant and helped by contacting her colleagues. A decision was made, based on the preferences of the teachers and agreed by me, to use WhatsApp to conduct all interviews and focus groups. In particular, this way was more comfortable for the participants, and I had no objection to it. Additionally, the aims of the interviews and focus groups could be achieved using this method. Ultimately, the task was carried out successfully in both the pilot and the main study. For recruitment, I asked the intermediary to explain to the teachers through their network (the group of LD teachers on WhatsApp) the research aim and questions and examples of questions which can be asked in the interviews in order to obtain their initial informed acceptance. Following this, an electronic copy of the consent form has been sent to them and they emailed me back their consent. I repeated this information (about my research aim and questions) just prior to conducting the interviews. Amongst those who were accepted, three teachers who had more experience were chosen to participate in the interviews while others were listed in the focus groups.

(b) Sampling for focus groups

Two focus groups with female teachers and four with male teachers were conducted. When I contacted the teachers’ supervisors (two), they suggested for the focus groups that there will be a plan in a specific week which is called ‘mutual visits’. Teachers are divided into several groups where each group is required to visit one school per day, and to learn from each other’s experiences by looking at the different resources in the rooms and doing some activities. I welcomed this idea, so one of the teachers’ supervisors sent me a list of these groups including an administrator for each
group (a teacher). I found out that each group included six or seven teachers which, fortunately, fitted with my proposed plan. The groups were almost the same in terms of the diversity of experiences such as the number of years of service and teaching in rural or urban areas. It seemed that the way of organising teachers in this level of diversity without my intervention empowers this sampling to be unbiased. I aimed for three focus groups as these groups were similar; I looked for contact numbers of group administrators, then contacted several ones and, finally, could organise three meetings with these groups. One of these groups was interrupted (see Section 3.8.7.1) in the middle, so, I arranged another focus group with four male teachers which was conducted in one of their schools. A similar sampling and recruitment method to the one used for arranging female interviews was followed for their focus groups; the intermediary contacted them and arranged two focus groups.

(c) The questionnaire

Because I met different teachers in the pilot exercise and in the main study, I was still in touch with many of these participants. This relation assisted in contacting some teachers (about seven) and asking for help in distributing the questionnaires. I provided each one of them with several copies to distribute to other teachers around them to ensure they receive at least 25 copies back. I took into account selecting teachers from both rural and urban areas and asked them to distribute questionnaires in their areas. For female teachers, the intermediary sent them an invitation through the network to participate in the survey. Then, questionnaires were emailed to those who accepted.

I received 45 questionnaires from the participants, which is more than what I initially expected. There were 16 (male and female) teachers who participated in both the questionnaire survey and either interviews or focus groups. However, no teachers participated in both interviews and focus groups. I had no objection to let some teachers participate in both of these; however, this did not happen because focus groups did not include anyone of the interviewees.

3.8.3 Common techniques for conducting interviews and focus groups

3.8.3.1 Focusing on the study aim

While collecting data, I kept in mind the aim of the study in order to go in-depth and not be misled by the high amount of generated information. One way of focussing on the aim was to review the study aim and questions repeatedly by printing them out and putting them in visible places in the main folder. Also, there were specific times when I was keen on looking at the aims such as just before the interviews, when editing or writing questions to ask participants, and in the preliminary analysis.
3.8.3.2 Procedures

At the beginning of each interview and focus group, I welcomed the participants and thanked them for offering their time and their willingness to help. Also, I introduced myself and my research, including the research aim and questions. Following this, the participants were asked to provide their consent and signature. Furthermore, I obtained their consent for audio recording. For confidentiality, I stressed that the data will be secured and anonymous, and also that the information will be destroyed after completion of the assignment. This helped to maintain the ethical considerations of the study and to allow participants to talk more freely. At the end of each discussion, I thanked the participants again for their help.

3.8.3.3 Managing the discussion

In both methods, I sometimes repeated what the participants said in order to make sure that I had understood their statements clearly. For each meeting, I took some notes in addition to the audio recording in order to accurately record their words, as well as to ensure the information was maintained in case something happens to the audio recording, such as it being deleted by mistake. I, as the interviewer, tried not to interrupt the interviewees while they were speaking in order to allow them to develop their thoughts and ideas, unless they digressed away from the subject. Questions such as 'why', 'how come' or 'what do you mean by…?' were often asked after an interviewee finished a particular point in order to gain an in-depth understanding through reflecting, prompting and probing techniques. For timing, I highlighted (in the invitation and again at the beginning of the meetings) to participants that the discussion should last between 45 and 60 minutes. However, for WhatsApp discussions, meetings were expected last between 60 and 75 minutes. All meetings were largely within these ranges. However, some meetings went a slightly longer because the participants continued to enthusiastically discuss certain issues, so I did not stop them. Also, some meetings had interruptions which led to stop the meeting (see Section 3.8.7).

3.8.4 Preparing to engage in the fieldwork

3.8.4.1 Ethics

The first step planned to be carried out at the beginning of the fieldwork was to ensure that it was ethically approved. I gained ethical clearance from the University of Manchester (See Appendix 1). Also, a permission letter regarding data collection was received from the Saudi Ministry of Education, which is sometimes requested by teachers when inviting them to participate in research.
3.8.4.2 Documents and technical issues

There were two types of documents used to facilitate fieldwork procedures. Firstly, documents that might be needed at any time including:

- formal documents such as instruction leaflets for teachers, as I may need to revise these documents at any time or for any session,
- a developable timeline to facilitate writing what had been done, what had not, and what could be changed, added or deleted during the fieldwork,
- and the study aim and questions, as has been explained earlier (see Section 3.8.3.1).

Secondly, I used some documents to arrange or check certain requirements before each session, mainly questions which needed to be ready and written earlier. Furthermore, two audio recorders and spare batteries were prepared.

3.8.5 Interviews procedures and analysis

3.8.5.1 Procedures

I aimed by conducting interviews to understand the study questions in depth. The questions, which were asked in the interviews, were derived mainly from the study aims and questions, theoretical framework and experience in the pilot study. Also, I read the SLDP regulations and literature to understand policies and then reflect on the interviewees’ answers in terms of their practice. The main interviews questions are listed in Appendix 3. I arranged for the location of the meetings to be with the participants in their school. All interviews were conducted in the resources room as it was free of inconvenience and other people. Other arrangements are explained in the Section 3.8.3.

Three interviews with female teachers were carried out. Regarding setting the meeting time, the teachers were given the choice to specify the appointment time. Notably, the evening was chosen as the best time for the appointment to conduct the interviews. I prepared for each interview by arranging a quiet room 20 minutes before the beginning of the meeting, making sure that the iPad to be used was fully charged and that the Wi-Fi signal was working, along with making sure other physical or digital documents were present. Some changes were made to the meeting times due to the requirements of the teachers. For example, one of them was not present at the beginning of a meeting which led me to pay more attention to my iPad until the teacher responded. Another issue that should be highlighted is that while an interview was running, one teacher asked for the session to be stopped and continued later for special reasons. Although it may seem that this was a disturbance, it was
found to actually have some advantages, as I had a greater chance to revise the comments received. Also, I noticed that when the teacher came back she showed more motivation to share her experience and information, leading to an extension of the duration of the meeting (see Table 3-5).

**Table 3-5 Duration of teachers’ interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Female Duration</th>
<th>Male Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interview 5</td>
<td>~ 90 mins</td>
<td>Teacher interview 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interview 6</td>
<td>~ 75 mins</td>
<td>Teacher interview 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher interview 7</td>
<td>~ 60 mins</td>
<td>Teacher interview 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher interview 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8.5.2 Analysis

As the data gathered was in Arabic, all data analysis was also in Arabic in order to facilitate understanding of the teachers’ wording. The aim of the interview analysis (which took place before conducting the focus groups) was to explore the issues that needed to be investigated in more depth, based on the study aim, as it was expected that there would be some issues that needed more examination. Some may have needed confirmation, which could be gained through exploring perceptions.

Careful analysis using the thematic method followed data collection. The thematic method was used for analysing the interviews (before the focus groups). However, less time was spent on this analysis (i.e. during the fieldwork) compared to the main analysis (i.e. analysis of all data after completing the fieldwork data). The time taken for each stage of the analysis was based on the aims and the results expected. Furthermore, there was not enough time for the researcher to write up all of the interviews and use a profound and comprehensive thematic method for interview analysis. The analysis took place by carefully listening - more than once - to the recordings, pausing if required and taking notes in order to observe all of the perceptions and ideas that might be needed for the analysis.

Following this, initial codes were generated and I tried to identify themes and sub-themes. This was done by drawing using a pen and paper in an attempt to find how the codes and themes were connected. This helped to identify which parts were clear and which were missing or ambiguous. This also helped to examine how the themes and codes could answer the questions required at this stage and what questions appeared and needed to be further investigated in the focus groups. In the following paragraph, some examples are given to explain this discussion.
Two main themes emerged from the analysis during the fieldwork, namely identifying SWLD and involving SWLD in the programme. I discovered that not all students identified as SWLD would be registered in the programme. Rather, there are some priorities and conditions that make it more likely for a student to receive this service. Under each theme there were various codes and points. Table 3-6 and Table 3-7 below present examples of two codes of each theme.

Table 3-6 Examples of codes from the first theme that emerged from the interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Obstacle factors</th>
<th>Pressure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>Diagnostic resources</td>
<td>Lack of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- Teachers are qualified to teach, not to diagnose</td>
<td>1- Problems with the diagnostic test</td>
<td>The effects: Identification accuracy Ignoring some identification strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Absence of a multidisciplinary team</td>
<td>2- Absence of a psychological test in developmental skills and IQ tests a. Tests are not required b. Teachers are not qualified to apply them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-7 Examples of codes from the second theme that emerged from the interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Reasons for involving non-SWLD in the programme</th>
<th>Some teachers’ priorities regarding applying diagnostic tests for referred students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External factors: a. Administration b. Parents</td>
<td>How strict are the teachers in applying the rules when there are non-SWLD having general needs in reading, writing or math</td>
<td>a. Selecting names that were repeated the most by classroom teachers and the school counsellor, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They might think it is a general support programme</td>
<td></td>
<td>b. Selecting students who have repeated more years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8.6 Using a progressive focus technique for focus groups based on interviews

As data collection in this research is based on a progressive focus technique, the analysis of interviews should feed into focus group questions. So, there were several processes undertaken to do that. After conducting and analysing interviews, I reviewed this analysis keeping in mind the study aims and questioning what I needed to explore more, what burning issues need to be examined and what I need to focus on. This helped to narrow my investigation for deeper examination in focus groups. The following points explain this review process and the main decisions:

1- As a theme has risen because of including connected codes and many related points, it is likely to stimulate teachers for discussion which helps to develop the themes and facilitate discussing other interesting questions in focus groups. Therefore, I formulated from each theme an open question for discussion. For example, one of the themes is ‘pressure’, so I was interested in discussing it by asking participants the following question: ‘do you have enough time to identify SWLD in your school?’ By asking such a question, participants were free to discuss lack of teachers, the number of students or other related issues, which allowed raising new issues and initiating deeper discussions.

2- The interviewing step was not planned to be comprehensive on its own. However, this step was the first and was intended to help in developing the data collection process. So, it was crucial to conduct a review of interviews data and subsequent analysis looking for burning, interesting and important issues in relation to the study aims. I found that these issues fell under two types which are perceptions and practice or experience of practice.
A. Perceptions: for example, it was highlighted by more than one teacher that they usually cannot be sure of the existence of LD because of the absence of IQ tests. So, I listed a question: ‘do you think that absence of IQ tests makes you unsure about LD existence?’
B. Practice and experience: a teacher highlighted that he used an identification technique of his own design. This point of practice fell in the heart of the study aim and constituted an important issue that is worth investigating in more depth. So, I formed a question: ‘did you design, modify or adjust a technique to identify SWLD?’

3- There were other points related to the study aim; however, there was no need for them to be repeated in focus groups, especially, descriptive explanations and/or repeated descriptions that were stated by many teachers, for example, regulations for the identification process. These data were moved to be reviewed with focus groups data while preparing questions for the survey.
Table 3-8 below clarifies how focus group questions were derived from interviews and their analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
<th>Practice and experience</th>
<th>Fully answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>One of the themes is ‘pressure’; I was interested in asking: ‘do you have enough time to identify SWLD in your school?’</td>
<td>There was doubt in the ability to assure LD existence because of the absence of IQ tests. So, a question was listed as: ‘do you think that absence of IQ tests makes you unsure about LD existence?’</td>
<td>A teacher highlighted that he used an identification technique of his own design. So, it was important to discuss with other teachers whether or not they designed, modified or adjusted a technique to identify SWLD</td>
<td>The general rules for identifying SWLD. For example, regulations for the identification process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision</td>
<td>List these questions and then organise them to be asked in focus groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Keep them to be used in questionnaire or main analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8.7 Focus groups procedure and analysis

In the focus group sessions, I played the role of a moderator; I allowed the participants to speak freely without giving my own opinion or any indicator of my satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

3.8.7.1 Procedure

The meetings were arranged in scheduled schools of ‘mutual visits’ in the morning. Once I arrived at the appointed school, I started doing what was highlighted in the ‘official procedures’ (Section 1.8.3.2). Most focus group discussions went well and as planned. However, one focus group faced an interruption that led to stopping the meeting partway through. This interruption was caused by a visit from the teachers’ supervisor who wanted to meet teachers at that particular time. As a result, I added another short focus group which was arranged with four teachers and conducted in one of their schools in the evening. This focus group was planned to be conducted shortly after the initial analysis of the previous focus groups; this is because some questions might arise from this analysis, so these could be discussed in this last focus group. Table 3-9 presents the durations of the focus groups.
Table 3-9 Duration of focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus group</th>
<th>Female Duration</th>
<th>Male Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus group 5</td>
<td>~ 80 mins</td>
<td>Focus group 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group 6</td>
<td>~ 60 mins</td>
<td>Focus group 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For female teachers, similar technical preparation for the interviews was followed for the focus groups. In terms of conducting the first focus group, all members (five teachers) attended the whole discussion showing good participation. However, there was an irregular attendance in the second group of four teachers, as all the teachers were slightly late and only two teachers attended the whole discussion, while one was very late and another teacher attended irregularly. I started the discussion as soon as two participants appeared and discuss the prepared questions. However, if the group showed more commitment, the discussion would have been richer.

3.8.7.2 Analysis

The method of analysing focus group data was not different from that for the interviews. However, I considered interview data while analysing the focus groups data. Therefore, more themes and sub-themes emerged with richer details. Table 3-10 to Table 3-12 show the main themes and two examples of sub-themes:

Table 3-10 Themes emerging from the focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students identification</td>
<td>Obstacles for identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suggested strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related to identification and registering in the programme</td>
<td>Required number of SWLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paying more attention to the first three grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registering SWLD in the programme</td>
<td>Priority factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administration and parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-11 Example (1) of a sub-theme emerging from focus groups data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Main classification</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Always used and important</strong></td>
<td>diagnostic test</td>
<td>Gives a picture of strengths and weaknesses of skills of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews/ informal test</td>
<td>Because of teachers experience, they think that they can ask several questions and see how students answer them which shows whether or not a student has LD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Important but not often used** | Observation     | * It is highly required in policy to apply observation in class and activities as a specific step in the identification process but there is no explanation as to how it is to be applied  
- Male teachers think it is important but they do not apply it because they do not have time  
* I noticed that female teachers apply it unlike male teachers |
| **Two ways to scan for eligible students to be diagnosed** | Asking for a notice about LD students from class tutors | - Teachers of LD ask class tutors to nominate students who have difficulties in reading, writing and mathematics.                                                                                 |
|                             | Reviewing records for students repeating a course | - Students who repeat courses are very few because there are pressures on class teachers to pass their students  
* There might be students who have LD but they do not need to repeat a course |
| **Useful but not always used** | Student portfolio | - Not very important because it sometimes misses important information about students                                                                                                                     |
|                             | Asking for a notice about LD students from school counsellor | * After discussion with some teachers, I found out that they take a report of students repeating a course. School counsellors sometimes give some notes about other students not repeating courses.  
- Not all school counsellors have enough information about students |

Table 3-12 Example (2) of a sub-theme emerging from focus groups data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Poverty**                 | - Some teachers of LD suffer due to poverty of the school students in general, which causes a low achievement level. This happens because children do not receive enough attention from their parents  
Below is more explanation on how this low level of achievement can affect identification |
| **Achievement level of students** | - Some teachers of LD have difficulties with the low reading and writing level of the majority of school students. This makes them very unsure whether the problem is caused by dyslexia or lack of attention from their parents  
- Some teachers highlight that the majority of students in sixth grade cannot write, so there is a need to train all of them to diagnose this issue, which is very difficult |
| **Number of students in school** | - More school students means less accuracy in identification  
- Some teachers suggest that they cannot identify SWLD well because they do not have time to apply identification strategies and fill required documents for this purpose  |
| **Class tutors**            | - Some class tutors are very good in referring students suspected of having LD, while other do not care |
3.8.8 Using focus groups and interviews analysis to feed into the questionnaires

After completing focus groups data analysis, I came back to review the analysis along with what was inferred from interview data in order to feed into the questionnaires. The processes of progressive focus technique (that were used at the stages of interviews and focus groups) are similar to those processes used for the questionnaire. However, at this stage, I became aware of the issues that I aimed to investigate. However, there were still two aims which are needed to be completed: firstly, to examine broader teachers’ views; secondly, to explore the level of teachers’ beliefs about issues in more specific and clearer manner. The questionnaire is more suitable to achieve these two aims than discussing new issues. Therefore, the progressive focus at this stage would not explore new issues; rather, it would concentrate more on completing these two aims (more views and level of perceptions) in relation to the following investigated points:

1- Techniques: This study focused on: firstly, identification techniques (e.g. tests, observation or interviews); secondly, exploring the gap between policy and practice. So, all techniques (which were used by teachers and mentioned in the regulations) were listed to explore to what extent they are used and how teachers think about the importance of these techniques.

2- Sub-themes: As themes became too large, I could not use them as questions, so I focused on sub-themes (or sub-sub-themes if they have). These have been used in two ways:
   A. as demographic information because I found out these points influence teachers’ perceptions; for example, the number of students in a school and the achievement level of the school students.
   B. listing other sub-themes as questions; for example, ‘do you think that a class teacher is qualified to identify LD?’

3- Sub-themes may include many of the teachers’ perceptions and some are worth being used in separate questions. I set two conditions that qualify perceptions to be asked in single question/item, which are:
   A. repeated (or agreed on in focus groups) by two or more teachers because if a view has not been supported or mentioned by other teachers in all sessions of interviews and focus groups, this indicates that it is likely to be a personal view or personal experience. For example, a teacher provided an important point about her experience in another city which is characterised by multiple cultures and multiple accents. However, I did not list a question about this particular view because the view was not echoed by other teachers and I did not
expect many teachers to be involved in teaching in that (or indeed a similar) city. Therefore, asking about this issue would not generate different views; however, this would take time that could be used to ask about points that might be controversial or common among all (or the majority of) teachers.

B. Views must not be considered as side points of the study. For example, a point highlighted in relation to the core of the study and repeated in different sessions was that diagnostic tests assist in discovering missing academic skills but do not discover LD. So, I intended to explore how many teachers hold similar views and how strong these beliefs are.

Using this process, many questions were listed to be used in the questionnaire (see Table 3-13), although these questions were designed and organised (summarised, deleted, separated, and reformulated) in another way which is explained below (Section 3.8.9).

Table 3-13 Using the progressive focus technique to feed into the questionnaire construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Results emerging from focus groups and interviews data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>This study focuses on: 1- Identification techniques 2- Exploring the gap between policy and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of needed questions</td>
<td>- To what extent is observation used? - How do teachers think about the importance of these techniques?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims that are common in these categories</td>
<td>1. To explore broader teachers’ views 2. To explore the level of teachers’ beliefs about issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision</td>
<td>List all questions to be organised and designed for use in the questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3-4 presents and summarizes how the progressive focus technique was applied in this study, showing the main processes within each method. In addition, it displays the process of progressive technique between the sub-methods, showing the main points of focus that were generated from each of these sub-processes.

**Figure 3-4 How the progressive focus technique was applied in this study**

**3.8.9 Questionnaires**

Analysing the data generated in the focus groups and interviews helped me to become aware of what happens in the SLDP. For the purpose of designing the questionnaire, I was not aiming to install validity; however, I intended to collect a wider range of views. I spent much time and effort devising a useful questionnaire. This included paying attention to the following steps:

1. Reviewing all questions (items) that were listed after analysis of the interviews and focus groups (see Table 3-13).
2. Making sure that all of these items support the study aims and research questions.
3- Writing several standards to be followed when formulating the questionnaire. These standards were based on my experience in the pilot study and the literature as well as previous experience from courses in research methods. The standards followed were:

A. The questionnaire construction and its items have to be well formulated in a way that assists to avoid problems related to questionnaires rules and principles which I reviewed mainly from Bradburn et al. (2004). This made it necessary for me to present the questionnaire to Dr. Aldoghan (Associate Professor in the College of Education at King Faisal University), who suggested certain corrections.

B. It was necessary for the questionnaire not to be very long. So, I had to summarise many points without compromising any of the questionnaire aims that were presented earlier.

C. Items had to be clear in language, format and idea.

D. I had to be quite sure that the teachers would understand the point behind each item. This led me to meet a few teachers while they were filling in the questionnaire to discuss with them what they understood from the items. In particular, the teachers were asked if they were uncertain or concerned about anything. This was very useful and many items were edited accordingly.

E. It should not include any language mistakes. This standard, in addition to standard number B and C, led to asking teachers of LD to provide their comments on aspects such as language, question adequacy and clarity of the questionnaire. Based on this, I developed the questionnaire further.

F. It had to include open-ended questions.

G. It had to include spaces in case the participant wanted to add a comment.

4- Creating the questionnaire in a way that ensured meeting the aims of the questionnaire:

A. To explore broader teachers’ views.

B. To explore the level of teachers’ beliefs about some relevant issues.

C. To assist in understanding the gap between policy and practice.

5- All listed questions were added to the questionnaire.

6- The items were edited, summarised and reformulated.

7- The questionnaire was revised and edited many times to ensure that I had adhered to the aims and standards.

8- Two copies were formulated of the Arabic questionnaire: one for male teachers and one for female teachers because there were many differences in the pronouns used.
9- The Arabic questionnaire was translated into English and revised by a bilingual lecturer whose speciality was in the English language.

10- The translated questionnaire was sent to my research supervisor who provided valuable feedback. Accordingly, I edited some aspects and the questionnaire, which was then ready for distribution.

11- Some teachers were contacted and several copies were sent to each of them to distribute to other teachers they knew.

12- After several days, the participating teachers returned the completed questionnaires.

13- For female teachers, the intermediary emailed them the questionnaire, and then returned the completed questionnaires back to me.

The collected questionnaires showed positive interaction in dealing with items in general. In terms of understanding the questionnaire instructions, a few collected questionnaires showed that the second section of the questionnaire had not been filled in as was explained in the instructions. However, this did not have a negative effect but might cause loss of some anticipated data from these particular questionnaires. In addition, while conducting thematic analysis (Section 3.10.2), I found that, upon examining the answers of the questionnaires, a few of the questionnaire items were not very reliable. Thus, I excluded these poor items which are 4 and 7 of the second part; 4, 5 and 6 of the third part; 2 of the fourth part.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Several ethical considerations were observed in this study. Firstly, I was very keen to maintain confidentiality as I was not working with just certain schools but rather with teachers from various schools. Methods to maintain anonymity were employed so that the identity of the participants could not be traced. For example, every participant has been given a number instead of writing their real name whether in transcripts or in the thesis itself. Furthermore, participants were provided with a participant information sheet which was translated into Arabic (see Appendix 2). Following that, I asked for each participant to provide consent to participate and to be audio recorded. This information was also sent to the female teachers and returned by email. Furthermore, I respected Saudi culture in relation to collecting data from female teachers according to what was discussed regarding the pilot study; I conducted interviews through WhatsApp, a method that was preferred by female participants.
3.10 Data analysis

This study follows a thematic analysis approach, which has been discussed in depth in the literature (Beard et al., 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Thematic analysis has been defined as:

a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79).

This definition shows that the main aspects of thematic analysis are based on dealing with themes of data. This approach has various advantages, including flexibility for the researcher and the limited requirement of extensive experience. In relation to flexibility, the identification and analysis of themes can be done in flexible and various ways, which gives more freedom for the researcher to shape their interpretation as required. In terms of the pre-requisite requirements of this approach, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 97) highlighted that theme analysis is “accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research”.

In addition, the interviews and focus groups involved different aspects of the teachers’ experiences, views and perspectives, which require identifying patterns and connecting them through relevant links in order to help analyse and report them. However, the purpose of the analysis is not to examine the story given by the teacher, which could be done through narrative analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilbert, 1998), nor to explore a phenomenon by collecting rich detail on how many cases people perceive, which could be done through interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Furthermore, the analysis is not aimed at constructing a theory or analysing data based on my experience.

Thematic analysis can be done in different ways. For example, Miles and Huberman (1994) provided three processes of qualitative data analysis: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. Also, other authors (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) highlighted six phases as qualitative analysis guidelines. Therefore, the analysis in this study followed six phases, as it seemed that the six phases included the three processes in somewhat greater detail.

Importantly, it must be noted that there was an extensive degree of thinking involved in these six phases; revising, reforming, refining and adapting data, coding and themes constituted a continuous process, which needed regular movement back and forth between these six phases until confidence
was reached that the analysis made sense collectively. Before starting with these phases, I developed an analytical framework as following.

Data analysis was carried out in Arabic in order to maintain the level of understanding of the meaning of discourses which might be lost if they were translated into English. Some codes were created in English as I am accustomed to using the relevant English terms in my research. I planned to use Nvivo for analysing the data and received training to use it; however, after uploading my Arabic documents, I realised that this software does not support Arabic. I looked for alternative software and after extensive searching; I chose to use MAXQDA as I found its features met the needs of my analysis including support of the Arabic language. I used MAXQDA to manage, generate and classify the codes in a quick, easy and accurate way. All interview, focus group and qualitative questionnaire data were uploaded onto MAXQDA and analysed by taking advantage of its tools. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using a descriptive approach. The dataset was prepared in Excel and then exported to MAXQDA to categorise responses, code newly developed concepts and present the data in diagrams that can be changed automatically to explore different impacts.

3.10.1 Analytical framework

Important reasons were behind developing the analytical framework. First, to make sure that the analysis is progressing in the right way to answer the research questions. Especially, as analysing large amounts of data might distract a researcher from his/her aim if no clear framework was introduced. Second, to control the number of codes as a large number of codes can be developed which will hinder organising the themes. Finally, to save time and effort, both of which can be wasted if a researcher analyses the data without a clear plan. In the following, an explanation is provided of the main process undertaken to introduce the analytical framework.

I prepared priori codes which have been derived from the research aim and questions, literature review, and analysis within the fieldwork. In this process, I tried to extract the ideas of the research aim and questions and formulate them in the form of codes. Although these codes were not many, they guided the analysis to consider what sub-codes could or could not fall under the main codes. Then, I looked through the literature review and elicited many more codes. I compared between codes extracted from the research aim and questions and those from the literature review and kept the codes that were relevant to the research aim. Similarly, codes that emerged from data analysis when applying the progressive focus technique in the fieldwork were fitted within the codes of the research
aim. Finally, other codes were suggested by comparing the three levels of codes (from research questions, literature and the fieldwork). Table 3-14 explains the previously explored processes under the analytical framework, and Table 3-15 shows the concluded list of codes.

Those codes were matched up with the data by taking a sample of the data to see how it fitted in the priori codes; a good match was achieved. This guided me to analyse my data based on the research questions and reminded me to consider different points which were related to my aim. For creditability, I asked one of my colleagues, who was in a PhD programme in education, to code part of an interview using the listed codes. Upon comparing the outcome, I found that his and my coding were almost identical. The main difference between the two was locate a quotation in a theme or its codes. I also added another code which was not included in the listed codes, which he did not apply, giving more credibility to the work. This leads to talking about changes that happen within codes which are: 1- adding more codes as I realised their importance and relevance to the research questions, 2- changing the names of some codes, and 3- merging a few of the codes together. Most of the codes, however, were kept as they were.
Table 3-14 Processes employed under the analytical framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>First question:</th>
<th>Second question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do teachers on the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme (SLDP) identify Students with Learning Disabilities (SWLD)?</td>
<td>How do teachers view the policies around identification strategies and registration as being valid, necessary, and efficient? And why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers understanding of LD</td>
<td>Process undertaking by teachers</td>
<td>Reasons for following a certain process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive and negative sides in terms of:</td>
<td>1. Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A- Effective identification</td>
<td>2. Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B- Usage</td>
<td>3. Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Society</td>
<td>5. Comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Implementation - Teacher training - Programme characteristics - Teacher characteristics - Organizational characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Identification</td>
<td>2- Related to identification &amp; Registration on the programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork analysis</td>
<td>3- Registering SWLD on the programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1 Obstacles to identification</td>
<td>2.1 required number of SWLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.1. A - Teachers are qualified to teach not to be assessment specialists - Problems with the diagnostic test - Absence of offering courses in learning disabilities - Absence of IQ test &amp; developmental test</td>
<td>1.1.B Absence of a multidisciplinary team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1 paying more attention to the first three grades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 1.2 Current practice:
- **Always used and important:** A. Diagnostic test B. Interviews and informal test
- **Important but not used:** observation
- **2 ways to scan for eligible students to be diagnosed:** B. Reviewing records for students who repeat courses
- **Useful but not always used:** A. Student portfolio

### 1.3. environment:
- Poverty
- Achievement level of students
- Number of students in a school
- Multicultural cities

### 1.4 Class teachers

#### 1.5 Suggested strategies

### 3.1 Priority factors

#### 3.2 Administration and parents

### How teachers value identification

**Teachers’ explanation of LD:**
- Understanding of underpinning problems
- Confident in understanding

**Used techniques (positive and negative / how often?):**
- Interviews - Informal test - portfolio
- Observation - Records of repeating students - Suggested strategies

**Context:**
- Achievement level of students
- Number of a school students
- Multiculturalism
- Poverty

**Practising policy**

**Labeling**

**People support: (positive and negative / how often?):**
- Multidisciplinary team - Administration - Parents

**Required number of SWLD**

**Linking between definition and identification**

**Assessment or diagnostic test (positive negative / effective):**
- Issue of standardized assessment
- IQ test - development test

**Influence on registration:**
- class teacher – school counsellors - administration - parents

**Teachers as responsible agents for assessment**

**Implementation:**
- Teacher training
- Programme characteristics (manual)
- Teachers pressure - Lack of teachers
- Teacher characteristics (e.g. confident)
- Organizational characteristics

**Talking about policy: (positive or negative) / Why?**

**Paying more attention to the first three grades**
Table 3-15 The concluded list of themes and codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 How teachers value identification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Teachers’ explanation of LD</td>
<td>- Understanding of underpinning problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Confidence in understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Labelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Linking between definition and identification</td>
<td>- Interviews - Informal test - Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Observation - Records of repeating students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Suggested strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Techniques used (positive and negative / how often?)</td>
<td>- Class teacher as identifier - school counsellors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Notice (positive and negative / how often?)</td>
<td>- Multidisciplinary team - Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 People support (positive and negative / how often?)</td>
<td>- Issue of standardized assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- IQ test - Development test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Assessment or diagnostic test (positive negative / effective?)</td>
<td>- Teacher training - Program characteristics (e.g. manual) - Teachers pressure - Lack of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teacher characteristics (e.g. confidence) - Organizational characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Teachers as responsible agents for assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Implementation</td>
<td>- Class teacher as a power - - Administration’s influence on registration - Parents’ influence on registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Context</td>
<td>- Achievement level of students - Number of students in a school - Multiculturalism - poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Influence on registration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Talking about policy (positive or negative)</td>
<td>Reasons for practising or not practising policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 The required number of SWLD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Paying more attention to the first three grades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.10.2 Adopting the six phases of thematic analysis in this study

In the following sections, the main steps of each phase will be presented; however, the reader needs to take into account that although these phases are presented sequentially, they were applied repeatedly. This led me to move back and forth on many occasions, where revising, reforming and adapting coding was a continuous process in order to achieve the most from this data and become more confident in the results.
Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data

All interviews and focus groups were written as transcripts from audio recordings. I did not need to spend time writing transcripts of interviews and focus groups of female teachers because they were already transcribed on WhatsApp. As I was the one who managed data collection, I was involved in the procedure from the beginning. Therefore, I had a good understanding of the data. Particularly, the progressive focus technique allowed me to revise and probe the data. In addition, I tried to be well-prepared when starting the coding through the described procedures. I went through the transcripts and uploaded them onto MAXQDA.

Phase 2: Generating the initial codes

After becoming familiar with the interviews, I started coding the data. As I prepared the list of codes, I allocated identified points in a particular sentence or paragraph to the existing codes. When there was no suitable code, I created new codes or sub-codes accordingly. Codes were first created as a short title (2-5 words). I aimed to code the entire transcripts (see Appendix 4). When there were statements that were not relevant to the research questions, they were placed in a code called ‘bin’, in case I needed to review uncoded discourses. At the end of this phase, the picture of the results was not clear. Some codes had many quotations, while some others had only a few statements. Also, different quotations were placed under two or more codes which indicated that they were inter-related. Revising the codes and identifying relations between them were carried out in the next phases. Generally, the process of revising the coding was done throughout this exercise from its start up to the last phase.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

Although the majority of themes have been created earlier, a few themes were created while coding. This phase was considered to be one of the main parts of the analysis where critical processes were carried out. I revised all the themes and codes, replaced many codes, reformulated different themes and identified sub-themes. In this process, much effort and time were spent; in particular, this process was repeatedly revisited throughout the analysis. I also did some mapping manually and using stickers (see Appendix 5) to help me make sense of the codes and identify relations between them.
Phase 4: Reviewing the themes

This phase involved the revision of the produced themes. Two steps constituted this phase. First, I had to review the coded extracts to ensure their meaning could be integrated under their relevant themes. Second, the themes were reviewed to certify that the themes reflected the entire dataset. This step was approached through rereading and reassessing the dataset. This reconsideration aimed to ensure that the themes did explain the whole picture presented by the data. Surprisingly, although I thought that this phase did not require much effort, it took an equal or even greater effort and time than the other phases. The reason behind this was that I had to read the data repeatedly in order to understand the meaning of the ideas behind each code, theme and all the transcripts. This resulted in gaining greater comprehension of the data and led to changes in themes including separation, combination, deletion and addition of themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Although this phase is presented as a separate phase, it was taken into account during work on the previous phase. This is because reviewing themes led me to highlight an explanation for each theme in order to build and develop the themes with clear vision and distinct differences from theme to another. However, in this phase, I worked on naming and defining themes in more formal and organised way, where I chose clearer vocabulary in order for it to be distinguishable for the reader. I also commented more on theme allocations and differences between one theme and another and what these allocations could tell the reader about the data as a whole.

Phase 6: Producing the report

The interpretation process of the analysis started from the beginning of the development of the themes as stated by the literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006), although some researchers (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999) claim that it should actually start with the process of transcription because a researcher constructs the meaning of what has been said at that stage. For this research, the interpretation was an important stage in this phase, where I explained the main ideas and articulated the evidence and its underlying relationships. The entire process of interpretation was recounted in this phase, providing evidence of themes from the interviews and demonstrating more about the relationships.
between the themes. This was mainly done in the light of the relationships identified within the research questions.

3.11 Summary

This chapter discussed the methods of data collection and analysis, including the justification of their usage. First, I addressed the methodological design of the study, followed by an explanation of the three methods of data collection (interviews, focus groups and questionnaires) that were applied through a progressive focus technique. The study adopted a qualitative paradigm to ensure consistency between ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological approaches, which have all been discussed under the philosophical considerations of the study. Next, I addressed the theoretical framework of the study where I explained the need for adopting the interpretive approach in order to analyse a complex social phenomenon (related to the Saudi learning disabilities programme) that includes several views and influential factors (e.g. teachers’ views, administrative influences and policies).

Following this, I explained how the pilot study was conducted and how it was important for me to consider many methodological and analytical issues for the main study. Subsequently, I discussed the main study including sampling strategies, methods, procedures and ethical considerations. Finally, I addressed the data analysis and explained how and why this study followed a thematic analysis which includes the adoption of the six phases of thematic analysis in this study. The next chapter presents the findings and discussion of this study.
Chapter 4
Findings and discussion

The research questions proposed to be addressed in this study were:

1- How do teachers on the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme SLDP identify Students with Learning Disabilities (SWLD)? For instance:
   - Why are SWLD identified in the current process?
   - Why do tutors follow certain ways to identify SWLD?
   - How does the referral process take place?
   - To what extent is the identification process needed and how comprehensive is this process?
   - How do contextual factors (family and school administration) affect the identification process?

2- How do teachers view the policies around identification strategies and registration as being valid, necessary, and efficient? And why?

These questions are very much related and each of them has effects on the other. However, RQ1 focuses more on practice while RQ2 is more related to policy. Section 4.1 addresses RQ1 and Section 4.2 deals with RQ2. Because practice and policy interact with each other, they will have an impact on the discussion of both sections (see Figure 4-1). The presentation of the data analysis is arranged in a way that attempts to explain the process of identification starting from the initial stages in order to be understood easily.
Figure 4-1 The research questions addressed in this study and their effects on practice and policy

- RQ 1: Practice
  - Screening and referral process
  - Teachers’ explanation of LD
  - Assessment
  - Class teachers’ roles
  - Context
  - Priorities of registration

- RQ 2: Policy
  - Influence on registration
  - Labelling
  - Linking between definitions and identification
  - Techniques
  - Diagnosis tests

Steps:
1. Where does policy come from?
2. Equity
3. Flexibility
4. Implementation
5. Rules: e.g. Required number of SWLD
4.1 Practice

This section presents and discusses the process of identification. It deals with strategies, techniques and procedures which are considered in identifying and assessing LD. Also, it addresses contextual and conceptual factors that have an impact on the practice in the SLDP.

4.1.1 Screening and referrals

4.1.1.1 What do screening and referral mean in the SLDP

LD teachers start the identification by screening and referral. The first step is ‘screening’, which was explained by the participants as reviewing the list of all students who were retaking courses. Screening here simply explores who passes or fails the course rather than applying sophisticated screening measures such as reading or spelling tests; such tests will be considered under the diagnostic tests and not as a method of screening (see Section 4.1.5.4). Other education systems in other countries employ tests under the concept of screening; for example, Dyslexia Early Screening Test (DEST), which is used by a number of schools in the UK (Reynolds, Nicolson, & Hambly, 2003). I asked a participant (Teacher interview 4) about other students who were not retaking courses but who did not achieve satisfactory marks. He replied that he could not identify those because there were only two options for any subject symbolised by two digits: 1 and 0, where 1 referred to a pass and 0 to fail. The previous system, however, specified the students’ scores in detail. Therefore, this factor can limit LD teachers’ ability to investigate students’ strengths and weaknesses. A student’s portfolio is related to this issue (i.e. investigating students’ strengths) and will be presented later (see Section 4.1.5.1(c)).

As a second step, LD teachers request class teachers to list students who might have LD in a ‘referral list’ in the ‘referral’ process.
4.1.1.2 The importance of screening and referral

Screening appears as an important identification tool and is always used by the vast majority of participants (see Figure 4-2). In that, the participants believe that the existence of academic failure is an indicator of having LD. However, a few participants highlight that they considered it as a helpful way rather than an important one. One participant justified this view by stating:

*Students who pass exams are not necessarily free of LD; on the contrary, those who are retaking courses do not necessarily have LD.*

(Questionnaire: 2\textsuperscript{nd} part/ item 2)

This comment can be consistent with other participants’ belief as they all understand that this process warns that failure can be caused by different factors including LD, and therefore, failure as such is not a conclusive indicator of LD. Although ‘an unexpected failure to learn or underachievement’ is a characteristic that appears with SWLD (Scanlon, 2013), SWLD would not certainly fail nor retake all courses. Particularly, retaking courses is more than just failing to learn some skills, which might include different or more complicated problems surrounding the repeaters. Because reviewing the records of retaking a course is not a strong indicator, one participant explained that he did not feel eager to implement this process all the time; however, he stated he had to do it all the time because it was made compulsory by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Generally, this approach is not only compulsory as a method of identification, anyone
who is retaking a course has higher priority in the programme than others; a trend which will be discussed further below (Section 4.1.2.3).

Interestingly, the participants highlighted that the number of referred students is large, while nominated students by screening are very few. This leads to a certain understanding of the issue of retaking courses in Saudi Arabia and its relation to the SLDP programme. I did not find any information in official online sources, such as the MOE website, that state the intention or determination to reduce the number of repeaters. However, Algamdi (2010) highlighted that a report from the MOE indicated its commitment to reducing the percentage of repetition. To confirm or refute this information, I searched for the percentage of repeaters from the previous years. Again, no relevant information was found in government websites. Fortunately, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015) provides the percentage of repeaters in Saudi primary schools in several years as following: 5.06%, 3.20%, 3.31%, 1.98%, 1.44%, 1.36% and 0.95% in 2005, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, respectively. This decrease of the percentage is consistent with the report mentioned above as well as the data of this current study. The following quotations indicate how the phenomenon of repetition has been reduced.

*Nothing formal from the MOE that asks: ‘reduce the number of repetitions’. However, the MOE sets methods that lead teachers to attempt to allow students to pass. For example, if a teacher has one or more students who have not passed, the teacher has to continue working for about two weeks to apply a management plan for these students. However, teachers want to have these two weeks with their holidays instead. As a result, they try to allow all their students to pass.*
(Teacher interview 2)

*Our system of education does encourage not having repetitions. This can be viewed from two perspectives. First, class teachers fear to have repeaters because they are aware that there will be consequences where they will be accountable for this. For example, why did this student not pass? What recovery plans did you try to overcome a student’s problem? Secondly, schools do not like to have repeaters because of the negative reputation and avoid increasing the number of students in the classroom. Teachers receive suggestions implicitly, or sometimes explicitly, from the admiration to allow students to pass, in addition to the pressure from parents.*
(Teacher interview 4)
Both quotations indicate the willingness of the MOE to minimize repetitions. This willingness is not apparent as an explicit requirement; however, some regulations have been developed to achieve this goal (examples are stated in the quotations). As one of the participants (the second quotation) had some experience in the schools administration, he sees the issue of repetition as a very serious matter in that it became a negative indication for the teacher and the school with negative consequences for both. It seems that this attempt to decrease the effect of this phenomenon may have a negative effect on the SLDP. LD teachers assert that they are motivated to register students who are at risk of failure. Therefore, such students are prioritised over SWLD. This has led the implementation of the programme sometimes to deviate from its original purpose. However, LD teachers’ opinions still valued referral more than screening for students (who repeated or are at risk of failure) as the referral is a more effective way of identifying LD. The findings of the survey provide an indication that referral is more important than screening as can be seen from Figure 4-3. The importance of class teachers’ identifications of SWLD is also highly considered by different studies (Moats & Foorman, 2003; Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2011). Many related points will be further discussed below (e.g. Section 4.1.1.4, 4.1.2.1 and 4.1.2.2). An example of these points is how the referral process differs according to the priorities and context, and how policy supports such differentiation.

![Figure 4-3 Teachers’ beliefs and practice in relation to screening and referral](image)

Figure 4-3 Teachers’ beliefs and practice in relation to screening and referral
4.1.1.3 Knowing their students

Generally, participants think class teachers have a significant role to play in this process as they are the people with most knowledge about their students; they spend much time with them, observe their learning and understand their strengths and weaknesses.

*Class teachers usually are the closest to students and therefore their observation of the student and comparing the student’s performance with their colleagues is a good indicator of having or not having LD.*

(Questionnaire: 2nd part/ item 1)

*Information provided by some class teachers is accurate as they deal with students extensively and therefore they will have extensive information about the student’s performance and behaviour.*

(Questionnaire: 5th part/ item 3)

This advantage of knowing the students can explain certain aspects of why LD teachers highly value referral compared to screening. The participants feel and find that class teachers are able to provide a full picture of their students. In addition, many important questions, which are related to students’ diagnosis, can only be answered by class teachers. However, screening (i.e. reviewing the list of repeaters) only indicates failure rather than providing details about the repeaters (e.g. their participation and attention in the class).

4.1.1.4 Lack of awareness about LD

The phenomenon of teachers’ lack of understanding about LD appeared and was raised by different research studies (Tansey & Ní Dhomhnaill, 2002; Washburn et al., 2011) in developed countries as well. In the UK, Tansey and Ní Dhomhnaill (2002) surveyed 69 teachers for their attitudes regarding dyslexia and found that the majority of them (81.2%) felt they had a fuzzy notion about the concept of dyslexia. In the US, Washburn et al. (2011) conducted a survey (n=185 teacher) which looked at teachers’ knowledge of basic language concepts and dyslexia. Their findings indicated that teachers appeared to misunderstand dyslexia (a phonological processing deficit), where they considered it as a visual processing deficit instead. Also, they lacked knowledge of basic language concepts (e.g. phonic principles). From the above, teachers’ lack of awareness about
dyslexia appears to be an international issue, which necessitates providing appropriate training, as will be discussed in the next section (Section 4.1.1.5).

In this study, several participants raised a criticism that many class teachers do not have enough awareness about LD. This lack of awareness causes two problems. Firstly, as can be seen from the following quotation and Figure 4-4, the majority of class teachers refer the students with low levels of achievement rather than selecting and focusing on students who have characters of LD:

*Class teachers cannot identify SWLD; they think any student who is an under-achiever is associated with SWLD, so they refer them all.*

(Participant C, Focus group 5)

*The majority of class teachers are not fully aware of LD, they refer under-achievers and negligent students.*

(Participant D, Focus group 5)

![Figure 4-4 Referral by class teachers](chart.png)

The implications of this problem can be seen in the loss of valuable time by LD teachers as they need to diagnose all referred students. In addition, the behaviour of class teachers, who usually refer many students, lead LD teachers to distrust their understanding of LD. As a result, some LD teachers will be keen to have confidence in only teachers who usually provide a reasonable number of students who are more likely to have LD. Such a situation is highlighted in the section discussing Prioritising referrals based on how their class teachers are perceived to be good at teaching.
(Section 4.1.2.1). This causes lack of registration opportunities for students who are under class teachers with high referral rates. The points of ‘carelessness’ and ‘under-achievers’ will be discussed later with the concept of LD (Section 4.1.6.2).

**Secondly,** class teachers do not identify and refer those students whose weaknesses are not clear and not easily differentiated from others or whose intelligence precludes diagnosing their LD.

> Many students, who have LD, are not referred by teachers, particularly those who are gifted ... teachers think there is no need to refer students while there are other who are lower in their achievement.

( Participant A, Focus group 6)

The reason for this issue is most likely that gifted students do not cause added pressure and do not require more effort from their teachers. Therefore, class teachers do not feel that there is a need to refer such students. As a result, these students miss the opportunity to register in the programme which should help them to reach the levels of academic achievement that are supposed to be reached by students of their calibre. The problem most often is that there is no appropriate technique to identify gifted students with LD in the SLDP, except through the discretion of class teachers. Therefore, the programme developers should rethink suitable solutions of these issues.

**Thirdly,** some teachers refer students who misbehave.

> Once, a teacher came to me and said: ‘register this student in the programme; he always goes out of the classroom!’ My responsibility is not to resolve the problem of a student hanging around the school.

(Teacher interview 2)

This problem of tendency to refer students behaviour problems is in line with what was discussed by Frederickson and Cline (2009). They reported a study which was carried out in some areas in the US and the UK to identify students with reading disabilities, and the results showed that schools tended to identify students who were more likely to show behaviour problems.

However, these previous three problems do not apply to all teachers as participants noted that there are some teachers who are aware of LD and can observe signs of these disabilities. Therefore, they overcome the problems mentioned above.
When I meet teachers to ask them to refer SWLD, I find some of them have a good understanding of LD and they explain about SWLD to other teachers who have less information about LD.

(Teacher interview 5)

There was a smart student, she was active in the classroom and her reading was OK. But after reading skills became more difficult her teacher noticed that this student was relying on memorising the image of the word and she was good at that. Particularly, this was because she was diligent and ambitious. So, her teacher identified her and then referred her to me.

(Teacher interview 7)

The second quotation above shows the positive implications when attentive observation of LD students is applied by the class teacher. This helped this student to receive needed service which will help her to overcome her learning difficulty. However, this intervention would not have happened if the teacher was not aware of LD, as he/she might be satisfied with the student’s achievement unaware of the underlying difficulties the student is facing.

4.1.1.5 Providing class teachers with information about LD

For tackling lack of awareness, I asked the participants whether or not they try to provide class teachers with information about LD. Different participants explained that they followed different ways to raise class teachers’ awareness; however, class teachers were not active and did not respond favourably to such methods. Therefore, the method of referral is usually carried out by providing explanation and quick instructions to a class teacher about what SWLD are like. Consequently, teachers list some students from their class who they think have LD. It seems that it is quite a challenge to assist teachers to learn. A solution suggested by different participants was through providing courses about LD by the Ministry of Education for class teachers as this usually encourages them to attend.

I believe that teachers are required to attend courses because they are the basis of nominating students and then teaching them after the assessment is made.

(Teacher interview 5)

Tansey and Ní Dhomhnaill (2002) found that nearly half the teachers they surveyed did not receive any training about dyslexia. As a result, the researchers suggested providing
all starting teachers with a specific training about dyslexia as every teacher is expected to come across dyslexic students during their professional career. In the current study, participants highlighted that there was no training about LD provided for specialist teachers or other teachers since the beginning of their careers; however, participants received specific courses during their undergraduate studies (see Section 4.2.3.1). Although the SLDP can contribute to supporting SWLD by specialist teachers, classroom teachers are expected to be the first to notice and observe the indicators of LD. Therefore, preparing specific training for classroom teachers is highly suggested which should be considered by the MOE in Saudi Arabia. In addition, these findings seem to suggest that power plays an important role in raising awareness about LD. Class teachers seem to respond less well to any calls which require making an effort in any forms of learning if these calls come from persons who have limited authority. However, if calls come from a higher authority, teachers are likely to respond. This justification can explain the question of why LD teachers suggest making attending courses a requirement for class teachers rather than approaching teachers for this purpose.

4.1.1.6 What instructions are delivered when asking for a referral list?

From the discussion above, many class teachers do not have enough motivation to seek knowledge about LD. As a result, some teachers need instructions to fill the referral list. I noticed differences and similarities in the way of delivering these instructions. The differences might be due to the absence of strict policy or due to following convenient ways based on previous experiences. One method of delivering instructions is through explaining what SWLD is like in a quick verbal instruction because LD teachers find it to be accepted by class teachers. However, it lacks important details and precludes developing identification skills.

*I explain to the class teacher when handing the referral list about common characters of SWLD, like that they might be unable to concentrate or they reverse letters and numbers and such things.*

(Teacher interview 6)

A second method is that many LD teachers ask to identify weak students while focusing on exclusion criteria rather than explaining characters of LD. This instruction method seems to be delivered in a quick, simple way, similar to the first one. This way also
lacks development of teachers’ awareness of LD in addition to ignoring good students with LD.

*I asked teachers to list weak students by considering certain points which I clarified to them, such as no frequent absences, families’ follow-up, and whether the student is weak in certain subjects or all of them.*

(Teacher interview 5)

A third method was highlighted by one participant by stating he asks teachers to list students who have weak progress and then discuss each case regardless of the level of understanding of the class teacher about LD. This is because the LD teacher can acquire needed information from such conversation. Although this approach has similar disadvantages to the previous methods, it can be more relevant due to paying each case more attention by the LD and class teachers.

*The class teacher does know about LD, so I take from him information which he knows what it means for me. For example, I ask him how the student’s writing is, and if he says that his writing is not clear and he reverses letters, I keep this in mind, even though the teacher might not realise this. So, through such indirect way, I can get to know whether this student has LD.*

(Teacher interview 1)

4.1.1.7 Cooperation between LD teachers and class teachers

Discussions with the participants included whether class teachers have another role in addition to referring; for example, delivering special intervention based on instructions from LD teachers before, during or after referral, which might help in supporting SWLD. Particularly, in some situations, a student only needs little intervention or a different way of teaching from spending time in the resources room, which might be sufficient. For this question, some participants explained that, ideally, a class teacher is a member of a multidisciplinary team (discussed in more detail later, Section 4.2.3.2), which involves the LD teacher, a head teacher, a deputy head teacher, a school counsellor, a psychologist, parents and whoever is needed for the student’s situation. Participants clarified that class teachers should have a copy of the student’s individual plan where the teacher might have certain roles according to the plan. However, this is not always applied in reality.
Class teachers should have effective participation in the assessment process.
(Questionnaire: 5th part/ item 4)

Participant D: The Class teacher is supposed to have a copy of the individual educational plan for following up.
Participant A: In this way, the class teachers know the points of students' needs, so the teacher can help the student or let one of the good students help the SWLD.
(Focus group 3)

As has been described in the previous quotations, many important actions in supporting SWLD should be carried out by class teachers. By doing this, SWLD would have effective progress and may overcome their difficulties more easily. The absence of class teachers’ cooperation would put more pressure on LD teachers and SWLD. Alquraini (2010) emphasised the role of class teachers in the multidisciplinary team in improving the services for students with special needs in Saudi Arabia, which is compatible with the recommendations of the current study. However, some class teachers cooperate with LD teachers, share experiences and apply LD teachers’ suggestion. Three teachers who participated in this research stated in the questionnaire that one of the SLDP strengths is emphasising cooperation between class and LD teachers in identifying and exchanging experiences; however, no further detail in relation to this point was provided.

4.1.1.8 Barriers faced by teachers

Some class teachers are not only uncooperative, but they also cause obstacles. In focus groups, some participants showed their dissatisfaction towards some class teachers because they hindered their work with SWLD.

(Discussion was about an idea that LD teachers should attend class for observation)
Participant E: I think this is good! But will class teachers allow you to attend? Maybe half of them will do, but not the rest. Some teachers procrastinate sending the referral list, so will such teachers allow other teachers to attend their class?
Participant C: On some occasions, I worked with a student with LD for two or three weeks and when he started progressing, his class teacher asked me to stop his plan and take another student instead because he noticed this little progress!
(Focus group 2)
From interviews and focus groups, I felt that some class teachers are, to a certain degree, dissatisfied as they feel they have much more work and tasks to do than LD teachers who have only a few students. Such situations could cause barriers as well. In general, LD teachers should build bridges with class teachers and share with them the needs of SWLD. However, participant E in the previous quotation did not seem to make an attempt at sharing, which might be due to either fear of rejection or being busy with other tasks. Also, the school administration and the supervisors of LD and class teachers need to be notified about this issue and need to tackle it in order to achieve better results in the SLDP.

4.1.1.9 SWLD with no referral or failure

If a student has LD but did not repeat a year and was not referred by a class teacher, he/she is more likely not to be identified because these two methods are the main ways to make a list of SWLD, which is followed by different evaluation and diagnosis processes. This is a dangerous indicator, particularly as the phenomenon of repeating a year is decreasing in addition to the lack of identification skills exhibited by some class teachers (see Section 4.2.3.1). This concern was often raised by the participants (see Figure 4-5).

![Figure 4-5 Unidentified SWLD](image-url)
4.1.2 Priorities in registration of students in the SLDP

Although this subject is interesting in itself, it is highly related to other intriguing subjects such as the concept of LD, policy and practice. For example, when teachers give more priority to a student who has a specific character or problem, this reflects their understanding of LD. Essentially, they consider this student’s character as a key element of LD, and therefore it needs to be treated soon and should be tackled before other cases. Although many priorities are considered in the SLDP, LD teachers are the ones who judge and select who is going to be registered in the programme based on their experience and awareness of students’ situations. Because much flexibility has been afforded to the teachers, a section was dedicated to discussing this issue (Section 4.2.5).

Two priorities have been repeatedly mentioned by participants, which are the situations of retaking courses and being in the early years (i.e. first three grades of the school). More detail about these two and other priorities is provided in the following sections.

4.1.2.1 Prioritising referrals based on how their class teachers are good in teaching

I, as a LD teacher, only ask a class teacher who I’m sure will refer a student that I need; meaning, I choose class teachers whom I know and I know their quality of teaching and know that they are excellent in managing their class.

(Teacher interview 2)

This LD teacher highlighted a priority in the selection of referrals made by class teachers as he believes that many students are referred while they do not have LD; instead, they have not received quality teaching. Although this is a reasonable point in the sense that it gives more indicators of LD, it leads to ignoring other students who have LD if their teachers are not good (according to the LD teacher) and they would not have a chance to be diagnosed (see Section 4.2.4).

4.1.2.2 Prioritising referrals in early years

Different teachers assert that students in the early years (i.e. first three grades of the school) have more priority than others because these years constitute the basis of education. The following quotation shows how and why teachers support this idea.
As I’m the only LD teacher in the school, I need to help those in the first, second and third year. If I help them in these years, they will be able to help themselves in the following years. (Participant D, Focus group 5)

The quotation shows the advantages of early intervention and confirms the teachers aim to support students at an early stage. Also, it seems that teachers believe that teaching SWLD for one term or more enables them to use similar strategies in the following years to overcome their LD. I have no objections to the idea of early intervention; however, a concern which can be raised is the increased complexity of the subjects taught in the following years which might require different strategies compatible with such level of complexity and quantity. Unfortunately, no plan to ‘follow up’ is structured in the programme. This situation could lead SWLD to face new difficulties with no guidance. Literature (Reid, 2016; Smith, 2003) indicated the significance of identification in the early years which can be done starting at age three as LD can be early for some children. This point supports why the SLDP pays much attention to the first three grades; however, two related issues could be raised. Firstly, Smith (2003) explained that some indicators of LD (e.g. higher level of spoken language than written language) start appearing or become more noticeable in later stages of primary education. This, again, supports the suggestion that the SLDP should pay the later years of primary school sufficient attention as well, and the identification and related services should not be limited to the early years only. Secondly, a question can be raised in relation to why pre-school education is not supported by the SLDP. The answer might be related to the nature of the SLDP as it is directed and designed for primary schools. In addition, the definition, which is adopted in the SLDP, is based on the IQ-discrepancy model, which means that the differences between the children’s intelligence and learning achievement should be measurable. However, measuring ability of children under the age of six years to read or write is difficult, which could lead to false over-identification.

Figure 4-6 shows the extent to which the later years are ignored in relation to the identification of SWLD. Although the percentage of teachers who do not limit the identification of LD to early years is approximately 20%, neglecting other years could be happening frequently by teachers who limit their focus to early year. These cases can happen in the categories defined in the figure as: always, very often, sometimes or
rarely. The practice of early intervention is necessary for all special educational needs. However, students who did not receive early intervention should not be neglected. One teacher explained that neglecting these students might happen if the programme is new in the school. For example, if it has been installed for more than three years, those students who are in the 4th, 5th and 6th years would have been paid attention when they were in their early years. Although this is a logical argument, this is not always guaranteed as some students might have missed the chance in the early grades, so their chance of receiving any intervention in the higher grades would be slimmer. In addition, some students might be transferred into the school in their higher grades which causes them to miss out on the chance to receive a diagnosis. Also, this argument does not provide a solution to the earlier critique that highlights the need for updating the methods used to tackle new strategies.

Figure 4-6 Focusing on intervention during the early grades by teachers

4.1.2.3 Prioritising students retaking courses

LD teachers consider retaking courses as an important criterion which needs to be assessed before other cases. In the following, two teachers express how they deal with this issue.

At the beginning of the year, we check the reports of students who are retaking courses in the subjects that we teach, which are: reading, spelling and mathematics. We give more priority to the number of years repeated.
Meaning, a student who has repeated two years has more priority than a student who has repeated one year.
(Teacher interview 2)

Of course, students who are retaking courses in the early grades, from first to third grade, have to be taken.
(Participant D, Focus group 3)

These quotations show that students who are retaking courses must be paid careful attention especially if they are in their early years or have repeated their course. As the SLDP adopted the discrepancy model, it should be noted that this model usually focuses on concerns about a student’s unexpected unsatisfactory progress in attainment (Reid, 2016). The SLDP might pay retaking courses much attention because it can be considered as a very clear indication of insufficient attainment. However, retaking course raises other questions about the reasons which lead teachers to give them the priority to be diagnosed. In a sense, this process seems to be rational; however, the reality is that LD teachers register all such students unless they have clear exclusionary criteria such as hearing or visual impairment. Also, if the students’ problems are not related to LD but to other reasons such as ineffective teaching, they would be registered as well. Teachers seem to be pressured by the school administration to feel that registering such students, who are at risk although they do not have clear LD, is the right step to take. Otherwise, they do this sometimes under emotional obligation as they wish to help such students not to fail again. As a result, the role of the SLDP is shifted occasionally from serving SWLD to serving the general educational policy. That is, the programme is directed sometimes to filling the gaps in the educational system or reducing the pressure that might come from the surrounding society.

4.1.2.4 Prioritising students with reading difficulties

Two participants stated clearly in the questionnaire that students with reading difficulties have more priority than others with difficulties in mathematics. The following quotations include justification of this priority.

The majority of LD teachers have mostly students with reading difficulties while maybe only one student with difficulties in mathematics, and who knows, this one case maybe has been taken in order to give a satisfying impression with respect to the right of maths teachers. For me, all my
Students have reading difficulties. The reason, from my perspective, is that if a student does not know how to read, he will not be able to learn maths. For example, if you give a student a maths question, such as ‘add the following numbers’, he might not answer the question if he does not know how to read it.

(Participant B, Focus group 3)

The problem of reading difficulties is given more attention by LD teachers because the majority of other subjects such as history and religious studies depend on reading.

(Teacher interview 5)

Both quotations highlighted the importance of reading as the teachers justified their preference of having students with reading difficulties rather than those with difficulties in maths. However, two questions need to be discussed. First, the SLDP is structured to serve both types of learning difficulties: language and maths difficulties. However, difficulties in maths seem to receive less attention as can be seen in the first quotation, where some teachers have one or no students with difficulties in maths. Even if reading is more important than maths, according to teachers’ views, more consideration should be given to difficulties experiences in learning mathematics according to aims of the programme. Particularly, the statement ‘who knows, this one case maybe has been taken in order to give a satisfying impression with respect to the right of maths teachers’ gives an indication that considering maths is fundamental in the programme while teachers do not apply this consideration. The context reveals that some teachers register one case of difficulty in maths, although they are not eager to do so, in order to show that they have both types of difficulties in order to avoid criticism when they are asked by supervisors or maths teachers. This raises the question: is the importance of reading (as teachers believe) the only reason for ignoring difficulties in maths? Currently, no clear answer can be identified. However, as discussed in Section 4.2.3.3(c), some teachers select easier cases to avoid making more effort. If this trend of evasion applies to this issue, it can be considered that these teachers might find teaching reading easier, and after one or two years, they will have more experience and will have prepared plans to tackle reading difficulties; while if they take students with maths difficulties, they will need to make more effort to prepare new plans and teaching methods. Second, the claim that reading or literacy is more crucial than maths is questionable. Frederickson and Cline (2009) discussed the significance of maths as it is related to our daily lives and different subjects taught in schools, mainly science, depend on it. In addition, maths
plays a major role in employment, communication and cultural experience. Therefore, teachers should give difficulties in learning mathematics more attention.

4.1.2.5 Prioritising students’ specific needs

This priority is straightforward. LD teachers should examine the results of students’ diagnosis tests, which they can use to target students’ specific weaknesses based on their performance. Many participants mentioned this process in both the interviews and questionnaires where the following quotations are taken.

*It depends on his needs. I check his marks in the diagnostic test. Meaning, some students get lower marks than their colleagues, and some get zero, zero, zero. Such students need to be registered. Some others are better, so they have lower priority.*

(Participant A, Focus group 4)

*During the test, I observed a student who missed all the letters and another student missed three letters, so who is more in need in your opinion? Of course, the one who missed all the letters. And of course, from the test, you’ll see who is in more urgent need and who can be recorded on the waiting list.*

(Teacher interview 3)

As has been explained above, priority is given to those who are in more need identified by either having lower marks or missing more skills. Although the decision of registration based on comparison between students’ results in the diagnostic test seems to be fair, a legitimate question can be asked about the bias and validity of the diagnostic test and its results with respect to identifying the risk of the LD. For example, if this test is valid, the decision will be relatively acceptable; conversely, if it is not, the diagnosis will be doubtful. Frederickson and Cline (2009) and Jarar (2008) reported many factors that cause assessment bias or mistakes, such as the use of invalid assessments, bias in test content, inappropriate application of tests and lack of qualification of those who apply the assessment. Such problems have been identified in the assessment of LD in the SLDP as will be discussed in Section 4.1.5.4.

4.1.2.6 Prioritising students with cooperating parents

According to several participants, students have more priority if their parents pay more attention to supporting them, which is stated clearly in the following.
Registration priority for those children who are more teachable and receive attention from their parents.
(Questionnaire: 5th part/ item 1)

Children whose parents are cooperating with the teacher and show care from the beginning of the academic year.
(Questionnaire: 5th part/ item 1)

The reason for this priority can be intriguing, and these views can be compared to other quotations of teachers who think most of the registered students do not have real LD but they do not receive attention from their parents. Therefore, I deduced that teachers propose this priority (parents’ attention) to alleviate doubts about students who are in need of attention rather than having LD. When a student receives sufficient attention and he/she is still struggling with learning, this indicates that he/she is more likely to be at risk of having LD. So, LD teachers become reluctant to make a decision when they feel that a student is affected by external factors, such as lack of quality teaching. By contrast, teachers become more confident in making a decision about a student when they observe that all the conditions around a student are perfect while his/her learning does not make reasonable improvement. A similar issue will be discussed in Section 4.1.3.1 related to the context of identification, where the teacher can be challenged because of poverty and other external factors that can affect students’ achievement. What can be suggested when facing such challenges is to look for diagnostic tests that are not fully dependent on the subjects; rather, they should diagnose developmental dimensions in order to be less affected by disadvantaged contexts. Although this suggestion might not solve the problem of external factors completely, it can arguably reduce their negative effect.

4.1.3 The context of LD identification

The findings show a considerable influence of different contextual factors on the identification process. Here, the context is related to two aspects. First, economic and social or family circumstances of students are relevant. These are mainly poverty, being from rural areas and receiving parental care. Second, school related factors should be considered in terms of classroom conditions and the quality of education.
4.1.3.1 The effect of socioeconomic factors on students’ achievement

A relation between rural areas and poverty emerged from the data in the sense that teachers who work in rural areas complain about the negative effects poverty has on students’ achievements.

*I am talking about my school; it is in a very poor neighbourhood. I receive cases with which I face difficulty to distinguish between who have LD and others who have circumstances that affect their learning so I cannot say that the difficulties of all my students are LD. I exclude some of them when I recognise they do not suffer from LD; however, sometimes a student’s father tells me that he and the mother are illiterate, so it is not fair to leave the child to be lost. So I go back to the class teacher but he does not provide enough support to manage the student’s problem. I am afraid that these students might go to the next grade and have accumulated problems. Therefore, I – as a humanitarian duty – register the student in the programme. However, 70% of my students do not have LD, but it is due to parental negligence and negligence by teachers themselves. My school includes 134 students. An overview of the students is that 90% of the students are below standard; meaning, the sixth grade includes only one or two students who know how to read. So, for others, I cannot tell whether they have LD or circumstances as the surrounding economic circumstances have a definite negative impact on the students.*

(Participant C, Focus group 3)

Participant: *When you come to this teacher’s school, you’ll find the economic situation of students is excellent so the influence on learning would be better, therefore you can find students with only LD; but in my region, the economic situation is mostly below average.*
Researcher: *Where do you teach?*
Participant: *In the village of (...). So, I say that the diagnosis cannot guarantee LD 100%. The living and cultural conditions have an effect on students. There is one or two students who do have LD, but in general, the problems are not because of LD, there are other reasons such negligence, family situations, and sometimes the father is not educated and does not have an educational background, so you see the son follow the footsteps of his father in education.*

(Participant B, Focus group 1)

A discussion of these two quotations will be undertaken in following three sections. These sections will consider the relationships between socioeconomic and parental factors with underachievement and identification of LD (see Figure 4-7).
(a) Poverty and rural areas

These two factors are identified as important by two participants who teach in rural areas. These quotes were stated and discussed in two focus groups where other participants seemed to be aware of their effects and not surprised by raising this issue. The current study cannot estimate how serious and prevalent this phenomenon is because this is not the main aim of the inquiry and therefore it has not been part of the study plan. However, the above data indicate that there is a relationship between poverty and rural areas. Unsurprisingly, this relation has previously been identified by other research (Crosnoe, Mistry, & Elder, 2002; Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011). For example, in the United States in 2002, one fifth of children living in rural areas were considered to be poor (Jolliffe, 2004). As the relationship now becomes clearer, the next paragraph shall examine the relationship between poverty and low parental education.
(b) Poverty, family size and low parental education

Both participants quoted above pointed out that many parents are illiterate or have low education. Therefore, it seems that parents do not, or rather are not able to, help their children with their education. In addition, one participant indicated that children might follow their parents’ footsteps in having a poor attitude towards education. This is not surprising because parents often are the role models and the examples to follow by their children. In addition, it can be argued that when parents lack consideration for education and live in poor conditions, they might sometimes encourage or pressure their children to work to earn money and this phenomenon of child labour, often after school, is observed in many rural areas. Therefore, children cannot focus solely on learning during the day and they might show a pattern of regularly being absent from school or attending with symptoms of fatigue and lack of focus.

**Family size:** Another issue related to socioeconomic impact is having many children in one family which is usually a characteristic feature of poor areas. Two participants (female teacher B, Focus group 6; male teacher D, Focus group 3) who were teaching in poor rural areas expressed that this phenomenon exists in many families as can be seen in the following quotations.

Participant B: *From my experience, LD is more common in rural areas.*
Participant D: *Of course, students from rural areas have lower educational attainment than those in urban areas.*
Participant B: *Because of poverty and illiteracy, a mother gives birth each year which leads to neglecting her kids.*
(Focus group 6)

According to these participants, this phenomenon occurs in poor rural areas more than other areas. Having many children along with being pregnant most of the time weakens the attention needed for supporting children in their learning. The previous participant, participant B, stated on another occasion that she contacted mothers regarding supporting their children’s learning at home and many of these mothers said: ‘Sorry, what can I do?! I cannot support her learning, I have two little kids. Therefore, this will cause a further decline in the already low parental support in poor areas which can have very serious consequences such as missing needed quiet and suitable places for learning
and managing required resources such as books, desks and computers when these are at all available. The relationship between family size (or the number siblings) and schooling has been investigated by many studies for several decades. Early studies seem to support the idea that there is a negative correlation between family size and learning. In this respect, one highly considered model is the quantity-quality (Q-Q) trade-off (Becker & Lewis, 1973). This model proposes that when a family consists of fewer children (lower quantity), more support and resources can be offered for each child, which in turn would result in better educational attainment by the child (better quality). Although this model was supported very early by some studies (Hanushek, 1992; Leibowitz, 1974), more recent studies (Eloundou-Enyegue & Williams, 2006; Li, Dow, & Rosero-Bixby, 2014; Maralani, 2008; Marteleto, 2010) showed various empirical results across the world where the correlation between family size and educational attainment was different from the model ranging from positive, negative and non-existent. These differences occur sometimes in one country, which is reflected by such studies as Maralani (2008) in Indonesia. These studies referred the reason of these differences to the variances in contextual factors, particularly social and economic development. I am inclined to be in favour of this argument rather than accepting the general Q-Q trade-off as a standard. However, if a study can be conducted in poor rural areas in the city of Alahsa (where the current study was conducted), I highly expect to find such correlation. Having a large family size along with low economic and educational support can lead to more hindrances for parents resulting in more limited capacity to support their children.

From the above discussion, a relation can be identified between poverty and parents’ education. In addition, a negative effect on children’s education exists when their parents have low education and particularly if their economic circumstances are unfavourable. Research investigated and identified such relationships (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Duncan, Brooks-gunn, & Klebanov, 1994).

**Influence on literacy:** For more focus on literacy, Eamon (2005) identified a relationship between certain social and demographic characteristics and academic achievement within a sample of 388 young adolescents. The researcher found that reading achievement was influenced by poverty. Although Eamon’s research focused
on adolescents, other research asserted the same impact in children. For example, Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997) argued that students’ achievement is influenced by families’ economic situation in early and middle childhood years far more than later stages. This leads to arguing that adolescence and childhood are clearly affected by poverty; however, adolescents are more aware of and sensitive to economic conditions and this might cause some level of anxiety or depression, which can distract them from focusing on their studies. For children, poverty can cause lack of needed support or resources to develop their basic skills. For parental support, Eamon asserted that her findings were in line other research in relation to the importance of parental support in improving academic achievement. Eamon considered this support as cognitive stimulation at home by providing resources such as books and computers as well as sharing experiences. The missing cognitive stimulation is expected to have a role in leading to the problems mentioned by participants because parents with poor economic and educational conditions are not expected to deliver such stimulation.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the services of the SLDP in poor regions (such as the two cases in the above quotations) are generally directed to students with low achievement. This low achievement is influenced by poor basic skills in early childhood affected by poverty and low parental education. These findings are consistent with previous literature that relates poverty and special educational needs (SEN) placements in a quite similar cause and effect model (poverty – poor early development – low achievement – SEN placements) (Clancy & Scott, 2002; Fletcher & Navarrete, 2011; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006).

(c) Schooling in the rural areas

An important issue raised in the previous quotations was related to how the majority of students lack basic skills and continue to progress to later grades with poor level of achievement. Although the influence of parents has been considered, the percentage of under-achievers is too high. This led to raising critical questions about the school: what is the role it is serving? Why did it not manage to tackle this issue? What are the functional differences between such a school and other mainstream schools?

Basically, public schools in Saudi Arabia are funded by the government. No criteria, ratings, evaluations of schools are applied, and therefore the funding is not related to
these measures, unlike the common practice in the UK. Yet recently, the Council of Ministers established the Public Education Evaluation Commission, which started its functions in the current academic year (2015-2016) with private schools and this will be followed by evaluating public schools. Therefore, the participants’ schools are unlikely to lose their funding although one can notice differences in schooling provision between schools even within the same urban neighbourhood. These differences are not expected to cause such high percentage of under-achievers. Unfortunately, not enough data (from this study) can provide an idea about the exact reasons for this observation. However, based on some indications provided by the participants, I will offer my perspective and analysis of why such schools in poor rural areas might suffer from lower quality of schooling. First, participant C (Focus group 3) placed the blame on class teachers:

*Participant:* I always repeat that the outcomes of class teachers are bad.
*Researcher:* Why?
*Participant:* They do not teach. One teacher has just been replaced because he does not perform. He is busy and repeatedly absent, sometimes for one or two months to avoid lenders. This situation lasted for three years. When we discussed with teachers of the second and third grade about their students (who do not read or write) regarding providing them with more support, the teachers argued that they have to finish teaching the curriculum and they are not willing to teach these students the alphabet.

(Participant C, Focus group 3)

Teachers usually request to be transferred to teach in the nearest schools to their homes. Therefore, teachers who are from poor areas return to teach in these areas. Poverty might affect their productivity in many ways as seen in the story in the quote. Second, these stories raise another issue; if this issue took place in a school located in a wealthy urban area, would this problem persist for a similar amount of time (three years) or would it be addressed quickly? Again, educated parents living in more urbanised areas might complain about this situation which may lead to an earlier response from the school. In addition, I think when a school’s location is near the centres of the Department of Education, it is more likely to receive more support, attention and control than those in remote rural areas. Therefore, teachers might show less commitment in such distant areas. Finally, I believe that weaknesses and deficiencies can be confounded by factors related to the context of the teachers themselves. Teachers in the second and following years face problems related to poverty in addition to having
to deal with students who have weak basic skills. The participants highlighted that teachers (working with students in these following years) argue that they cannot re-educate these students in literacy because they have to finish the required curriculum which may lead to taking much more time, particularly within the context of poor parental support.

4.1.3.2 The context of regular classes

A participant narrated a story about registering a student based on the results of the diagnosis test. The teacher realised afterwards that the student had no LD. The following quotation relates the reason of this misidentification.

I have a student who got zero in the diagnosis test in all sections. At the beginning of the sessions, he did not know how to read or write. When he got used to me, he completed the alphabet within a week! OK, I went back to the diagnosis test and related assessment trying to find the problem. Then, I found out this student had a ‘classroom phobia’ because of the teacher. He was scared of him, and when he was asked questions by the teacher, he was afraid. He was also thinking that I’m similar to his teacher; however, when he realised the difference and saw the resources room and the presents, he responded to me. So, I realised that he had a classroom phobia rather than LD, so I could not continue with him as I gave him another test and he was able to read sentences and had good spelling, so why should I keep him in the programme? I give that opportunity to another student who had LD. So, a student is affected by the environment like the classroom and the number of students in class.

(Participant C, Focus group 3)

Two main points that can be raised from this incident include the following. **First**, the context of the classroom plays an important role in affecting the students’ educational attainment. In other words, some students can be considered as SWLD because of the effect of their class context on their learning while students with a similar calibre might be seen as smart in another supportive context. In this incident, the student (I will call him Ali for the purpose of this study) seemed to have a poor relationship with the class teacher and to lack the motivation to learn; however, when the LD teacher built a good relationship with Ali and provided a friendly environment conducive to learning, Ali demonstrated a quick and excellent improvement and a positive response towards learning. Although the data from this study only reveal one such incident, several factors related to the classroom context would probably have similar effect on learning,
including the class size (as suggested by the participant narrating the incident), the position of students’ desk in the classroom (front, middle or back row) and the relationship between students and their class teacher and with each other. This argument is much related to the points made about the importance of improving the classroom environment and removing barriers to learning; this approach is applied in English schools and is described as dyslexia-friendly (Armstrong & Squires, 2015; Mackay, 2012; Squires & McKeown, 2006). Therefore, the context of the classroom should be carefully considered in the general educational system and in programmes designed for students with SEN. One participant (Teacher interview 4) mentioned that he does consider some classroom aspects, such as the students’ position in the classroom, in general assessment. Second, this narrative seems to support the model of Response To Intervention (RTI), which was discussed in the literature chapter (Armstrong & Squires, 2015; Bradley et al., 2005). Also, Alquraini (2010) argues that RTI is an effective solution to address many challenges and to develop Saudi special education in early intervention in particular.

If RTI is applied, such a student (Ali) will probably do better with the support of the second wave of response, and this support would continue; however, such LD programme is not designed to support such cases, which usually results in spending much time and effort (in the diagnosis process including taking the parents’ permission and supporting the student to adapt to the resources room), while at the end, Ali was dropped from the programme because the programme does not aim to address such a problem. As a result, such a student who has learning difficulties (which are not considered by the class teachers nor the LD programme) might become lost. Rather, RTI is expected to be an effective approach to tackle such cases.

4.1.3.3 Quality of education

This point can be related to the previous one in terms of the quality of teaching as teachers are part of the classroom context. In Section 4.1.2.1, a discussion was drawn on how LD teachers pay more consideration to students who are referred to the programme by excellent teachers as these students usually tend to be more likely to have LD as opposed to students who commonly suffer from ineffective teaching. In addition, some participants indicated that not all registered students have real LD as some lack the
opportunity to have quality education. This seems to be similar to a concern raised in
the US in the late 1990s, when the percentage of students identified as SWLD
increased, exceeding 50% of students with special needs, which indicated probable
misidentification (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Also, the issue led researchers
to doubt the effectiveness of the discrepancy approach and to investigate or develop
other ways to find a more accurate method to deal with students who were suspected of
having LD. One of the main models developed to overcome this problem is the
response-to-intervention (RTI) model which aims to provide better education and treat
students in a careful, inclusive and precise manner (Kavale et al., 2005).

Registered students: 16
Student with real LD: 8
The justification of the difference: *I think the reason due to the lack of quality education.*
(Questionnaire: 5th part/ item 2)

Registered students: 5
Student with real LD: 3
The justification of the difference: *The quick response that I noticed from the students confirms the emergence of difficulties from carelessness. In addition, the way of teaching in previous years has an effect on that.*
(Questionnaire: 5th part/ item 2)

In both examples (teachers’ referrals and registering non-SWLD), LD teachers assert
how the quality of education has an important role in referrals to the SLDP. Future
research should consider how quality of education can be achieved and what the
possible implications of this factor would be within the SLDP. I believe when quality of
education is achieved, the number of referred students and those registered on the
programme will decrease because many SWLD will not be considered as having LD
due to an expected positive response to effective teaching. This discussion is in line with
a study by Fletcher et al. (2004), who analysed four reports in the US in the period
2001-2002 and found that all four reports indicated that the number of students who
were identified as having LD could be decreased by providing better quality reading
instruction. The MOE in Saudi Arabia should be encouraged by such results and the
supporting literature to review current practices in light of previous research and
international experiences to improve education generally and the way of addressing LD
in particular.
4.1.4 Factors affecting registration

This section is related to Section 4.1.3 because it is an aspect of the context; however, I preferred to separate them for the following reason. The section discussing the context was about the indirect effect of the context on the identification process. For example, poverty is associated with a chain of effects which impacts many processes leading to the process of identification. In this section however, the considered factors are mostly directed by stakeholders in the education process, such as the school staff.

4.1.4.1 Class teachers

The findings show a strong and common influence associated with class teachers and the administration. This influence appears in different forms.

*Sometimes class teachers pressure the LD teacher to register a student (who does not have LD), and it happens that this pressure comes from the school administration so the principal says ‘take this student and look for a solution for him’, and similarly the school counsellor says ‘find a solution for this student’, so I come under pressure and need to override as I feel obliged to register him.*

(Teacher interview 4)

Above, the participant provided various examples of the influences practised by class teachers, head teachers and school counsellors where they ask the LD teacher to tackle a student’s problem. Here, two questions should be raised. First, the school staff seemed to view the LD teacher or the SLDP as a way to ‘get rid’ of some students’ problems which are not necessarily related to LD, which raises a question about why some school staff have such a view. Armstrong and Squires (2015) pointed out a similar indication as they reported that the label can offer nothing more than providing calm or relief for teachers about their responsibility to support a labelled student to achieve appropriate attainment. I present below three examples that can possibly justify why school staff in some situations put pressure on LD teachers to register students who are not eligible for the LD programme.

1- The general students’ low achievement at school could lead the staff to be under pressure and try to resolve this issue by any possible method, even those not relevant to the aims of the programme.
2- Low awareness of the LD programme (including its basic principles) by the school staff might lead them to deal with this issue incorrectly, as they may think the SLDP is similar to a remedial educational programme (see Section 4.2.3.2).

3- The personality of the LD teacher might play a significant role. If the LD teacher has a strong personality, other school staff may be more likely not to put pressure on him/her.

Second, when the participant said ‘to override’, he means that such a student should not be registered but the LD teacher’s decision will override the rule (or guidelines) to register the student. Because of the limited places in the programme, this ‘overriding’ possibly has effects on service allocation to other SWLD which is not consistent with aims and principles of the SLDP.

Class teachers can put pressure on LD teachers to register some of their students by repeatedly requesting them to do so, as can be seen in the previous quotation. Alternatively, if the LD teachers refuse to register their student(s), they might use the power of the administration to force them, as explained by one LD teacher in the following quote.

Some class teachers, when they have some students’ parents who are unsatisfied with their children’s achievement and complain about this issue, these class teachers don’t want to be the ones responsible for this issue and come to me saying ‘write a report to the administration that this student has LD which causes a negative response to my teaching’. This teacher wants to evade the supervisor’s blame but actually his performance with students is poor. And if I did not accept that, the class teacher goes to the administration complaining that the LD teacher is not cooperating and does not treat our students!

(Participant C, Focus group 3)

This is an important declaration because it justifies a key observation of the reasons some class teachers try hard to have their students registered in the LD programme. In this quotation, the class teacher appears to have failed in helping the students to reach a satisfactory level of achievement, and therefore the teacher found that a convenient excuse would be to provide the students with the label of learning disabilities. Such
behaviour is considered as a major criticism of labelling (in such LD programme) according to the opponents of the programme (Riddck, 2012).

4.1.4.2 The administration

Many participants declare that there is pressure applied by the administration. The reason behind this pressure on the LD teachers can be related to external factors rather than academic goals. The following quotation provides an example of such issue.

The researcher: Does the administration force you to register a student?
Participant: Some of them do that indeed. Some administrations ask me to register the student regardless of the diagnosis. If the LD teacher is sincere in his work, the outcome will be good; so when they (the administration) see such outcomes, they want to register their family and then you have to register them. In one school, the head teacher asked me to register a student who is retaking courses, so when I examined his file, I found out this student was in the programme 2 years before. Basically, he was not considered to have LD but a mental retardation, and the head teacher has a family relationship with him. So, he doesn't want to shock his father by telling him that his child has mental illness!
(Teacher interview 3)

Two factors can be understood from the above incident. First, the relationships of family and friends (kinship in this quotation) is highly regarded and valued in the Saudi society because of culture and customs. It is common in Saudi Arabia that people consider not helping relatives a shameful act even if there are more deserving people, for example for a job, even if the relative is not qualified. This practice is sometimes known as nepotism (‘wasta’ in Arabic). It is a complex subject and serious issue in Saudi Arabia because it affects every establishment regardless of its size (Fawzi & Almarshed, 2013; Hayfaa & Saleema, 2011). In addition, the influence of family relations has been mentioned by another participant (Teacher D, Focus group 3) who stated that class teachers are occasionally under pressure from their relatives to allow their children to pass although the teacher should not do that according to the assessment. Secondly, labelling with learning disabilities is seen as a rescue strategy for academic problems or unsatisfactory situations. By contract, sometimes the administration does not force LD teachers to register students into the programme.
The administration does not interfere in my own work. I communicate with the school counsellor and he often suggests registering some students because he thinks they need it; but if I could not register them because, for example, I have the maximum number of students already, he would accept that willingly. The most important thing is that I explain my work to the school counsellor and the head teacher so they understand and never force me to do something.

(Teacher interview 4)

This participant raised a justification about why the administration does not force him to do something he does not wish to do, that he explained to them about the programme or responsibilities so they became aware of those particulars and he managed to convince them. This also refers to the three points which have been mentioned earlier concerning the reasons for the pressure placed on LD teachers.

According to Figure 4-8, more than 89% of the participants faced pressure from their administration to register students without LD. Although about 30% of participants found that a rare occurrence, this is still a prominent phenomenon which needs to be considered and tackled carefully.

![Figure 4-8 The administration influence on registration](image)

Do you find pressure from the school administration to register some students, who do not suffer from learning disabilities, in the programme?

4.1.4.3 The Department of Education

On some occasions, the Department of Education transfers students to schools that have the SLDP to be registered there.
Participant C: some students are referred to our school to diagnose them because they repeatedly become retaking-courses.

Participant A: Mostly, such transferred students have severe LD or are considered as slow learners.

Researcher: What about if you found they do not have LD, do you have to register them?

Participant A: We reject the request but, for example, there were three cases where I have been forced by the Special Education Department (in the Department of Education) to teach them. One of these students had autism while the other two had mental retardation and their families did not accept registering them in classes for mentally challenged students as they were afraid for their children from a negative reputation.

Participant C: We reject them; but in some cases, we are forced to continue with them.

Participant B: So with slow learners we give them double the lessons we give to LD students.

(Focus group 6)

As can be seen above, pressure by the Special Education Department on LD teachers is very clear. Although LD teachers sometimes have the choice to reject transferred students, it is very strange to force LD teachers to register students who are clearly not considered as having LD. Possibly, the Special Education Department seeks to address students’ needs through a possible way within the services under its management. What supports this argument is the participants’ statement that students’ parents refused to register their children in classes for mentally challenged students. In this case, the Department seems to have found the best way would be to resolve this problem by providing these students with extra support available through the LD services. Although parents are not seen here as a direct influence on registration, they are still considered as a factor in decision making in the SLDP. Again, the SLDP has in this case been deviated from its original goals and principles, but interestingly, this time it was by the Special Educational Department which is assumed to be keen to keep these principles adhered to perfectly.

4.1.5 Techniques and tests for identification

After LD teachers have collected names of students for referral and retaking courses, they apply certain procedures and techniques to investigate their LD and to list students with more priority and assign others to the waiting list. LD teachers start by using
general techniques such as interviews. If these techniques reveal possible LD, teachers would then apply a diagnostic test which is assumed to identify the LD of a particular student. The results of the identification techniques are reported in an ‘LD file’ by LD teachers regarding each of the SWLD. Figure 4-9 presents these procedures with some examples of influential factors that affect these procedures. Details of the diagnosis procedure will be discussed in more depth in the following sections.

![Figure 4-9 Procedures of identification](image)

The findings show many similarities and differences between teachers in the usage and perception of the identification techniques. The techniques that have been used by the participants and highlighted by the guidelines are: interviews, observation, evaluating students’ work, reviewing students’ portfolios and conferring with the school counsellor.

In the following sections, the consideration of these techniques will be discussed in two parts. The first part (section 4.1.5.1) will discuss each technique in relation to the participants’ perception and usage of those techniques. The second part (Section 4.1.5.2) will discuss why techniques are often implemented differently by different teachers. For more in-depth analysis, this part focuses on one technique ‘observation’ which will not be discussed in the first part to avoid repetition.
4.1.5.1 Techniques used by teachers

(a) Interviews

The findings show that interviews are one of the most highly valued techniques which are often applied by the participants. The questionnaire findings demonstrate that this technique is considered by all participants as an ‘important’ process, which is used by all of the teachers as the majority of participants stated that they ‘always’ use this technique while others used it ‘sometimes’. However, participants reflected different perceptions about the purpose of using this technique.

The interview focuses on introducing the teacher and student to each other and to obtain simple personal information and information on hobbies...etc., but learning disabilities are not diagnosis in interviews.
(Questionnaire: 2nd part, item 4)

Researcher: What about interviews, do you apply them?
Participant E: Yes, it is important to build familiarity with students.
Participant D: yes, I interview the student before the diagnostic test and find out about her characteristics.
Participant A: I must make her familiar with me and the resources room before adopting the diagnostic test because she is not used to this situation, so it might cause uneasiness; and the psychological aspects could affect the test results.
(Focus group 5)

... See, the LD teachers -after four years of experience- know that this student has learning disabilities after as simple as one or two glimpses, and they know what should be asked. For example, I ask a student about similar letters, if he made mistakes, he would need to do the diagnostic test; if he did not make mistakes, ok, that’s it.
(Teacher interview 4)

Researcher: How does the interview help you to identify learning disabilities?
Participant: Because of having experience, you know that this student needs or does not need the learning disabilities programme, what category this student belongs to, whether they have mental retardation or speech problems or others; so, I make sure about these things.
(Teacher interview 4)
From the above, it can be concluded that there are two main goals of the using interviews. First, the interview process is considered as a facilitator or an introductory means to apply other processes and techniques rather than standing as an identification technique. In that way, the LD teachers try to break the ice between them and the students, which can help to better receive the diagnostic test and any other instruction or teaching without apprehension or fear. Second, some participants highlighted the use of interviews for identification purposes. For example, some participants indicated that interviews assisted them to check the students’ social, psychological and educational circumstances. As can be seen in the quotation above, one LD teacher indicated that interviews helped him to recognise whether or not a student had mental retardation. However, although only one participant declared that interviews do not serve as a diagnosis tool of LD, many participants indicated both goals (introductory and diagnostic). Interestingly, none of the participants stated that they used formal interviews, prepared certain questions in advance or standardised forms for identification purposes. Therefore, the questions of the interviews were most likely to be slightly different according to each teacher’s experience. Two participants demonstrated high confidence in their ability to recognise SWLD by asking certain questions. These participants believed that this ability (recognising SWLD by a selection of questions) is a result of years of experience in dealing with SWLD. Such confidence may have a negative impact as it seemed to be excessive. This point is further discussed in Section 4.2.3.3(b).

(b) Evaluating students’ work

The guidelines of the SLDP (Almoady et al., 2013) highlight ‘evaluating student work’ as one of the identification techniques. However, it does not mention whether this method is compulsory or not. Two female teachers stated (in Focus group 6) that they apply this technique (see the gender aspect in Section 4.2.3.3(c)). Many participants indicated that they do not use it. This raises a concern about failing to collect enough information about students to apply proper assessment. Particularly, findings present that LD teachers, in many cases, collect limited information about students from classroom teachers only. Armstrong and Squires (2015) and Reid (2016) emphasised the need for much more comprehensive information to apply a full assessment which requires a combination of a range of strategies and different sources of information,
such as tests, classroom performances, learners’ individual profiles and the views of classroom teachers. This issue could be tackled by writing the policy clearly, in a way the teachers would easily identify what is compulsory, recommended or needed in certain situations. Failure to provide clear instructions might lead some teachers to be keen on adopting what is recommended and to ignore what is compulsory. For more discussion of issues related to clarity, refer to Section 4.2.3.2.

(c) Reviewing students’ portfolios and conferring with the school counsellors

Although reviewing portfolios and conferring with the school counsellor (SC) seems to be in the guidelines as two different methods to collect needed information about students, they are very much related. This relationship lies in the fact that the SC is the person responsible for preparing the students’ portfolios using all the required information including health, family and educational development aspects. The following quotation includes different points underlying these two techniques and their relation to each other.

Participant D: The school counsellor has adequate information about all student circumstances... I’m talking about my situation; our school counsellor is excellent.
Participant E: Unfortunately, some school counsellors are lacking experience in two aspects: the social situation of students and learning disabilities in general.
Participant C: The school counsellor receives everything about students and knows their circumstances.
Participant B: Our school counsellor was busy studying for a higher degree, so I could not take any information from her except some aspects of behavioural problems for some students at the end of the term.
Researcher: What about information that you can take from the student portfolio?
Participant A: The student portfolio was empty. However, the school counsellor has information about a student, but does not make effort to write it down.
Participant E: It is mostly filled as a procedure, even behavioural information is not certainly correct. So, there is not much benefit in using it.
Participant B: Basically, the portfolio does not help me except by providing some basic information about the student.

(Focus group 5)
Participants’ perspectives about the SC are not similar because of their different experiences with different school counsellors. The teachers (who dealt with an excellent SC) explained the importance of conferring with the SC and how the SC can help by providing significant information for identification of students with LD. Particularly, the students’ details are sent to and collected by the SC. Some other teachers are not satisfied with their SC as they did not provide them with the needed information. Reasons for unsatisfactory provision of information can be different. Participant B justified the low level of provision by the fact that their SC was busy with higher education. Also, this problem might have resulted from the ambiguous role of counsellors. In other words, LD teachers’ high expectations of counsellors in providing detailed information about students could lead to dissatisfaction if these expectations are not met. Two studies (Al-Ghamdi, 1999; Alghamdi & Riddick, 2011) indicated counsellors’ role in Saudi Arabia is seen variously by school staff. This problem and other barriers to practising their roles are referred to different reasons, such as ambitious policy guidelines, high student ratios and lack of knowledge and training.

Whatever the reason, this phenomenon can impact negatively on understanding and collecting enough information about students who are undergoing diagnosis. Also, this low-level provision reflects on the value of using students’ portfolios. In the quotations above, the teachers who criticised the SC, they also pointed out that the portfolios did not contain enough, accurate information. However, in some cases, there might be an efficient SC providing some weak portfolios as can be understood from Participant A. The following quotations support these criticisms.

Participant A: Basically, the exclusion criteria –which we apply in the identification of learning disabilities- we do not apply them seriously. For example, some students with visual impairment are referred to us.
Researcher: How? Do you not have their portfolio?
Participant A: Many of them are described in their portfolio as healthy or are not diagnosed. This is an old record; the school counsellor puts it, but does not read it.
Participant B: This is in the cases where the portfolio exists, basically.
Participant C: It is only a routine procedure that the student is assigned a portfolio; but is the recorded information accurate? I think mostly not.
(Focus group 3)
The portfolio is assumed to provide details about a student’s health and special needs such as visual impairment. Participant A explained that the absence of such details could lead to identification errors. For example, when the LD teacher finds in a student’s portfolio that his/her vision is described as healthy, while they have a visual impairment which causes mistakes and difficulties in the literacy diagnosis, the LD teacher might assign him/her as having LD. The participants show clear disappointment as they cannot rely on the portfolio. Particularly, the three participants (A, B and C) criticised how the details are filled as a routine or mandatory job rather than a significant source of information that needs much caution because important consequences (e.g. interventions) would occur based on such information.

4.1.5.2 Reasons for differences in adopting identification techniques

LD teachers sometimes used the same methods but differences could be identified in the way of adopting such techniques. For example, LD teachers stated their use of observation; however, they applied it in different ways which could be categorised in two types. First, many teachers collected the needed information (which was assumed to be taken from observation) from their interviews or from class teachers. In fact, they did not make any observation; rather, they filled the space assigned for observation comments in the LD file based on other means. The difference between LD teachers was how they explain, justify or consider their ways of dealing with this method (observation).

Some of teachers stated that they made a quick observation at the time when they took their students out from class or during the break time. However, this form of observation happened after registration. So, this was not intended for identification. This informal way of applying observational assessment does not seem to meet what Reid (2016) discussed. Reid explained that observational assessment should be carried out through different contexts and times. Also, early preparation of an observational framework is needed. This should include important points beyond just aiming to observe a child’s difficulties in learning; rather, it should aim to gain deeper insights into the child’s responses, level of needed assistance and other processes of learning. Reid, therefore, suggested many areas (each one includes different questions) for observational assessment, such as attention, organisation, interaction, motivation and learning preferences.
A few participants declared they did not apply observation as an identification method. Hence, they did not argue that class teachers’ notes were sufficient based on their observation; rather, they complained about the lack of time that precluded their implementation of such method.

Teacher: *When I go around the class, I observe the situation of students including my student.*
Researcher: *Do you plan for this observation?*
Teacher: *No, I do not have a plan, sometimes I go to the class teacher and sit with him and observe, and sometimes I go to my students in the morning assembly and talk with them.*
Researcher: *Do you find this observation effective?*
Teacher: *If I organised it, I would benefit from it; however, I do not use it effectively.*
Researcher: *Ok, why do you not use it?*
Teacher: *I know that observation gives more information than diagnosis; but I have a programme and it is impossible to observe more than twelve students within one month, I would be held accountable for falling short.*
(Teacher interview 3)

Teacher: *To be honest, whether I plan to observe the students or not, I will see them anyway because we are required to do rotation, where I can observe my student and can note whether he sat alone or ate. I do not talk about the diagnosis period because it is only four weeks, I do not think the teacher will be able to make it in this period.*
Researcher: *So, how is the LD file filled in terms of observation?*
Teacher: *It depends, for example, sometimes we ask the school counsellor.*
Researcher: *What about the observation in the physical education class or at break time?*
Teacher: *No, actually, it does not happen. But as I told you at the break time, I sometimes have a rotation. Actually, for the physical education class, I do not go to observe them.*
(Teacher interview 2)

*Observation is not applied but I take notes about each student to fulfil my duty towards the supervisor.*
(Focus group 5, participant C)

However, many LD teachers believed that the aim of observation is to collect some information about students’ learning including skills or difficulties. In addition, the
persons who often observe and interact with the students on a daily basis are class teachers, and therefore, they are likely to be the most aware of the needed information. Therefore, these LD teachers argue that asking class teachers (about the required information) based on their daily observation would provide more information than LD teachers’ observation which can be limited by time.

*Observation is through the class teacher; I meet the teacher in the teachers’ room and ask him: what does this student suffer from? What did you observe? And the teacher, of course, benefits you because he observes more than you do.*

(Teacher interview 1)

Researcher: *What about observation?*
Teacher: *We visit the class teacher, and ask about the student and his situation.*

(Focus group 3, participant D)

This argument seems to have some logic; however, it misses some important points. Class teachers are not specialists in LD and a number of them lack experience in educating generally and in the field of LD in particular. Even though the LD teachers might ask them about details, class teachers may still miss some specifics that are worth mentioning. For example, they may not pay early attention to important details of students’ learning such as their understanding of instructions or their out-of-classroom activities, and therefore their initial observation may well be insufficient. Another criticism of that argument is that the problem might be related to teaching in the classroom or interaction between students and their teachers. Such problem is hardly noticed by class teachers themselves and sometimes it is difficult to inform others about their own teaching weaknesses.

In addition, some LD teachers applied the observation method by themselves, in different situations (e.g. morning assembly) as required in the LD file.

Participant A: *Yes, we observe learning disabilities in classes and during break time.*
Participant B: *In classes and morning assembly and break time.*
Participant E: *Even if I attend class, I have a form to fill with the class teachers, because she will be more effective and will observe the student in different situations.*

(Focus group 5)
Participant B: *I attend and observe the students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom; mostly their self-esteem is low as a result of how the teachers and students view them! Unfortunately, most of our teachers do not motivate an underachieving student.*

Participant A: *I observe the student in the morning assembly to see how she interact with her colleagues and how she can be distracted.*

Participant B: *The most important time is the morning assembly; it shows the struggling and normal students.*

(Focus group 6)

The participants in these quotations explained that they applied observation in different situations and demonstrated its high importance. This raises a question about the reasons the participants show differences in adopting such a method although they have similar responsibilities and allocated time. The answer to this question is discussed in different sections of this chapter, particularly in Section 4.2.3 related to implementation. The following points summarise the most important reasons related to differences in applying observation.

1- Section 4.2.3.4 on organisational characteristics discusses the point of the time specified for diagnosis which was seen by participants as insufficient for accurate identification. The required time sometimes differs from a teacher to another, which depends on the number of students and the number of LD teacher in a particular school.

2- It was noted from the previous quotations, that the participants who applied observation were female, which might support the discussion in Section 4.2.3.3 on teachers’ characteristics that female teachers may be more enthusiastic in applying stipulated techniques making them more likely to implement the SLDP more ideally.

3- The clarity of guidelines (in the manual of the SLDP) is significant to achieve fidelity of implementation as can be seen in Section 4.2.3.2 on programme characteristics. Although the guidelines related to the SLDP highlight observation as a method of diagnosis and provide more description on this techniques than other methods, the guidelines address observation in only very short paragraph which does not contain some important detail about it, including what needs to be observed, the duration of observation, how observation can be interpreted and what the indications of different behaviours are. Additionally,
although the LD file includes several points to look for during the observation process, these are very limited and seem to be superficial with a remarkable lack of sufficient instructions on application and interpretation. For example, the file includes a question about observation during break time which consists of three items: 1- Does the student eat his/her meal? 2- He/she participates with his/her colleagues (always, sometimes, never), and 3- Other notes (open). In addition, the LD teachers do not receive follow-up training which can direct them to use a similar or more effective way of adopting the technique of observation and how to interpret such observation. This point is further discussed in Section 4.2.3.1 on teacher training.

4- LD teachers were directed ‘sometimes’ flexibly as is discussed in Section 4.2.5 on flexibility. This is most likely to influence the selection of what methods the teachers use and how they implement them. Therefore, the use of such methods will differ according to each teacher’s judgment and preference.

It can be noticed from above that the systematic issues in the education structure have a great impact on teachers’ practice. Therefore, the reasons for their shortcomings in achieving better implementation of identification and intervention should be understood. For example, if the educational system provided enough training, clear plans and constructive feedback, the practice and results of the teachers’ practice would be highly improved. In addition, teachers’ implementation is affected by how the policy focuses on completing teachers’ tasks and routine work more than supporting all SWLD by directing teachers’ to manage their tasks according to different students’ needs (see Section 4.2.7). Furthermore, Section 4.1.4 discussed that the school administration can impact on teachers’ practice by asking them to register students who have no LD. Therefore, the development of the educational system including the policy and schools’ contexts is expected to result in improvement of teachers’ practice.

4.1.5.3 The IQ test

(a) The difference between beliefs and practice in applying the IQ test

The findings show limited use of the IQ test in the SLDP although its importance was repeatedly stated by the participants.
Figure 4-10 Teachers’ beliefs and practice in relation to the IQ test

Figure 4-10 shows that just over half of participants (55%) stated they ‘never use the IQ test while they value it as important or helpful’. The following quotations present the participants’ justifications for this mismatch between their belief and practice regarding the IQ test.

*Because the IQ test is not available, nor the time for it.*  
(Questionnaire 2nd part, item 8)

*It is not available except in the assessment centre which does not accept the referrals easily.*  
(Questionnaire 2nd part, item 8)

*It is because of the absence of an accurate IQ test which is standardised for the Saudi culture. Also, we are not trained to apply it and do not have a psychologist in the school to apply it.*  
(Questionnaire 2nd part, item 8)

Basically, LD teachers had the option to refer a student to the assessment centre in case they suspected the student’s IQ to be below average. However, the majority of the participants pointed out that they did not use this option. Their reluctance seemed to be related to two reasons. First, the complexity of the referral procedures hindered them from asking for such option, and in particular, this process would take too much time while the identification period was very short as described before. Second, some
participants stated that they did not have much confidence in the IQ results issued by the assessment centre.

The participants also mentioned the justification that the currently used IQ test is not standardised for Saudi culture. This can be considered under bias in test content (Frederickson & Cline, 2009) as the test is prepared for people from a different background. However, Stanovich (1988) appears to view differences in IQ scores as not relevant because these students benefit equally from such a teaching programme. In addition, participants raised only these justifications. However, because of repeated observations by the participants of inaccurate IQ scores, other implied factors could impact the scores, including the IQ test implementation. These concerns should be paid special attention in future research.

(b) The reasons for the need to apply the IQ test

_In reality, an IQ test is mostly unavailable; as a result, this is an obstacle for us as teachers when dealing with some cases, particularly, those on the borderline (slow learners)_

(Questionnaire part 2 item 8)

The participants explained the significance of the IQ test as there was a need for them to exclude students with below average IQ according to the adopted IQ-discrepancy model (see Section 4.1.6 on the concept of LD for more discussion). However, if the score did not indicate below average IQ, the participants did not state any role for the IQ test in indicating whether the student had or did not have LD. Because of the absence of adopting the IQ test, some participants highlighted their uncertainty about some cases whether they had LD or some other special needs (slow learning or mental retardation). Although these reasons are important, they seem to be limited. Various literature studies (Armstrong & Squires, 2015; Reid, 2016) explain more reasons and benefits that can be gained from an IQ test. For example, through the exploration of scores, differences can be identified between visual and verbal scores; deficits can also be seen in speed processing and working memory (Armstrong & Squires, 2015). Having understood such differences and signs, these can be considered in the individual plan.
(c) The contradictions in applying the IQ test

*The department of learning disabilities does not require applying the IQ test in the identification procedure, although it is important. I consider the IQ test as a borderline procedure to judge whether a student falls within the category of learning disabilities or not. As we know from our study that learning disabilities fall within average or above average intelligence; and this is essential to distinguish learning disabilities from other categories of special education needs.*

(Teacher interview 6)

*It is not required for the programme entry (and the results from the assessment centre are not accurate).*

(Questionnaire 5th part, item 3)

Although the manual adopts a definition which is based on the IQ-discrepancy model and stipulates the IQ test as a method used in the identification procedure, participants pointed out that this test was not required and that referrals procedures for this test were not easy. This seems to include more than one contradiction. The LD teachers believed in the IQ-discrepancy model which is adopted by the manual as well. However, the MOE does not facilitate the practice of this part of the manual. Because of all these factors, LD teachers became confused in many cases because their beliefs and the instructions contradicted the real practice of identification. This led the teachers to pursue personal endeavours which were not based on scientific grounds. Therefore, the teachers’ outcomes of their identification are expected to be varied and may have errors at least according to the discrepancy model. The variety of inaccurate judgments implies injustice toward students where their intervention would differ according to their LD teacher rather than the adopted theory. This problem can be addressed in different ways. For example, if the discrepancy model is not suitable for the current education system, the programme makers can study how to develop a way that is more consistent with the model or come up with another model of dealing with SWLD.

4.1.5.4 Diagnostic tests

Two types of tests were used by the participants. First, the academic test was the main (formal) test used by all participants. Second, the development test was used informally by some participants.
(a) The academic test

Responses to the questionnaire (2\textsuperscript{nd} part, item 6) showed that all participants applied the academic test and valued it as ‘important’.

\textit{The academic test benefits you a lot in discovering learning disabilities; let’s say by 80% or 85%; while the other things, you need to investigate them.}

(Teacher interview 4)

Researcher: \textit{What do you rely on for preparing the individual plan?}
Participant A: \textit{On the diagnostic test to some extent... I may be different from other teachers in my teaching techniques and presentation, that’s all.}

(Focus group 4)

Strengths of identification in the SLDP: \textit{Academic tests specify the aspects of the academic difficulties in an accurate way.}

(5\textsuperscript{th} part, item 3)

Participants’ views on the academic test can be analysed in terms of two related aspects. **First**, the academic test is the main compulsory test in the SLDP. Therefore, when participants mention ‘the diagnostic test’, they usually refer to the academic test; meaning this test is the only authorised test for diagnosing LD in the programme. Furthermore, the individual plan (see the second quotation above) can be based on this academic test, and the student will be taught according to this plan. Thus, it is clear that most activities of the SLDP are highly related to or based on the academic test which might lead teachers to highly value it. **Second**, some participants highlighted the capability of this test to diagnose learning disabilities or academic difficulties. However, this point is not consistent with all the data. For example, a participant (Teacher interview 3) stated that “\textit{the current diagnostic tests are very weak; all of them are based on the teachers’ effort.”} In addition, the discussion in Section 4.1.6 on the concept of LD concept shows that participants believed that SWLD exhibited both academic and developmental problems. They explained that diagnosis and treatment of the developmental problems were more important as these are the root causes of the academic problems. However, as the academic test is the only stipulated test and all the work of the SLDP is almost reliant on it, the participants had to adopt its results. At the same time, some participants highlighted that this academic test was not enough to
diagnose LD among other criticisms, which are discussed below. Based on this account, the holistic analysis of the differences in the participants’ indications revealed an influential factor; the high reliance on the current test (the first aspect) seemed to have a significant impact on the participants’ perspectives (the second aspect). They would not declare that this test was not important or useless while all their work depended on it. Therefore, the context of practical work might lead teachers to express attitudes that associate high value to this test. However, if they had been provided with different diagnostic tests, they might choose an alternative and assign less value to the current test. This can be perceived from the following participants’ critiques of the test.

*The diagnostic test does not reveal whether this student has learning disabilities or not, because the current test is totally academic. However, there are other characteristics that play a role in learning disabilities, such as hyperactivity and attention deficits.*

(Participant A, Focus group 4)

*The current diagnostic tests are very weak; all of them are based on teachers’ efforts... Most of the students registered on the programme are under-achievers or show carelessness; why did this happen? Because there is no diagnosis test to distinguish whether this is a student with learning disability student or not...*

(Teacher interview 3)

These quotations discuss two points. **First**, the diagnostic test is designed and prepared by LD teachers rather than psychologists and is not based on research. Participants believed that this was a crucial weakness of the test which caused a lack of reliability and credibility as they did not trust the test results, which they claimed would not always be right. A similar problem was found in other countries by Sideridis (2007), who summarised concerns related to the identification of LD across eight different countries. Two of these concerns are associated with standardised measures of ability as either they are absent or the validity of their identification criteria is doubtful. **Second**, the participants argued that relying only on the academic test would result in including many non-SWLD under the LD category. Therefore, the academic test is lacking and cannot always identify academic problems. Participants stated the importance of applying other tests such as the development or the LD tests as can be seen in the following section.
(b) The development test

The underlying causes of academic difficulties are basically development difficulties. However, since we target the academic aspects, we turn a blind eye to the developmental aspects; but if there is a developmental specialist with a learning disabilities teacher, the matter will be much easier because he/she will help him/her in addressing developmental questions.

(Participant D, Focus group 2)

Researcher: Do you mean that you consider the development aspects in your identification?

Participant E: The focus is on the academic aspects, but the consideration of the development ones differs from one teacher to another. Some teachers focus more on development when they collect information about students.

(Focus group 1)

Participant: Basically, the programme in all of Saudi Arabia is academic, there is no developmental one.

Researcher: Do you mean the test?

Participant: All of the programme and plans; if they included development parts and there was a development test, this would have been a requirement from us. Development tests are a lot more related to attention, cognition and thinking, and memory. If these aspects were required from us, the learning disabilities students will be obvious to identify for us; but we are required to apply one test which is academic.

(Teacher interview 3)

The participant in the first quotation emphasised the difficulty in applying the development test because of lack of specialists, despite the high significance associated with assessing development. The participant’s perspective is in line with what have been raised by Armstrong and Squires (2015) who discussed the knowledge base that is needed in the assessment of cognitive functioning. For example, in order to assess working memory, one needs to have sufficient understanding and competency to do this assessment through standardised psychometric tests. Since such usage implies understanding technical and scientific considerations, it has been usually included as part of the field of psychology, including that of educational psychologists. This specialty can be gained through the accomplishment of specialised degrees in psychology. The SLDP seems to be in line with international practices, as described by Armstrong and Squires (2015), since it does not apply rigorous diagnostic assessment;
but rather, it has more relaxed approaches of assessment. Therefore, the results of assessment are not expected to be accurate compared to a more rigorous testing system.

The second quotation shows that the LD teachers were different in applying or not applying this kind of test which was a result of the contradiction between the absence of authorising a development test and its significance in identifying LD. The final quotation seems to be opposed to applying a development test in the current situation of the programme because the whole programme is unprepared for addressing developmental aspects.

**4.1.5.5 General comments about strengths and weaknesses of identification instruments**

Participants indicated some general points that provide a critique of the diagnostic tests. These points can be summarised in the following. First, many participants indicated in the questionnaire (5th part, items 3 & 4) the need to improve the current identification tests because they were neither standardised nor accurate. Alhabib (2006) indicated that one of the critical problems in the field of LD in Saudi Arabia is the lack of standardised diagnostic tests, which is in line with the evidence presented by the current study. Although a few participants considered the current tests as having identification strengths, this does not eliminate the need for standardised tests to achieve more accurate results. Second, some participants explained that inaccurate tests lead to uncertainty in their judgment. Subsequently, they stated they were not sure whether already registered students really had LD or not. For example, one participant stated (Questionnaire: 5th part, item 2) that although the registered students were 12 in the class, only eight of them seemed to have LD and the reason for other referrals was ‘the absence of accurate diagnosis, adequate scales and multidisciplinary team.’ Third, some participants provided examples of standardised scales for identifying learning difficulties and they wondered why such assessments were not adopted in the programme.

Weaknesses of identification in the SLDP: The absence of well-known standardised scales such as Al-sartawi’s and Myklebust’s.
(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 3)
The two scales stated above are the Learning Disabilities Scale for Primary Schools Students (Alsartawi, 1995) and the Pupil Rating Scale (Myklebust, 1971). They are teacher-based screening instruments and can be applied by class teachers. The point in question seems to be logical because it can be seen that the only authorised instrument is the diagnostic (academic) one, while the rest of the applied identification methods do not include any instruments, such as scales or tests, except a few questions and spaces for observation in the LD file. Therefore, this raises a question as to why policy makers in the SLDP did not provide instruments based on the available literature. Although they can be excused for not adopting psychometric diagnosis because teachers are not qualified for such process, no clear reason appeared to be there for totally ignoring other instruments that do not require such specialist qualifications. As a result, much subjectivity (personal beliefs) appeared in applying the identification methods. Although the diagnostic test seemed to exhibit less subjectivity, it still appeared to be lacking in providing accurate identification of LD. Therefore, the results of this identification cannot always be trustworthy, a view which was consistently expressed by the participants themselves.

4.1.6 The concept of LD

This section examines how LD teachers understand the concept of LD. In addition, different questions about this subject are raised, such as: the source of this understanding, the conflicts in conceptualisation, applying this understanding and labelling students with LD.

4.1.6.1 Teachers’ views on LD

In the following quotations, teachers explained their understanding of the concept of LD in relation to the application of their understanding of this phenomenon.

.. a LD student is normal and has normal or above normal intelligence. However, he suffers from some development problems which cause academic problems.
(Participant C, Focus group 2)

Participant A: A LD student is the one who has a clear distinction between the level of academic and mental ability; he (the student) can achieve 90 and above in IQ but he is weak academically.
Researcher: So, do you mean that when we find such discrepancy, we can say that this is LD?

Participant A: Let’s say yes; however, there are other factors. For example, if you find that the student has carelessness, this means this student does not have LD, so this student is excluded.

Participant B: If he has that discrepancy and his family are caring for him and his IQ is good, this student has LD.

(Focus group 1)

LD is a special disorder that hinders a student in the curriculum and does not refer to an external factor such as visual or hearing impairment. A LD student has a problem such as forgetting and attention deficit.

(Teacher interview 1)

I will give you my understanding of LD. A LD student cannot learn with a group of students in a classroom because he will be distracted... If a student is easily distracted while he is well cared for by his family and teacher, I think he has LD.

(Teacher interview 2)

Researcher: What does LD mean from your point of view?
Participant: I will provide you with our general definition of LD which is simply: a disorder in one or more of the psychological processes which are required in understanding and using verbal and written language, which is manifested in a disorder of listening, thinking, speaking, reading and writing, and which is not due to any physical disability or family or educational circumstances.

(Teacher interview 7)

Participants highlighted common issues related to LD including the discrepancy notion, exclusionary criteria (e.g. other disabilities), symptoms (e.g. academic problems) and underlying problems (e.g. development problems). These explanations and issues are included in the definition of LD in the Saudi context (Ministry of Education, 2002), which is very similar to the US definition (U. S. Office of Education, 1977). The last participant’s quote stated the Saudi MOE definition of LD almost exactly although I asked her about her point of view, which indicated that she embraced similar concepts. This concentration on one definition raises two questions.

First, it is interesting to examine why LD teachers defined LD in a similar way, although they, as specialists, are likely to explore various definitions. This leads to think about the contents of their training programme at university. As the participants
graduated from different Saudi universities, this raises an assumption that these universities teach similar contents about LD. This is not surprising as these programmes seem to be influenced by how the Department of Learning Disabilities in the MOE defines LD. Whether or not there was collaboration between universities and the MOE, the universities seem to focus on how the MOE adopts concepts about LD. In different occasions, when participants talked about the concept of LD, they often said ‘according to what we studied’ or ‘what we studied is...’, which confirms that these views reflect what was taught at university. A similar definition is presented again for the teachers in the manual of the SLDP. This focus on, and repetition of, this particular definition in both of the teachers’ training programme and employment manual seems to leave them with little freedom to consider other views. Adopting a definition in a specific programme seems to be fine; however, the specialists (LD teachers) are expected to consider other definitions and have depth in conceiving LD, which will support their work by providing more analytical insight when treating SWLD. This means that teachers’ application of a specific definition seems to be sensible but at the same time teachers come across various cases where they sometimes need to make difficult decisions to select students who have more priority to be registered on the programme. Section 4.1.2 on priorities of registration contends that participants usually set different priorities to register different students; however, none of these teachers highlighted whether they considered more definitions or views about LD to decide on the level of priority of different students, where students who met more of such criteria would have more priority. Although such prioritisation seems to be very important and potentially effective, it has not been mentioned, which seems to be a result of a lack of studying and paying attention to other views on LD.

Second, it is questionable whether teachers would identify SWLD in a similar way as a result of the similarities in their understanding of LD. The findings of this study demonstrate several differences in identification between teachers. These differences seem to be due to different factors such as context, experience and policy. These factors also highlight differences in the teachers’ understanding of related criteria in the definition and how these criteria are conceived by the teachers. Therefore, agreement on LD definition does not necessarily mean agreement on the way of applying such understanding. For example, LD teachers generally agreed about the notion of discrepancy while they differed on how they approached it (see Section 4.1.5.3).
addition, such related factors led teachers to implement the SLDP in a way that is
different from their expectations or beliefs. To illustrate this, when I asked them to
explain the concept of LD, they sometimes wondered whether I asked for an answer
based on their own understanding or one based on practice, and therefore they
explained this concept but added that what was applied was different.

Researcher: How do you conceive that a student has LD?
Participant C: We generally, in our school, consider the weak students have LD.
Researcher: Is this your understanding as a LD teacher?
Participant C: No, as a LD teacher, I have to be more accurate; LD student
is normal and has average or above average intelligence. However, he
suffers from some development problems which cause academic
problems.
(Focus group 2)

LD according to what we studied is when the intelligence is high but with
low achievement. However, in reality, we register our students while we do not basically know their intelligence...
(Teacher interview 2)

With my experience in this field, I honestly feel that even though we
memorise the definition, we focus on the academic aspects rather than the
development ones although development is the essence of the problem.
(Teacher interview 7)

All these influential factors and their consequences in practice are addressed in this
chapter based on the main discussed themes. This section does not discuss how teachers
consider the components of LD definition in their identification (e.g. academic
difficulties, development problems and discrepancy) because these have already been
discussed in Section 4.1.5 on identification methods. However, this section considers
certain concepts which were repeatedly mentioned by participants, albeit in different
ways, in relation to their understanding of LD, while at the same time causing some
confusion in identification when application of these concepts is different from one
teacher to another.

4.1.6.2 Related concepts in understanding LD

Carelessness, mental retardation, slow learning and underachievement have been raised
as exclusionary concepts. This means that when participants explained LD, they
emphasised excluding such concepts in identifying SWLD. However, they raised some issues related to these concepts when talking about practice. For example, they admitted that they sometimes registered students who had such characteristics rather than LD. They were not satisfied with such registration, which happened due to certain influential factors (see Section 4.1.3 and 4.1.4). Another issue is that these concepts can overlap with LD; this can cause difficulties in differentiating between LD and non-LD difficulties in learning, which results in making mistakes in identification as can be seen in the following quotations.

As I work in a school that is located in a district where there is common carelessness and family problems, I often face difficulty to make decisions regarding some cases. Is the reason for underachievement the existence of LD or other reasons are the cause of that? For example, although some cases have other reasons, these reasons overlap with the existence of real LD. Some cases have a general weakness in all subjects, so is the reason that the student has LD and this impacts on the student’s performance generally? Or...or...
(Teacher interview 7)

I think no teacher in any school can be sure of the existence of LD in a student. If he argues about that, I will ask him to prove it; how did you measure his intelligence? How did know that this is not carelessness? For example, we faced parents who claim that they supported their children at home and did so and so, but unfortunately, we found out later through one of the student’s relatives that there is no support but carelessness.
(Teacher interview 2)

Most of the referrals (students) suffer from carelessness which is the cause of their underachievement.
(Questionnaire: 5th part/ item 2)

These quotations as well as the rest of the section demonstrate how LD teachers face difficulties in identification because of the complexity of the LD concept and its relation with other phenomena. The teacher (quotation above: teacher interview 7) was concerned about identifying the reason for difficulties in learning, particularly, when these difficulties can be described through different concepts. For example, a child (who has academic problems but he/she is perfectly cared for and supported at home and at school in addition to having good health and satisfactory environmental circumstances) would be easier to diagnose than another student (who has the opposite
situation). This is because any of these negative aspects (that surround the student) can negatively influence his/her learning. Therefore, the learning problems could be referred to different possibilities of causes but they are similar in their overall consequences. The second quotation seems to confirm this argument; the teacher asserted that it was impossible to be sure that a student’s academic difficulties are a result of real LD because there might be many other possible causes which could be very difficult to identify.

Reid (2007) highlighted similar points to the ones raised by the previous two quotations. He discussed that a child could have LD, general difficulties, a combination of both or neither of the two. This is because different factors play significant roles in a child’s learning, such as the child’s history, the curriculum and the child’s learning style, which all can cause complexity and present challenges to distinguishing between LD and other factors. The final quotation argues that carelessness can cause underachievement or difficulty to cope with the curriculum which is not experienced by other students. Underachievement is a common problem with students who have LD or related concepts. This warning sign and possibly others play a role in creating obstacles for LD teachers to differentiate between LD and other learning problems. Each of these related concepts are discussed in the following sections.

(a) Carelessness

This concept has been repeated by the majority of participants as a problematic issue. For example, most of participants indicated in one question (5th part, 2nd item) of the survey questionnaire that many students, who were on the programme, did not have real LD, and 14 of these participants highlighted carelessness as a reason for their registration. This shows that this concept needs to be considered carefully.

Meaning of carelessness

The term ‘carelessness’ is translated from ‘ihmal’ which has close meaning to other words such as negligence, laziness and inattentiveness; however, after discussing these terms with my supervisor and an Arabic/English translator, the term ‘carelessness’ seems to be more appropriate to provide a similar meaning of the word ‘ihmal’ as has been presented by the participants.
The concept of carelessness has been presented mainly in three patterns. Firstly, most of participants referred this concept to a lack of family support. They assumed a student had to follow up his/her learning at home; and he/she would not do that without family support. More findings and discussion about family support and their responsibilities is included in Section 4.1.3.1.

For my students, I do not think they reach the level of LD, the vast majority of them are affected by carelessness of their families or no one instructs them at home.
(Focus group 3, participant B)

Secondly, other participants assigned carelessness to bad teaching in addition to lack of family support (see Section 4.1.3.3 on quality of education).

Carelessness mostly results from the environment itself. For example, school environment sometimes, or the society itself, does not care for the children.
(Teacher interview 2)

The quick response that I noticed from the students confirms the emergence of difficulties is from carelessness. In addition, the way of teaching in previous years has a role to play in that.
(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 2)

70% of my students do not suffer from LD, but family carelessness or carelessness of the teachers themselves.
(Focus group 3, participant C)

The participants, in these quotes, addressed carelessness as an external influential factor on students. This means the difficulties of learning according to these views were due to careless families and teaching; therefore, if a student (who is considered as suffering from such carelessness) was supported by a caring family and excellent teaching, he/she would not be considered as having such a problem and, as a result, would not be included in the SLDP.

The final view was concerned with lack of willingness to learn.

I had a referral student and I interviewed him and his father. I found out from his father’s declaration that this child does not have LD but has carelessness, ‘he says: I do not want to study!’
(Teacher interview 1)
Although this pattern points to a student as not caring for his/her studies, such situation must be studied carefully because different reasons are likely to lead to such a lack of willingness. For example, this can happen because of a lack of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation (Clark & Schroth, 2010), lack of parental involvement (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005), negative attitudes toward certain learning contents and materials (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), or unfavourable teacher-student relationships (Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002). Once these reasons have been identified and addressed, the problem can be resolved. Therefore, this unwillingness does not appear mostly as a rooted psychological problem; rather, it is more related to external factors such as motivation and encouragement. Importantly, a teacher should think about LD as the reason of this unwillingness. If the student has LD, he/she could face some challenges in some aspects of school education which might result in negative feelings such as frustration. As a result, a lack of motivation and low self-esteem would increase (Reid, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising that some SWLD show lack of willingness and motivation to learn when their difficulties are not identified, considered or treated appropriately.

How it can be identified

As discussed at the beginning of this section 4.1.6.2, concepts related to LD cause confusion when efforts are made to differentiate between them and real LD. However, participants pointed out two situations where some cases of carelessness could be recognised. The first situation was when applying identification methods, particularly interviews.

*Through the interview, I ask the referral student some questions about the school where I let him feel comfortable and I can find out whether or not he has carelessness or the class teacher does not take care of him.*

(Teacher interview 1)

The second situation seemed to be more common and presented a clearer proof of carelessness. This case was the quick response to teaching in the resources room. However, this identification of carelessness is quite late as these students would have already completed the diagnosis, registered on the SLDP and used valuable time that should have been directed to other students with real LD.
The quick response that I noticed from the students confirms the emergence of difficulties is from carelessness.
(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 2)

Most of students are registered because of the willingness of their family and class teachers, while when delivering the service, we find out that the student does not have LD but carelessness or family circumstances.
(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 2)

Interestingly, no participant indicated that the diagnosis test could indicate the difference between LD and carelessness. However, many of them criticized the diagnosis test because it is an academic test and cannot demonstrate such differences (more detail is included in Section 4.1.5.4 on assessment).

**Would teachers exclude students with carelessness from the programme?**

When teachers realise their mistake in registering students with carelessness rather than LD, some of these teachers replace these students while other teachers continue to finish the student plan.

*I try to be accurate and exclude students who have other disabilities... but I sometimes turn a blind eye to carelessness of families as I work in a village where the majority of parents are farmers and illiterate who cannot support their children; so I register such children and support them... I am afraid that this student might go to the next grade having accumulated problems. Therefore, I – as a humanitarian duty – register the student on the programme.*
(Focus group 3, participant C)

*I registered a student who always asks me to register him and his problem is that his parents are illiterate. You have a limited number, so do you exclude a student with LD to register this student? I added him in addition to the required number.*
(Teacher interview 1)

... *There are other factors; for example, if you find that the student has carelessness, this means this student does not have LD, so this is excluded.*
(Focus group 1, participant A)

In addition, a LD Teacher (interview 2) stated that sometimes the exclusion of carelessness is overridden; so he registered some students whose problem was carelessness, particularly, if the family and school did not provide good care and
support for their children. This seemed to be consistent with the first quotation which asserts the registering of such cases because of poor contextual factors. The second quotation highlights that students with carelessness can be consciously registered in addition to the required number as a voluntary act. Although the final quotation indicates the exclusion as an applied process, it does not provide detail as to what extent is applied and when it is applied (before or after registration). From this discussion, the exclusion of students with carelessness appears to be related to two aspects. The first is the teachers’ beliefs about the SLDP. As discussed in Section 4.2.3.2(c) on implementation, teachers felt the SLDP was just like a remedial educational programme (REP). Based on this feeling, it is not surprising that some teachers considered other students who could benefit from the REP even if they had no LD. Second, contextual and influential factors lead or force LD teachers to register students without LD even if these teachers are not contented or happy with this process. Therefore, some teachers were strict in the registration process because they had favourable contextual factors while other teachers were in the opposite situation and found it difficult to be as strict.

(b) Mental retardation and slow learning

Participants highlighted that many registered students on the SLDP have mental retardation or slow learning. The participants did not explain the definition of these terms; however, they mentioned that students with LD scored 90 or more in the IQ test. The Ministry of Education (2014) states in its definition of mental retardation that the IQ score is usually between 55-75 according to the Wechsler test or 52-73 according to the Stanford test. Generally, slow learners have scores mostly above this range but below 90. Different literature (Kaznowski, 2004; Peltopuro, Ahonen, Kaartinen, Seppälä, & Närhi, 2014; Shaw, 2008) indicate that slow learners have IQ scores between 70 and 85. Other terms can be used to refer to this category, such as ‘borderline students’, which was also mentioned by one participant.

Low IQ as a problem

The participants believed that LD teachers face difficulties to differentiate between SWLD and below average IQ scores (slow learning or mental retardation) as can be seen in the quotation below.
In reality, an IQ test is mostly unavailable; as a result, this is an obstacle for us as teachers in dealing with some cases, particularly, those on the borderline (slow learners).
(Questionnaire part 2 item 8)

Because the diagnosis test is an academic one, all of these students are likely to fail. Teachers argued that IQ score were needed to understand the reason of failing in the diagnosis test. If a student’s IQ score was clearly below average, the LD teachers believed that they were not considered as SWLD and then they were not entitled to the services of the SLDP.

Why are some students with slow learning or mental retardation registered in the SLDP? And what are the consequences of that?

Students with slow learning or mental retardation can be registered on the programme for two reasons. The first reason is inaccurate identification which was justified by the participants by the absence of an IQ test. The following quotation indicates that LD teachers sometimes realised after a period of teaching that some their students were slow learners. This confirmed that LD teachers face real challenges in the issue of identification.

I have two students: slow learners who are excluded from the programme after a period of time because of the absence of benefit...
(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 2)

Second, LD teachers were forced or influenced sometimes to register students with slow learning or mental retardation as can be seen in Section 4.1.4. Participants (in quotations from Focus group 6) explained that they had been forced to register some cases with slow learning, mental retardation or even in the autism spectrum. In this situation, these students were provided with double the sessions required for SWLD. These participants and others demonstrated their discontent with this coercion to register non-SWLD.

I think that there are a significant number of slow learners and I view them as a hidden and lost category because there is no programme or special class for them; and what happens now is including them in the learning disabilities programme and they are accounted for as two students; and I view this as injustice as they take the place of learning disabilities students who have more priority in entering the programme. And I see that however
hard I worked with the slow learning student, her level cannot be improved in all subjects; she might become better in the subjects that I teach in the learning disabilities programme, but not others and vice versa with the learning disabilities student where her development in the subjects of the programme reflect on her academic level generally.
(Teacher interview 5)

This participant justified why she does not agree with including a slow learner in the SLDP as he/she would account for two SWLD in relation to teaching time. This has been viewed as an unfair practice because this takes away the right of other SWLD who have more priority in the programme. Also, the participant shows her concern about the lack of special education for slow learners, which, also results in directing them to the SLDP. Another participant (Questionnaire: 5th part, item 2) stated that she excluded two slow learning students after some time of teaching in the SLDP because they did not benefit from the service. The issue of how the LD teaching programme can be suitable for slow learners or "garden-variety" poor readers is still controversial. For example, Stanovich (1988) argues that garden-variety poor readers can also benefit from the teaching support provided for SWLD. However, another study by Stoodley, Ray, Jack, and Stein (2008) indicates differences in the way of acquiring knowledge between garden-variety poor readers and dyslexic children, which has implications for teaching programmes that are designed specifically for children with dyslexia. The findings of the current study seem to illustrate the idea discussed by the previously mentioned study. However, more details about teaching styles and the accuracy of diagnosis are needed in the current study in order to support a specific argument among the previously outlined ones.

4.1.6.3 Labelling

90% of the current students suffer mainly from carelessness or slow learning.
(Teacher interview 3)

70% of my students do not suffer from LD, but family carelessness or carelessness of the teachers themselves.
(Focus group 3, participant C)
For my students, I do not think they reach the level of LD, the vast majority of them are affected by carelessness of their families or no one instructs them at home.

(Focus group 3, participant C)

This extracts clearly show that the proportion of non-SWLD in the SLDP is very high as they are estimated by the participants to be the majority (i.e., ‘90%’, ‘70%’ or ‘the vast majority’). These estimations are very critical and need to be considered by researchers and policy makers very seriously. These registered students (who have no LD) are labelled as SWLD although they do not have such disability; and this false categorisation is known by their LD teachers but they continue with the plan and deliver the services of the programme to such students. In other words, the official procedures restrict the service to SWLD; therefore, in order to include other students (with no LD), they must be registered as having LD. A similar observation about official procedures was raised by Al-hano (2006) as well.

Labelling can take two forms which are formal and informal labelling. For formal labelling, any student on the SLDP has a file that explains that he/she has LD. This file is kept until the student graduates from his/her primary school.

The student’s LD file is not included in student’s reports or in the portfolio. It is only kept with the LD teacher until student’s graduation from the primary school.

(Participant B, Focus group 4)

The LD file is not included in the student’s portfolio and does not play any role in the student’s future education. In other words, the label formally appears only while the student is on the programme in order to receive this service. In such a situation, the advantageous part of labelling is applying early identification and receiving suitable intervention (Armstrong & Squires, 2015; Reid, 2016). This temporary labelling seems to be better than a permanent one, especially with the current educational services. This is because there are no additional significant services, facilities or consideration for SWLD after completing their plan on the SLDP. If there were such services, one might argue that keeping the LD file could assist in providing continuous assistance for these students. However, because of the absence of continuous care, there is no clear advantage of keeping the LD file or label, which could rather become a hindrance with such disadvantages as having feelings of permanent incompetence.
Informal labelling includes how class teachers, colleagues and SWLD themselves view a student who is registered on the SLDP and repeatedly brought out of class to the resources room.

Some students do not accept to come to the resources room because they feel that they are lower than their colleagues or weak students, so they say, ‘I’m ok, why do I come there? I’m good, I listen to my teachers.’ Meaning, other students might look at them as inferior.

(Participant D, Focus group 1)

Students do not recognise that learning disabilities students are different from them because they are friends and play together and do not find a difference except when they have lower academic achievement and they need to go to the resources room to take remedial lessons with the LD teachers.

(Participant B, Focus group 4)

The understanding differs according to the student’s community and the class teacher’s consideration of the learning disabilities student, as some teachers despise the learning disabilities student, and warn other students who show bad behaviour to be sent to the resources room. However, this view has been changed when they see how the student progress, so they become convinced and stop this contempt... A student who comes to the resources room is happy with changing the ambience and having the chance to play with the tools, and receiving motivation and special care unlike other students; particularly, their class teachers are usually short tempered, while we are patient and do not become angry with them, so they see this difference and love to come to us. I think other students understand that this student needs someone to help her with her learning individually, while some students do not know why we take this student...

(Teacher interview 6)

The quotations above show different opinions about the effect of labelling. Participant D believed that many SWLD did have negative attitudes towards the resources room as their colleagues looked down on students on the programme, which is a negative aspect caused by categorisation and labelling (Riddck, 2012). On the other hand, participant B stated that the SWLD understood that they received this service because they were under-achieving but this situation did not make these students or their colleagues feel that this was a significant difference, rather, they behaved normally with each other. Explaining such differences between participants’ views can be related to the last
quotation as it states that the impact was related to awareness about LD by the school community. The participant pointed out that class teachers used to look down on SWLD and warned other students who displayed bad behaviour that they would be taken to the resources room. However, this attitude had changed gradually after observing the positive impact of the resources room on SWLD. Furthermore, the rest of students wished to have a place on the programme due to the personal care the SWLD were receiving from the LD teachers. Therefore, in this case, the disadvantages of labelling had almost faded. Although this study did not explore parents’ views, another study was conducted by Somaily et al. (2012) and investigated, through a survey, attitudes of parents (n=111) of SWLD towards the resources room in the Saudi Arabian educational context. The authors found that parents had positive attitudes towards the resources room, but they had limited awareness about LD. The researchers attributed this low awareness mainly to the parents’ lack of visits to the resources room.

To reflect upon the above, three points seem to be important to consider:

1- The class teachers have a critical role to influence students including SWLD with the way they present the resources room either positively or negatively. Also, the class teachers’ treatment of the situations where SWLD need to go to the resources room is highly important as this can be positively portrayed or negatively presented, which can impact the views of all students in the class.

2- The LD teachers’ roles influence students and class teachers as well. This can be related to the LD teachers’ characters, outcomes, relationships and awareness.

3- Although the concept of labelling may include categorisation of students based on their different learning abilities, the label should be emphasised within the school community. For example, when SWLD goes to the resources room, their departure to this room should be represented as going to enhance their learning rather than based on their label as ‘learning disabilities students’. This is better than assigning them a label that shows their weakness. This situation happened with some participants and assisted in portraying a positive attitude towards the resources room and SWLD.
4.2 Policy

The policy of the SLDP has built a significant foundation for practice and implementation. In the following themes, critical aspects of the policy will be discussed, starting from the source of policy to the key policies that shaped the SLDP, and finally, the causes underlying teachers’ adherence or lack of adherence to such policies.

4.2.1 Where does policy come from?

As discussed in the literature, the Ministry of Education (MOE) contains the General Directorate of Special Education (GDSE) which includes several departments including the Department of Learning Disabilities. Usually, when participants mention policy or regulations, they refer to the Ministry of Education because it authorises and issues these policies; while in fact such policies are planned by the Department of Learning Disabilities and the GDSE (Figure 4-11).

Figure 4-11 LD-related policy making: relations and roles
From a search on the MOE website and other related research, the aims, missions and schemes of the educational system were found along with some details about existing policies. When looking for more detail about policy making, what can be found are such statements as: ‘the regulations are determined by the competent authorities’ or ‘by those who are delegated to do so’. However, no more detail is provided about what these competent authorities are or how they determine these policies, regulations or guidelines. Hakeem (2012) discussed a similar situation in Arab countries and pointed out that the preparation of educational policy is the prerogative of boards of education headed by the Minister of Education, and this is initiated through studies conducted by educational and planning competent bodies, including boards of education and committees for planning. This means that the MOE does not have to present the developed policies outside the ministry to the public or specialists to seek suggestions and discuss their implementation. The MOE probably does some research along with meeting specialists. However, unlike other countries, no process of policy making by the MOE in Saudi Arabia has been highlighted. Educational policies in some countries need to pass through certain processes such as receiving a proposal, formalising it, presenting it to the public and specialists to conduct consultations, discussion by members within the Department of Education, amendment and development, and finally issuing the finalised policy (Haddad & Demsky, 1995). Roy (1992) stated that the MOE in Saudi Arabia performs its functions in a centralised and bureaucratic way. An example was given about curriculum development where the formal curriculum is not allowed to be adapted to the conditions of a specific district. This situation seems to have been practised until recently. However, Hakeem (2012) anticipated that Saudi Arabia will gradually move towards decentralisation, which will be noticeable in the near future. To reflect on the SLDP, it is designed by the competent authorities in the Ministry of Education. LD teachers receive the regulations from the Ministry. Teachers sometimes are given the chance to offer suggestions about some of the regulations. LD teachers seem to have a reasonably strong relationship with the MOE compared with other class teachers in terms of the interaction with the Ministry and involvement in making regulations. This might be due to the limited number of LD teachers, which results in a limited number of suggestions and hence much easier communication. In the following statement, a participant talked about his experience in critiquing a regulations manual.
Every year, we have a week to do some activities including exchanging visits between teachers in the form of groups. I was the head of my group. The supervisors asked us to critique the new manual from the MOE. So, we fully critiqued it. As a result, the Department of Education called me and praised our work and rewarded us for that.
(Teacher interview 3)

Another participant expressed his feelings about how the MOE responds to LD teachers’ suggestions.

We are asked every end of the year to write down our suggestions and criticisms of the programme and we do so. However, nothing has been changed.
(Participant B, Focus group 1)

Both participants were asked to contribute in evaluating certain aspects of the SLDP. However, two points need to be considered. First, the second participant explained that their suggestions are not taken up into action by the MOE, and although the first participant asserted that their critique was valued by the Department of Education, he did not highlight any changes which were introduced into the manual in response to their work. The MOE seems to attempt to reduce its centralisation via communicating with LD teachers and taking their evaluation into consideration. The most important attempt is considering their suggestions and giving them a voice to influence policy making and regulations; however, the extent of such an influence is still not clear. Second, none of the participants indicated that the MOE asked LD teachers’ suggestions in planning new regulations. The LD teachers are only asked after drafting new regulations and most often their consultation takes place in relation to previous work including regulations and policy. This could be interpreted to mean that the MOE is not keen on activating the role of teachers in generating new policies; however, more information in relation to this area is needed in order to draw firm conclusions.

4.2.1.1 The role of the Department of Education

The Departments of Education supervise the educational process in each region according to the framework of the educational objectives, regulations and policies laid out by the MOE. These departments are directed and controlled by the MOE (see Figure 4-11). Each department has supervisors who are specialised in different fields. The supervisors of LD teachers are the most important channel of communication.
between the MOE and teachers. Different research studies (Almogaidy, 1997; Eisan & Alani, 2007; Kutsyuruba, 2003; Zepeda, 2012) in different countries explain important roles of educational supervision. For example, Almogaidy (1997) indicated that educational supervision in Saudi Arabia aims to develop teaching and education as well as supporting teachers and removing any barriers that hinder them from achieving effective teaching.

Although departments do not have much autonomous authority or power unless they are directed by the MOE, they have less restricted authorities over certain aspects of the programme. Even though they are a few, these departments can be considered as important players in the regulation process. For example, the participants highlighted that the diagnostic tests differ from one region to another due to the involvement of these departments.

If you look at the diagnostic tests you will find them different between LD teachers. The Department of Education in Alahsa has a different test from that of ... (i.e. another city). I taught in ... (i.e. another city) for one year, then when I came to Alahsa I brought the test but the supervisor told me not to use it as this city has its own test. All of these tests are made by LD teachers, we don’t have a standardised test!

(Teacher interview 3)

The issue of standardisation is discussed in Section 4.1.5.4. The point relevant here is that developing a diagnostic test is a critical matter; however, it has been left to the departments. These findings highlight differences between regional departments in the same national educational programme, and because these differences are critical, this indicates variability in equality of opportunity and the need for standardisation (more related discussion in Section 4.2.4).

When looking within each department, one will notice differences between supervisors in directing teachers. The participants (e.g. see the previous quotation) complained that sometimes supervisors ask to treat some aspects of the programme in different ways. This contradiction between supervisors can be interpreted to mean that supervisors might have one or both of the following: 1- ambiguous policies or regulations which cause different understanding or interpretation, 2- different knowledge and experience in both LD and work in the field.
4.2.2 Theories and policies

LD teachers are mostly graduates from Saudi universities that developed courses for LD. However, LD teachers complain about the gap between theoretical studies taught at universities and practice based on the policies made by the MOE.

_There is a gap between what we studied and what we saw. Meaning, what we studied at the university is completely different from what we practise. We studied many things about IQ and development tests and many other types of tests, but now in practice we are not allowed to use it; so why did you teach us if you don’t allow us to do it? Also, we have studied many teaching methods but we were not provided the needed tools!_ (Participant C, Focus group 3)

_When we started teaching after our graduation we found out that the books, we studied, were ideals and sometimes difficult to implement in real practice._ (Teacher interview 1)

The reasons for such a gap could be referred to: 1- independence of universities (previously under the Ministry of Higher Education) from the MOE. In 2015, these two ministries were combined and are now under the MOE which might result in changes of departments in universities including training in special education, 2- universities aim to develop specialists in the area of LD regardless of what is implemented in practice, and 3- the MOE might struggle to make high quality policies that reflect ideal theories because this requires larger funds for specialist staff and equipment. Therefore, teachers become disappointed in the absence of expected policies and development from the practice.

4.2.3 Implementation of the SLDP

Implementation is one of the main aspects in the current study; particularly, it tackles how well SLDP is implemented and what elements indicate fidelity of implementation. For more depth of discussion, the related findings have been analysed in light of the elements identified by Dusenbury et al. (2003), which include: training, programme characteristics, teacher characteristics and organisational characteristics.
4.2.3.1 Teacher training

Two key aspects of teachers training for the intervention lead to better implementation which are previous (or initial) and follow-up training (Dusenbury et al., 2003). The findings address both of these types and are discussed in the following sections.

(a) Initial training

Essentially, LD teachers working on the SLDP graduated from the special education departments (schools) of different Saudi universities where they focused on special education generally and learning disabilities in particular. The last semester of their university education constitutes training on the SLDP. This preparation was highly valued by some participants.

Strengths: Teachers are qualified for identifying SWLD.

(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 3)

*In terms of identification methods, all these things we practise now are gained through our experience at university. The doctor taught us, and we apply it now; and we apply some things through taking suggestions from our colleagues.*

(Teacher interview 2)

This appreciation of the four years of studies, including practice, is not surprising. However, some other participants argued that there is a gap between what they have studied and real life practice which is discussed in Section 4.2.2 on theories and policies. These findings seem to agree with the results found by Hussain (2009) who surveyed 160 LD teachers and explored their views about the preparation programme at King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The results showed that the majority of participants found the programme effective in general. However, subscales related to coursework and professors’ teaching skills were rated as not effective.

Although such gap can exist, this does not eliminate the high importance of LD teachers’ preparation for four years at university. Particularly, the last semester (the practical course) provides a high level of preparation for the real practice under the supervision of both the university (academic doctors) and school (mainly an LD teacher). As discussed below, the problem of this gap can be minimised using: a
practical course at university, training, supportive supervisor and colleagues, and personal development. However, if a LD teacher does not have such elements delivered appropriately, he/she would be at risk of failure to implement the programme correctly. Although dealing with the previous elements could improve the way LD is addressed, this would probably need much time. This extended time means there is higher probability of dealing with many students with LD unjustly and inappropriately.

(b) Follow-up training

Many participants in all the research aspects of this study raised a concern and criticised the SLDP for not having any follow-up training.

I have been a LD teacher for six years and had many training courses; however, I had no training course in LD, identifying LD, teaching LD neither, anything concerned with LD. Unfortunately, this is a shortcoming from the Department of Education; and we did send them a report saying that we need such training but we saw nothing.
(Teacher interview 2)

Researcher: Do you have any training in identification?
Collective voice: Nothing, it is not available.
Participant B: It must be provided and to be compulsory even, not optional.
Participant C: There is a shortage actually, especially in terms of LD. I wished even if there was something related to LD.
(Focus group 3)

In addition, five participants insistently suggested providing courses in identification, as indicated by the questionnaire (Questionnaire: 5th part, item 4). Importantly, it can be noticed that participants did not only raise the issue of lack of training, they also asserted their need for such training. Different studies (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Dusenbury et al., 2003) asserted that supporting teachers by providing feedback or follow-up training is very essential and is associated with better quality implementation.

Both lack of training and emphasis on its requirement could have critical consequences, such us lack of confidence, confusion in implementation and commonly facing difficulties in identification. Although LD teachers do not receive training, they are provided with directions and suggestions from their supervisors. This, at least, helps them to obtain some feedback and develop some practices. Dusenbury et al. (2003)
suggested that teachers should receive sufficient training, follow-up instructions and feedback. Although there are no statements directly explaining these benefits, they can be understood from different quotations where participants demonstrated communication with their supervisors which influenced their practice. Also, some teachers were keen to develop their skills through discussions with colleagues, reading or attending online courses. Also, teachers have mutual annual visits each lasting a period of four days. Usually, teachers are required to do certain activity such as critiquing a short book, writing a leaflet or doing some research. This is a good opportunity for teachers to increase their knowledge by doing these requirements as well as sharing their experiences and supporting each other. This seems to be similar to the findings of Dusenbury et al. (2003) who pointed out that teachers prefer and benefit from provision by trainers at the administrative level with successful experience of implementation methods instead of researchers or experts from outside. However, having an activity session once a year is probably not sufficient to provide the needed improvement, which includes knowledge about the various aspects of LD and the numerous implementation details. Also, these visits might become as a motivation for teachers to progress their work.

In Focus group 5, two teachers mentioned that they attended an online course which was provided by King Salman Centre for Disability Research; the rest of the participants were surprised and keen to register on its future courses. This raises two points. First, many teachers were keen on attending training courses relevant to their practice. Tansey and Ní Dhomhnaill (2002) found that the majority (91.2%) of teachers they surveyed were willing to attend a specific course in dyslexia if this became available. This indicates that the need for tackling LD by teachers is an international phenomenon which might have resulted from the complexity of LD and the number of SWLD encountered by teachers. Second, a question is raised as to why there is no coordination between the MOE and other training providers such as the King Salman Centre mentioned above. Alternatively, the MOE (represented by supervisors) should look for all related courses and notify teachers about them.

4.2.3.2 Programme Characteristics

The characteristics of the SLDP that seem to have an influence on implementation fidelity are complexity and clarity.
The complexity of interventions here is considered according to Dusenbury et al. (2003, p. 250) as they state that these programmes "consist of many elements that require special skill and that require coordination by many people." The following quotations present how and why identification in the SLDP includes and requires such a variety of elements and skills. In addition, they consider points related to the requirement of a multidisciplinary team. According to the manual (Almoady et al., 2013), the required multidisciplinary team is composed of the LD teacher, a head teacher, a deputy head teacher, a school counsellor, a psychologist, parents and whoever is needed for the student’s situation. In addition, this team is assumed to work in a cooperative, coordinated way and to have different responsibilities, such as gathering initial information about students, selecting appropriate tools for diagnosis and evaluation, and conducting the identification and evaluation processes. However, this is mostly not applied in reality as is presented below.

Researcher: What about the multidisciplinary team?
Participant: It is nominal... nominal. There should meeting with the team but actually the LD teacher takes a signature from the head teacher and might meet the school counsellor; but there is no meeting where they discuss the identification and education plans of the SWLD, and they do not ask you and are not keen to discuss with you. The LD teacher does everything. I’m sorry to say how bad the situation is, but actually it is really frustrating.
(Teacher interview 2)

LD teachers’ responsibility is about academic aspects: making personal educational plans, education and teaching. The psychological test is not our responsibility. Examining the environmental and cultural disadvantages should be undertaken by psychologists. Hearing and visual impairment should be undertaken by a doctor who works around us. School should involve psychologists and sociologists.
(Participant C, focus group 2)

We need sociologists and psychologists in order to achieve a more holistic and accurate identification.
(Teacher interview 7)
These quotations indicate that the identification process in the SLDP requires many skills and specialists in order to generate a comprehensive view of all students’ situations and contexts. Based on that, the LD teachers’ decision-making is more likely to be effective, accurate and influential. For example, when a teacher only looks at certain aspects of a student (such as learning achievement) and does not study other ones (such as social and psychological contexts) because of lack skills or specialists, the information about the student will be incomplete and therefore the decisions and plan will be inaccurate and inappropriate. Although the SLDP states certain regulations for arranging the multidisciplinary team, this still is not practised which causes complications in the implementation. Hanafi and Alraies (2008) indicated that parents’ participation in the individual educational programme in Saudi Arabia needs to be given more emphasis in the regulations and in schools as it is considered very influential. Alquraini (2010) argued that one of the main problems in special education in Saudi Arabia is that assessment procedures are not team-based. In the current study, LD teachers seem to be in a difficult situation as they do not have the various needed skills and sources of information for diagnosis and identification. Indeed, they explained in many occasions their emphasised need for such a team and complained about its absence. Figure 4-12 demonstrates that the vast majority of the participants strongly believed in the importance of multidisciplinary skills in identification. Also, many quotations highlight similar thoughts; however, the above extracts and the figure seem to be sufficient to provide a clear conclusion about this requirement. The need for psychologists in supporting identification of LD and teaching SWLD is also highlighted in other studies, for example (Reid, 2016; Tansey & Ní Dhomhnaill, 2002). Particularly, the discrepancy model is usually applied with cooperation from additional professionals such as speech and language therapists (Reid, 2016).

What is important here is that this complexity of skills or specialties needed in the implementation strongly influences the LD teachers and the outcomes. A similar problem about the teachers’ need for essential skills can be found in other countries. For example, Sideridis (2007) highlighted that diagnosis of LD in Botswana is carried out by teachers; however, these teachers lack important skills and training which hinders successful identification.
The result of this complexity is that LD teachers feel frustrated as the participants stated. This heavy influence and frustration seem to be stimulated by two reasons, which are their views about the quality of their work and the effectiveness of the results of such work. LD teachers currently try their best to work sometimes as specialists in different disciplines although they know that they are not prepared for such tasks, they are not sure about their ability to do them, and they believe that there are other specialists who are more qualified to perform such tasks. As a result, they do not guarantee the accuracy of their identification, and they frequently realise their erroneous identification in teaching (after identification has already been made). All these aspects seemed to be a source of conflict for LD teachers where they were not satisfied with their own identification and results while at the same time they did not have another choice.

Figure 4-12 The importance of a multidisciplinary team in identification of LD

(b) Clarity

To achieve the intended implementation, LD teachers need clear instructions that help them to fulfil the intended requirements. These instructions should explain all processes in sufficient detail including the mechanisms of implementing each rule or method (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Manuals seem to be very important in this regard as they are assumed to be the reference of the intervention that is available for teachers anytime,
anywhere and for any related issue. Some participants’ reflections about the clarity and manual are stated below.

*I have no problem with collective teaching, but give me a working mechanism. Now all LD teachers are confused and do not know how to do it. We are using one-on-one teaching since 2006; so how does the MOE want to move us to collective teaching in one year without a mechanism?* (Teacher interview 3)

Researcher: *What is your reference that you rely on to practise identification?*
Participant C: *On my experience.*
Researcher: *Your experience?! Don’t you have something such as a book that you go back to?*
Participant C: *The work of LD teachers is routine. Meaning, every year you take referrals, do interviews and teach... take referrals, do interviews and teach.*
Researcher: *What about the manual?*
Participant C: *No, this book is from the Department of Education, it is called The Guidance for Teachers, it has nothing important!!* (Focus group 4)

Two points about the manual can be understood from the above. First, it does not clarify important details related to the mechanism as the participant stated (the first quotation) when talking about collective teaching which is mentioned in the manual. Second, it is not seriously considered by teachers. The first point seems to have impact on the second one. This means when LD teachers do not find the information and answers for their questions or problems in the manual, they become less likely turn to it in future instances. Also, other factors can also lead to disregarding the manual. For example, the issues related the routine nature of work or the emphasised focus on accomplishing the tasks (as discussed in Section 4.2.7) tend to eliminate the need to refer to the manual repeatedly because of the absence of new stimulating areas. However, if the LD teachers are required to study each case deeper than the routine way, this could necessitate revisiting the manual which is assumed to provide rich detail and information about the ways of addressing various cases.
The interplay between clarity and complexity of the programme

This ambiguity of instructions is an important factor that leads the SLDP to be implemented in unintended manner, leading to unachieved aims. Therefore, the programme may not accomplish the expected results or it perhaps serves unrelated issues; and then, the programme will appear in different form. The problem will increase when the programme has complex elements and needs various skills. This clearly happens in the case of the SLDP. Figure 4-13 demonstrates that 80% of LD teachers think (definitely or to some extent) that the SLDP becomes almost like to the remedial educational programme (REP). The LD teachers find themselves addressing academic weaknesses rather than dealing with issues related to real LD.

The current system is not accurate in identification at all. It needs better criteria and diagnosis. I view the programme as REP. Yes, there is a difference between the two programmes but finding students with the criteria of LD is very difficult!

(Focus group 2, Participant B)

I think that some instructions that come from the Department of Education and school administration imply that this programme is similar to the REP; when they observe a student who is in need, they say support him.

(Teacher interview 2)

Although the majority of participants view the SLDP as a similar to the REP, their justifications seem to be different. These justifications address why identification is not accurate and why many of the registered students do not have LD. This means that every participant presents problems which they think are mainly responsible for poor identification and inaccurate results. Examples of these justifications are weaknesses in the identification system, lack of preparation by some LD teachers’ and administrative influences, which were all addressed in different sections of this chapter (e.g. see Sections 4.2.3.1 and 4.1.4). In addition, teachers’ need for professionals is also discussed (in Section 4.2.6) as it is argued that current preparation of LD teachers is more suited for teaching SWLD, rather than diagnosing LD by the teachers themselves. This situation is expected to affect the outcomes where students (who are identified as having LD) might in fact not be SWLD. This seems to be in line with arguments by Armstrong and Squires (2015), who raised the question: are all pupils with dyslexia assessed? The authors explained that some assessments are not undertaken by a multi-
professional team, which weakens the validity of the outcomes. They raised a similar concern about the validity of teachers’ differentiation between students with dyslexia and other cases who can manifest similar learning difficulties in reading and writing.

Other factors which were not mentioned by the participants but seem to be very influential are highlighted in the following two points. First, Section 4.1.1 discussed the plan of the MOE to reduce the number of course-repeaters which causes pressure to build on LD teachers to support students who are at risk of failing courses rather than spending time to deal with SWLD. Second, Section 4.1.1.4 and Section 4.1.4.1 on the influence of class teachers demonstrate that LD teachers are influenced by class teachers who have limited understanding of LD and put pressure on LD teachers to register their students for unrelated reasons.

When re-examining factors related to clarity and complexity, teachers generally would be more likely to be able to overcome similar pressures and influences if the programme provided a very clear manual that addresses how teachers can deal with different contexts or situations as has been suggested by Dusenbury et al. (2003). However, the SLDP is complex and it needs different components that work together, including human resources (e.g. specialists, highly skilled and prepared LD teachers, school counsellors and class teachers with awareness about LD), relations and contexts (e.g. family contexts and relations with school staff), identification system (e.g. accurate tools, effective methods and inclusive diagnosis), and strong policy system (e.g. fixed, clear objectives based on valid knowledge). A simple deduction is that the more the deficiencies in these components, the worse the implementation and results. In addition, if there is no clear and detailed manual and instructions about these components, the system will most likely not be implemented as planned.
4.2.3.3 Teacher characteristics

Teachers’ attitudes towards the programme, their confidence and enthusiasm in applying its plan will influence the implementation of the programme (Dusenbury et al., 2003).

(a) Attitudes

The LD teachers chose to specialise in LD as part of their undergraduate studies and they expected (or planned) to work in the SLDP; particularly, the undergraduate course prepares students mainly for such a programme. Attitudes of teachers are likely to be more variable when an intervention has been forced on teachers who already have their own normal workload. However, the intervention of the SLDP is the core of LD teachers’ work. Findings showed several critiques by participants directed at some or many policies related to the SLPD. However, no objection to the idea of the SLDP was expressed. Therefore, it seems that LD teachers value the SLDP; however, the level of a LD teacher’s satisfaction with policies could change his/her attitudes towards the programme. However, this issue can be addressed in more depth by future research.

(b) Confidence: training and experience

Different factors can increase or decrease teachers’ confidence, including the quality of training and the level of experience, which can impact the implementation of the
programme to a great extent (Kealey, Peterson, Gaul, & Dinh, 2000; Overbaugh & Lu, 2008; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). As mentioned in Section 4.2.3.1, on the training that teachers receive, LD teachers graduate from departments of special educational needs with no follow-up training available for them. As a result, the teachers’ confidence is expected to be positively influenced by their undergraduate qualification but negatively skewed by the absence of follow-up training. Training can be considered as an integral part of teachers’ experience. To avoid repeated discussion, the following analysis considers points related to three aspects which have been concluded from available data. The aspects are related to the degree, the years of experience, and the sites of experience.

First, the following quotation raises the question of whether higher confidence translates to positive results.

> Through the experience of practice, you will know that this student needs the service of the SLDP, while another student does not need it or needs the service for mental disorders... we don’t give IQ test to students although we can do it. I can recognise that this student has or does not have a problem in intelligence as I am used to knowing this through his talking, movements and gestures; by observing these, I know whether or not he has no problem and his intelligence is 90 and above.

(Teacher interview 4)

It can be observed that two phrases indicate the participant’s confidence built on experience, which are ‘Through experience of practice you will know...’ and ‘I can recognise that ... as I am used to knowing this through ....’. Although this is a form of high confidence, it seems to have a negative influence on implementation because it appears to be on the extreme side. This means that the participant relies on his experience to judge students’ intelligence and maybe the presence or absence of LD as well. Regardless of the risk of this judgment, the guidelines suggest sending students to take an IQ test, particularly when a teacher suspects some cases of having low IQ.

Second, confidence appears to be related to years of experience as indicated in the following quotes.

> Based on my experience which is six years, I have started to recognise student’s characters, in which the difficulty comes from carelessness or
otherwise. In the interview, I ask him some questions and can detect some things from that.

(Teacher interview 6)

Many cases are discovered during teaching that they are due to carelessness. I feel that because of my lack of experience, I cannot recognise some cases.

(Focus group 5, participant A)

The two quotations are about recognising the cause of difficulties in learning and the relation of this ability to confidence. The first participant showed his confidence to recognise carelessness while the second showed low levels of confidence. Both of these teachers referred their ability to recognise carelessness to their experience. Regarding implementation, the first participant stated that he could find out carelessness through asking certain questions, which he used to identify the student’s condition in such interviews. However, the second participant realised such problem after the identification process (during teaching) which was very late. Generally, more experience is expected to result in better implementation. Hanafi and Alraies (2008) conducted a survey, which included 642 special educational teachers in Saudi Arabia, to explore the obstacles to applying an individual educational programme. They found that teachers with lower experience (less than five years) faced hindrances during their planning and implementation of the individual programme. These results are in agreement with the findings of the current study; both seem to suggest supporting teachers, particularly those who are at the beginning of their career, by providing more training and workshops in order to achieve better results in implementation.

*The accuracy of identification increases with experience and practice, by focusing on all the information that is related to a student.*

(Teacher interview 5)

Unsurprisingly, this participant supported the view that long experience has a considerable impact on identification accuracy since experience is related to dealing with many cases, situations and mistakes made or avoided.

Finally, working in different sites or cities provides various experiences.

*When I was in (another city), the diagnosis test, which we used, was more accurate than the one we use here because...*

(Focus group 2, Participant C)
This participant taught previously in a different city, which means, he practised his job in another environment, with different staff and sometimes under different rules. This diversity enabled him to compare and reflect on differences between his practices, outcomes and what happened in the two sites. As a result, he would express preferences or critique some rules or practices in one city compared to another. The teacher argued that the diagnosis test applied in the previous city was better than the one applied in the current site. The teacher seemed to be confident in his argument because he built it on experience or experiment rather than just expectations or speculations. This example of test preference could occur in different forms, such as teachers’ preference of certain identification techniques, practices or environments (e.g. resource room).

(c) Enthusiasm

The findings of this study present several reasons for the differences in enthusiasm between LD teachers, and how these differences relate to implementation. These reasons include differences in objectives, gender differences and flexibility.

First, teachers’ objectives in the SLDP can vary from one teacher to another. For example, these objectives might be more associated with the programme objectives which results in consistency in implementation. Alternatively, they may be associated with the accomplishment of tasks to earn their wages, which surfaces as a contradiction. Such contradiction in objectives can translate to certain problems in activity (Engeström, 2001; Roth & Yew-Jin, 2007). Such problems can be identified in the following quotations.

Weaknesses: - some teachers are not serious in implementation.
   - Teachers’ selection of easier cases in order to avoid making more effort.
(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 3)

The researcher: If you are not convinced about the current policies of identification, why do not you discuss that with the Department of Education?
Participant A: We are afraid that they then will require us to do more things (smiles).
(Focus group 1)

When I came to the practical course I was enthusiastic; I asked the LD teacher -who was at that school- that we need to adopt an IQ test. However,
The LD teacher said ‘Teach anyone; this is your source of livelihood ... Do not open the door to new tasks, otherwise, they will make it an obligation on us, and it is really not our business, it is psychologists’.  
(Teacher interview 1)

The first quotation was written by a LD teacher who had worked as a supervisor which gave his opinion, observation or conclusions more reliability. This quotation implies that some LD teachers’ objective was to complete their tasks with the least possible effort; however, the SLDP directs teachers to address cases that have more priority or needs. Usually, the teachers are responsible to their supervisors according to their documents including the current students’ plans and their progression. However, students’ selection is mainly evaluated by the LD teachers, so the supervisors are not assumed to hold the LD teachers accountable for this selection. In this case, teachers have certain aspects of their job with no accountability, where they should work according to their responsibilities, including the objectives of the SLDP. As a result, this problem (selecting easier cases rather than higher priority ones) can be interpreted by the existence of this contradiction between the objectives of the SLDP and those of the LD teachers.

The second and last quotations include similar contradictions. They show why ‘some’ LD teachers are not keen on making progress and contributing to the development of the SLDP. They do not prefer to raise points about field problems to the Department of Education because this could return to them with requests for more requirements, which will put more pressure on them and may or may not resolve these problems. Ideally, the LD teachers should communicate and discuss the field issues with the SLDP officials in order to support better implementation and more progression. Because such teachers are concerned about the increase in their tasks this step can cause, rather than what is better for their students, many assumed amendments of regulations will perhaps not take place. This means such practices will lead to missed opportunities of making more accurate and better identification.

Second, suggestions that gender differences can lead to differences in enthusiasm are arguable. Few findings are related to this issue and they suggest that female teachers are better in relation to this aspect than their male counterparts. If this was true, female teachers are expected to implement identification methods with more fidelity than male teachers do as they have more enthusiasm. For example, if all contextual factors were
similar, gender differences should cause different levels of fidelity of implementation. Section 4.1.5.1 suggests that female teachers implemented some methods in ways that were closer to the SLDP regulations than male teachers. Although this shows how female teachers’ implementation was more adherent to policy, identifying the reasons or supportive factors for this adherence (e.g. having different environments, their degree of enthusiasm or having different supervisors) can be difficult due to the complexity of this matter, which includes various overlapping contextual influences.

Finally, flexibility or freedom in practice is considered by some participants as an important motive. This issue was discussed in detail in Section 4.2.5.

4.2.3.4 Organisational characteristics

This section deals with how and why implementation could be affected by different schools. Basically, each school has its own characteristics; for example, support by the head teacher, staff communication, culture, teachers’ morale and money, time and other resources. These factors will be considered in the following analysis of the findings. Several school characteristics were discussed in different parts in this chapter. Therefore, readers are referred to the following sections: 4.1.1.7, 4.1.4.1 and 4.1.4.2. It can be noted in these sections that the head teachers and class teachers played critical roles in the implementation process. For example, some class teachers were more supportive when they listened to the LD teachers and reflected on the advice they were offered by only referring students who were at real risk of having LD. However, other teachers and some administrations caused difficulties for LD teachers by undertaking inaccurate referrals or causing them pressure to register students for irrelevant reasons. Such cases provided various scenarios where fidelity of implementation was affected in relation to the degree of support shown by class teachers or school administrations. Other organisational characteristics manifested in the following aspects.

(a) Resources room

The MOE set a list of resources room characteristics including its size, location, provisions (such as a U-table), educational technologies and some other learning materials. However, some teachers complained about the lack of such supplies.

Weaknesses of identification in the SLDP:
Lack of material support for the programme.

(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 3)

Some other LD teachers had smartboards in their resources room and did not complain about such shortage, which implies their satisfaction with material support. As the resources room is mainly state funded, the needed materials are expected to be easily available as Saudi Arabia has allocated a large budget for the educational sector (Hakeem, 2012). However, Kanalan and Celep (2011) cited the problem of improper and ineffective spending of this budget as the reason for the limited educational development.

In addition, when teachers talked about the lack of supplies, they spoke about the need for these supplies in teaching, while identification or assessment was not raised because all the materials needed for that were available or could be easily acquired by LD teachers. Therefore, these supplies could affect implementation more in teaching SWLD than in LD identification.

(b) Culture

A participant who taught in different schools raised the following observation:

Participant: I do not face difficulties in the identification in this school, but I did in previous schools.
Researcher: How was that and why?
Participant: When I ask class teachers about their students to collect information: why and how and so on, they feel that these questions are weird, and they may feel that I interfere in their work. By contrast, I did not find such a problem here.

(Teacher interview 4)

This teacher noticed culture differences which can be influential based on his broad experience in different schools. As a result, he considered the situation in the precious schools as problematic compared to the case in his current school. Regardless of how this culture has appeared, this could cause difficulties in applying the identification process. The LD teacher showed how his questions were seen as weird for the other teachers, which could result in negative effects for both sides. For example, the LD teacher might not continue asking the required questions if he feels that they were unwelcomed by other teachers; in this case, he may be likely to miss some information,
and then his decision would not be based on complete data and strong evidence basis, which could cause misidentification. For class teachers, if they were really uncomfortable with such questions, they might not provide explicit and complete answers; this situation could probably cause similar consequences for previous cases through missing some information leading to misidentification.

(c) Lack of time

This matter can be related to both organisational and programme characteristics. This is because the programme has a fixed time (3-4 weeks) for identification, which some teachers claimed to be insufficient if there was only one teacher in the school. Therefore, schools with more LD teachers may not face such a problem in identification. Dusenbury et al. (2003) considered the lack of time as a barrier to effective implementation. This matter is further analysed in the following points.

First, the participants explained the need for at least two LD teachers in the school.

*One teacher at the school is not enough to reach high productivity in serving the largest possible number of students.*

(Questionnaire: 5th part, item 3)

Participant E: *My school has 450 students; I could identify a large number of SWLD if I was with another teacher.*

Participant C: *Two or three years ago, another LD teacher came to my school. Because there two of us in one school, we could diagnose 50 students in four weeks; can you imagine?*

(Focus group 2)

*More students of the school need to benefit from the SLPD. The school is supposed to include two resources rooms with a LD teacher in each one or at least one resources room with two teachers.*

(Teacher interview 2)

Here, all participants’ justifications of the necessity of additional teachers focused on the need to diagnose and serve a larger number of students. Participant C explained his experience when another teacher was assigned with him where they could diagnose a high number of students according to his estimation. More discussion about aspects related to this matter is presented in the following section.
Second, participants discussed why identification takes much time.

We receive, through the screening process, a huge number of students, but the time does not help. However, schools that have two LD teachers and about 400 students, of course, they have much better circumstances than me. Their identification is more accurate than mine as I have 700 students in my school; particularly, they have more time to observe and meet students’ parent. So, such circumstances control everything.
(Teacher interview 1)

The quotation expresses the need for time in identification; it considers this matter in terms of the LD teacher’s capability. The teacher explained that identification was a critical stage where more effort and time should be spent to have more accurate results. Also, he raised the issue of the importance of a detailed process in identification and diagnosis where this detail should/must be applied to avoid bias and misleading results. The teacher provided an example of a school where each LD teacher focused on a much smaller number of students than the one he was responsible for. This allowed these two teachers to examine students’ situations in more detail maintaining fidelity of implementation and precise techniques of identification.

Figure 4-14 shows participants’ views about whether the specified time for identification is sufficient or not. Half the participants believed that this period is sufficient to some extent. This finding is consistent with the previous quotations in relation to the following points. Participants’ quotations show the need for more time for two reasons: delivering the service to more students and achieving more accurate diagnosis. However, they were still able to perform the stipulated task of identifying the required number of SWLD, even though more SWLD needed to be served. As a result, the selected option of ‘yes, to some extent’ can be explained by the observation that they could do the identification but lower likelihood of accuracy and service provision for other students. Participants who selected ‘yes, definitely’ probably had another LD teacher in their schools or the number the students enrolled in their school was reasonable. Another interpretation of this trend is that they had similar circumstances of other teachers but could manage (i.e. while other teachers could not) to apply the needed diagnosis in this period of time because of their good management of time and work. Other participants who selected ‘not really’ or ‘definitely not’ might believe that
identification accuracy was very critical and difficult to be achieved in the currently specified time; particularly if they were in situations where their schools had a large number of students.

Third, there were a number of participants who asserted that LD teachers should focus on teaching while identification should be undertaken by specialists such as psychologists. This suggestion refers to two reasons which include: insufficient time and belief that LD teachers’ preparation and training are more suited to teaching than assessment. This is in line with a report by Bell (2013), who stated that if the preparation programme was not of high quality, the specialist teachers would be highly challenged in fulfilling their role of assessment. The reader is referred to Section 4.2.6 on lack of staff support in diagnosis for related discussion.

Finally, the lack of class teachers’ time can also affect the SLDP. Section 4.1.1.7 discusses why class teachers did not seem to be cooperative in the identification process while ideally they should take part of this activity. The reason (as previously discussed) could be associated with their busy work schedule and lack of time. Arguably, if a school required the class teachers to work with a lower number of students in each classroom, they may be able to make more effort to support the identification process as stipulated in the programme manual.
4.2.4 Equity

The MOE highlights ten aims under the theme ‘General aims and policies for achieving them’. The third aim is ‘Offering equal learning opportunities and support systems for all students’. This is achieved through the following policies (three relevant policies out of seven listed by the Ministry):

- “Developing the policies concerning the identification of students with special needs and their classification.

- The development of awareness and understanding, and building policies, and frameworks to integrate students with mental and physical challenges in mainstream schooling.

- The adaptation of equal enrolment opportunities for equal and appropriate education in the schools for all students with special needs, regardless of gender or social background of physical or geographic location or the nature of the need.”

(The MOE, 2014, online)

Unfortunately, no more detail or further explanation was provided about this aim or how these policies can serve to achieve this aim. Generally, this aim implies planning to provide all students with equitable learning opportunities. Students who are not able to learn through similar methods used to provide for their colleagues because of having certain difficulties should be supported by other methods to help them to achieve similar learning outcomes.

Interestingly, these policies indicate some implications which will subsequently be examined and discussed. First, policy pointed to classifying SEN as an important means to achieve equity. Second, policy demonstrates an attempt to integrate students with special needs in normal mainstream schools. Currently, although different special schools are still running, many normal schools include special classes, and a number of students with visual impairment study in normal classes. Third, policy presents how equity in the SEN system is considered in relation to which aspects of differences between students are assumed not to play a role or have an effect in the system.

I would reflect on previous policies in relation to current practice in the SLDP. From different parts of the current data analysis, some forms of inequitable learning
opportunities can be drawn out (see Figure 4-15), which are caused by different reasons as can be seen in the following examples:

- Some students would be identified as having LD if they were taught by some LD teachers, while they would not be identified if they are taught by other LD teachers (see Section 4.2.5)
- Some SWLD are not identified because of referral or assessment bias or problems associated with this process (see Sections 4.1.1.9 4.1.1.9 and 4.1.5.4).
- Some identified students are not registered because of lack of places (see Section 4.2.7).
- Some SWLD may have less priority according to their teachers, and then miss the chance to be identified or registered (see Section 4.1.2).
- Some SWLD could not be identified because of context problems, e.g. students’ general underachievement in disadvantaged areas (see Section 4.1.3).
- Some non-SWLD receive services in the programme because of different reasons, such as external influence by the school administration (see Section 4.1.4).

This leads to rethinking the sources of the problem of inequity. It can be inherent in the design of the programme, which is a possible reason because the SLDP is relatively new and has not received much attention from researchers, and therefore it may need further development with consideration of feedback from staff and academic investigators. However, when we look at the idea of such programme, other issues can emerge and the discussion of equity in the SEN system starts from examining the concept of ‘equity’. Equity is considered as applying similar aims and achieving similar outcomes for all students with different methods utilised to provide the needed support to certain students (Dyson, 2001, 2005). In other words, all students have the opportunity to attain similar outcomes described as ‘academic achievement’ (McLaughlin & Dyson, 2014). The question is: does the special education system meet the essence of equity? This question has generated an extensive debate with various opinions and much research in the area. Different research studies have criticised categorisation in the SEN system because students are labelled differently for certain reasons. For example, conceptualising each category is different in many research including lobbies and policies reports. As a result, some students could be labelled as having SEN if the
research institute applies certain definitions of the categories, and the label may be different if these are not applied.

Another issue that has also been identified is that different types of bias occur in referrals and assessments which impedes equity (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). Frederickson and Cline provided an example about biases in the IQ tests identifying evidence that questions in IQ tests are more related to the socioeconomic context of some classes (e.g. white middle class), which makes these questions difficult for others who experience different contexts, such as Asian children. This current study found and discussed similar criticisms such as bias in referrals (e.g. see Sections 4.1.1.4 and 4.1.1.9) and in assessments (see Section 4.1.5.4), including IQ tests (see Section 4.1.5.3). All these critiques in the SLDP are contrary to the concept of equity which is the aim set to be achieved by the MOE.

Figure 4-15 Sources and forms of inequity in the SLDP
Research suggests certain approaches to overcome such criticisms. For example, ensuring the quality of overall schooling provision (Dyson, 2001), response-to-intervention (Kavale et al., 2005) and inclusion (Ferguson, 2008). According to these studies, the highlighted approaches should provide better results in relation to educational outcomes. I would argue that this needs a progressive educational system because approaches, such as ensuring the quality of schooling provision, mean developing the whole educational system which probably requires strong, well-prepared and developed system. However, the educational system in Saudi Arabia may need much time to make a remarkable progress. As has been mentioned earlier, the MOE has progressed relatively well for the last two decades in relation to caring for special needs and started to achieve partial inclusion. If the MOE aims to initiate such approaches, this should be done along with keeping the SEN system and gradually transforming and adopting the new system. For example, the MOE can start applying these new approaches in very few schools until the outcomes of the programme are shown to support this new system, and then more schools may become involved in applying it. My concern is that if the SEN system has been replaced by the new approach abruptly and it did not achieve the goals set for it, the students (who used to benefit from the previously provided support) might struggle with the new approach.

4.2.5 Flexibility

The issue of flexibility can be related to two points. First, it can be a negative aspect if it happens because of ambiguous instructions (Dusenbury et al., 2003), which can result in different interpretations by teachers, and subsequently, different implementations. Second, although instructions may often be clear, teachers are provided a space to adapt them according to their needs, contexts and cases. This could be considered as a positive aspect of implementation if this adaptation is monitored (Durlak & DuPre, 2008) within a framework of cooperation between teachers and their supervisors. Therefore, policies can be viewed negatively when they are made inclusively and strictly, where every item is fixed in a way that ignores the possible differences in contexts. On the other hand, policies with wide boundaries for application (too flexible) and without proper monitoring may result in open practices and various options for practitioners. For example, policies of the LD programme might specify certain types of measures, and teachers are instructed to choose those with the lowest results according
to specific comparisons between students’ results. In this example, teachers’ subjectivity is reduced. However, this approach might also lead to losing teachers’ evaluation of different details and situations relevant to the students, which may be important in managing their cases. Conversely, the second extreme may suggest some measures and methods and leave the evaluation and decision making to teachers. However, excessive subjectivity can make the decisions made by teachers more prone to errors. Teachers might be motivated to do some evaluation and diagnosis that requires more than their knowledge, which can become misleading and result in errors. Also, teachers can be influenced easily by other factors, such as pressure from parents or the administration to register ineligible students. Furthermore, some teachers might avoid students who have complex LD situations and prefer to register easier cases to teach (see Section 4.1.2.4, 4.2.3.3(c)). In this introductory section, I aimed to reflect on the SLDP and examine its outcomes in the issue of flexibility as can be seen in the following two arguments.

**First**, ambiguity was found in the policies. The manual sometimes specifies certain methods of identification; however, it does not provide details about how these methods are used. For example, the MOE issued new regulations just two months prior to the collection of my data. These regulations require LD teachers to teach certain students collectively rather than teaching them individually. Many teachers are not happy with this change in policy for different reasons. One of these reasons was raised by a participant in the following quotation.

*I have no problem with collective teaching but give me a working mechanism. Now, all LD teachers are confused and do not know how to do it. We have been using one-to-one teaching since 2006; so how does the MOE want to move us to collective teaching in one year without a defined mechanism.*

(Teacher interview 3)

From this participant’s complain, a critical point could be raised; a disadvantage identified in policies which are very loose is that practitioners (teachers) feel lost, and if there is no satisfactory following-up by supervisors, the teachers will probably go into a different direction ranging between right and wrong practice. Another example is observation which is a method of identification that has been stated in the manual; however, there is no clarification about how to interpret the observation checklist or
what marks or results derived from it mean. This indicates that this method is intended to help teachers collect more information about students. As has been discussed (Section 4.1.5.1(a)), many teachers do not take observation as a method of identification seriously.

**Second**, participants sometimes adapted the assessment according to their interest.

Researcher: *Do you mean that you consider the development aspects in your identification?*

Participant: *The focus is on the academic aspects, but the consideration of the development ones differs from one teacher to another. Some teachers focus more on development when they have collected enough information about the students.*

( Participant E, Focus group 1)

One of the female teachers (participant E) asserted that she uses a development test from her own invention. However, this wide variation in such a test can cause differences in practice. As a result, students who are identified or registered in the SLDP according to one teacher may probably not have the same chance to be registered if they were assessed by another teacher. More differences can be seen in Section 4.1.5.1.

This means that LD teachers are highly trusted and sufficiently authorised by the MOE. Some participants asserted that every teacher has his/her own judgment and this independence of judgment is likely to be affected by this freedom of identification. Because of this wide freedom and independence, various ways of using different methods as well as discrepancies in results are likely to appear. This is related to monitoring/supervising teachers’ identification which might be needed in such a situation. Educational supervision should support teachers with collaboration, motivation and feedback. This helps to improve teachers as well as assisting supervisors to be informed about what is going on in the field (Zepeda, 2012). Therefore, supervisors can benefit from supervision by understanding different teachers’ experiences in different contexts. This could enable the supervisors to transfer these experiences by spreading effective ones and warning against unsuccessful practices, while taking into account the variation in contexts (e.g. teachers’ qualifications and schools).
Although LD teachers have this freedom of choice, two participants indicated that they should be given more flexibility.

Participant E: *The supervisor focuses on one side. The supervisor comes and opens the student educational plan and asks why they achieved only up to the third aim while you are in the third month and still have 11 aims left?! Or why you didn’t use this or that method. However, the supervisor should focus on how the student has progressed. Some SWLD need extra time to make progress.*

Participant B: *No freedom is given to LD teachers, when you have the freedom, your planning and teaching will become better like when you give a farm to a farmer and let him grow crops up, he will be keener.*

(Focus group 1)

This dissatisfaction with the lack freedom seems to be inconsistent with the previous discussion. However, this complaint could have two possible reasons. First, the guidelines might give excessive freedom in some aspects while they can be strict in others. Second, the supervisors’ behaviour might be the underlying reason as some supervisors might ask questions or suggest some methods to demonstrate that they are eager to make sure that the programme is effective. However, their way of approaching the teachers may appear to the teachers as harsh rather than collaborative and supportive, which makes the teachers nervous and can lead them to feel restriction of freedom.

### 4.2.6 Lack of professional support in diagnosis

Participants explained that they are the only specialists in the school. Some of them asserted that there is a need for specialists (as employees in the school or at least as visitors), such as psychologists, who can help in diagnosis. LD teachers are considered as specialists in teaching not diagnosis. The lack of educational psychologists seems to be a problem that could be found in developed countries although the size of their shortage is expected to be lower. This lack could lead to allocating or encouraging teachers in taking qualifications to diagnosis LD as is the case in the SLDP. Armstrong and Squires (2015) explained that there is a movement in the UK to increase teachers’ skills in the assessment of dyslexia because of the lack of educational psychologists (see 4.2.3.2(c) for related discussion about the implications of this issue).
Participants pointed out that although there is a system for transferring students to services provided by speech therapists, this way is not effective enough. This is mainly because it asks parents to take their children to the special education centre; however, parents do not always do as recommended even if they give their consent to receiving the services.

*I fill the form of referral to a specialist in full and the parents should take it to the special educational centre. But my role cannot do more than referring them. There are no specialist visitors to assess at-risk students. We need many specialists, speech therapists and psychologists.*

(Teacher interview 4)

*LD teachers’ responsibility is about academic aspects: making personal educational plans, education and teaching. The psychologists’ test is not our responsibility. Examining social and cultural disadvantages should be undertaken by psychologists. Hearing and visual impairment assessment should be undertaken by a doctor who is around the school. The school should have psychologists and sociologists.*

(Participant C, Focus group 2)

The MOE understands that LD teachers are not psychologists as it requires LD teachers to do only academic tests but at the same time the Ministry does not provide specialists to support diagnosis. One participant (Participant C, Focus group 2) compared the SLDP with a similar programme in Bahrain using information from his friend who works there. The participant praised the Bahrain programme because it uses two teachers, one of whom is a specialist in the identification and diagnosis of LD while the another focuses on teaching. In Saudi Arabia, the lack of providing specialists in schools or compensating with visitors is questionable. The reason for this practice could refer to the need for more funding. Saudi Arabia is a large country and has thousands of schools. This may require huge funding to provide specialists in different fields. Therefore, the idea of special educational centres and health clinics seems to be more economical and to fill certain gaps. Although Saudi Arabia allocated a large budget for the education sector, problems have been identified in the means of spending this budget, which tends to limit expected educational development (Kanalan & Celep, 2011). Economic factors might lead the MOE to be in favour of the current practice over the approach suggested by the participants.
4.2.7 The required number of SWLD

The rules of the SLDP specify a minimum number of students to be registered in each programme every year. The number was previously nine students to be taught individually by the teachers, i.e. one-on-one, and this number increased to 12 students, half of whom must be taught in three groups. This rule has a critical impact on the implementation, outcomes and ways of presenting the aims of the SLDP, which are discussed below (see Figure 4-18). Some participants were not happy with this system as they argued:

*I registered 12 students and put the rest of the SLWD on the waiting list, because the 12 students have more needs. Those who are on the waiting list might have a chance in next year, but I might find out other SWLD who are in more need. So, those on the waiting list would be considered as lost in this case.*

(Teacher interview 3)

*For two years, I have been struggling with looking for SWLD in my school. I applied every identification method. I’ve done tests for some classes as a whole, but I only found a few SWLD, which is nearly half the required number. Even the students I teach certain academic skills have not studied these in their classes.*

(Participant F, Focus group 2)

*The rule of taking a specific number of students is not good because there are not many SWLD. So, this rule forces you to take students for other reasons such as general underachievement to fill up the required number. The criteria of our work should not be related to the number of teaching classes. If I have only one SWLD and he needs nine classes, I should give him nine classes.*

(Participant E, Focus group 2)

The first quotation discusses the disadvantages of this rule when there are not many SWLD in the school, while the second quotation considers the situation of having too few SWLD. The last quotation suggested changes to the rule. The previous points are important and related to the following two aspects of the programme.

First, the SLDP policy seems to attempt to follow this rule to allocate available resources. This leads to focusing more on the LD teachers’ workload rather than treating the LD facing their students. In this case, teachers appeared to focus on
fulfilling the required number whether there are few or many SWLD. This claim can be understood from earlier statements that teachers need to fulfil their required number with students without LD if the identified SWLD are few, while some SWLD who are on the waiting list from previous years may be forgotten if there are too many SWLD in a certain year. Although Figure 4-16 shows that students on the waiting list have a good chance to join the programme, it still indicates that a number of these students may not receive the same level of access as the rest of SWLD, which is a clear case of inequity (see Section 4.2.4).

**Figure 4-16 Consideration of students on the waiting list to join the programme**

In addition, when comparing the number of students (that can be served in the SLDP in each school) to the incidence of LD, it can be noticed that the ratio of SWLD is high in comparison to the available places in the SLDP in each school. The incidence of LD among the population of Saudi Arabia and other countries appears to be between five to ten percent (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Hussain, 2009; Smith, 2003). According to this incidence level, the SLDP (which serves 12 students per school) would ideally fit with schools that include about 120 – 240 students based on the incidence ratio (i.e. 5 – 10 %). However, more than two thirds of participants indicated that their schools include more than 300 students (see Figure 4-17). Because LD teachers usually support different children annually, they might be able to cover the needs of their school children. However, two problems could be raised. First, LD teachers encounter extra students (who are not SWLD but need to be registered) beyond the incidence ratio. This is because of external influences and the absence of standardised diagnostic tests, which lead to requests to register students with general underachievement or general learning
difficulties in the programme. Second, because teachers cannot always provide the number of eligible students with sufficient places in the programme with the needed services, the teachers then find it difficult to follow up students who have finished their educational plan, which usually lasts for one year.

![Figure 4-17 Number of students in the participants' schools](image)

**Second**, the MOE might aim by this rule to regulate the work of the LD teachers. In the last quotation, the teacher suggested regulating the teachers’ workload using the number of teaching classes. However, similar critiques could be applied if the SWLD enrolled in the programme were too many or too few. The MOE is probably aware of such problems because it changed the rule from 9 to 12 SWLD to serve more students. Because the MOE focuses on teachers’ workload and attempts not to let this increase and affect their work, the Ministry asserts that half of these students must be served in three groups instead of individual teaching which means more teaching hours. However, this can cause other problems. Participants asserted that they sometimes do not find two students who have similar difficulties. This seems to be in line with the suggestion by Reid (2016) that support for SWLD needs to be built on an understanding of each student’s needs and strengths, which are likely to vary among children. Furthermore, participants pointed out that this new rule of group teaching can lead them to give more priority to students who have similar difficulties which causes service delays or absences of more SWLD.

The problem of not meeting the needs of all SWLD should be addressed by applying suitable changes to policy. For this purpose, the following suggestions can be
introduced. The main mechanism of the current SLDP is to evaluate the cases and working according to this evaluation. Because each case is expected to have different strengthens and weaknesses; therefore accordingly, support and services should be different in terms of the amount of time, content materials, teaching methods and teaching environment. For example, some SWLD do not need to go to the resources room at all, they might however only need more support in their classrooms by either the class teachers or the LD teacher. Other students might need to receive support for two or three years but with a few regular sessions. LD teachers might be able to manage the service for all students according to their needs, and if there are too many students, the teachers can find a solution such as reducing the percentage of the workload with students in general or find another method for students whose situations are not severe by using help from class teachers. If there are few students, the teachers could relatively increase some activities or receive other cases from other schools if the system allows this practice. In addition, responsive to intervention (RTI) is worth being suggested as a way of more efficient allocation of resources and more effective support for all students to improve their learning (Burns & VanDerHeyden, 2006).

Attempts to tackle these disadvantages might be complicated by certain obstacles, such as lack of cooperation and awareness by class teachers (see Sections 4.1.1.4, 4.1.1.7). Another example of obstacles can be highlighted by the routine way the SLDP is practised.

*Researcher: What is your reference that you rely on to practise identification?*

*Participant C: On my experience*

*Researcher: Your experience?! Don’t you have such a thing as a book that you go back to?*

*Participant C: The work of LD teachers is routine. Meaning, every year you take referrals, do interviews and teach... take referrals, do interviews and teach.*

(Focus group 4)

Teachers focus on the first two months to identify and diagnose students. Then, LD teachers make a personal educational plan for each student. These plans are based on how many academic skills were not identified as lacking using the test. Therefore, plans are usually similar.
Usually, the plans are semi-ready. They include most of the students’ problems. For example, the aim of reading and writing letters has a similar plan. I can be different from other teachers in my teaching techniques and presentation, that’s all.

(Participant A, focus group 4)

According to each student’s achievement of these skills, LD teachers add or delete skills from the template plan which is prepared on a Word document. Following this amendment, registered SWLD are usually taught for one year although the manual does not specify the duration. What raises more questions is that some teachers indicate this routine is a somewhat simple; and although teachers are not happy with some rules, they do not wish to complain to avoid changes which may cause more workload. This is in line with suggestions in the literature (Fullan, 2007; Richardson, 1998) that teachers often resist change. The routine might appear to be a systematic work; however, this could be misleading because the focus is more placed on completing the tasks rather than continuous observation and evaluation of the responses and development of SWLD, which could indicate needed changes to the plans from time to time or from an environment to another.

To sum up, if the MOE is eager to tackle the drawbacks of the programme, it should change its focus from teachers’ workload to students’ improvement and develop a plan to move LD teachers from routine work to being able to manage their work according to the changing needs of the students.
The Rule of the required number of SWLD

Consequences
- Teachers focus on fulfilling the required number whether there too few or too many SWLD, which leads to:
  1- Registering students with no LD
  2- Some SWLD do not find a place in the programme

Whys and wherefores
- SDLP focuses on teachers’ workload and attempts to control it
- Not consistent with the aim of the SLDP which focuses on SWLD

Reflection
- Reconsider the aim of the SLDP and change policies accordingly

Suggestions
- New policies that ensure the rights of SWLD which might include, e.g.
  1- Taking support from class teachers
  2- Classrooms should be an alternative to the resources room in some cases

Obstacles
- e.g. 1- lack of cooperation and awareness by class teachers
  2- The tendency to have routine work

Figure 4-18 The rule of the required number of SWLD: analysis and discussion
Chapter 5
Underlying model development

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain the main steps of the underlying model development. The final version of this model is discussed in more depth than the preceding versions because it includes the main points in the previous versions in addition to subsequent amendments, which are developed based on the research results. The chapter discusses six stages, which are highlighted in the final version; they range from addressing the policy of the SLDP to identifying the gap between policy and practice.

5.2 The first two versions of the model

At the beginning of planning the methodology of this study, I generated the underlying model below (Figure 5-1) in order to explain the aspects involved under the questions of this study. Karst and Van Hecke (2012) developed a new model of intervention evaluation for family impact on autism spectrum disorders. Their model incorporated different factors including the parents’ impact and the child’s outcomes, which assisted in better capturing these relationships. Similarly, the model in the current study aims to clarify the relationships between different factors that influence, and play roles in, the identification of SWLD in the SLDP. In addition, it intends to illustrate the reasons for the expected gap between policy and practice.

The initial model was based on the findings of the pilot study with consideration of the wider literature. It included four sections, which are: 1- various international definitions of LD, 2- unknown compatibility between national policy and practice, 3- internal factors e.g. tutors’ perceptions, and 4- probable external factors (e.g. school administration).
However, a lot of information was needed to review this model. Therefore, at the beginning of data analysis, I reviewed this model and found it consistent with early findings. Accordingly, I developed the second version of this model (Figure 5-2). It included supportive examples of each part. It started with providing the definition of LD in the policy of the SLDP and highlighting the similarities between it and the international views, particularly, the US definition. Two examples of recommended identification processes were raised which are observation and multidisciplinary team. However, in the actual identification process, they did not exist and thus this is what has been recommended. In addition, the examples for both the recommended and actual identification processes showed how these processes were different, which supported the existence of the identified gap. This gap was presented as being the result of internal and external factors. Teachers’ views were provided as an example of the internal factors while administration influences were presented as external ones. The second version did not provide specific characteristics of the identification outcomes in the part of ‘Certain pupils involved in the SLDP’ which is because of incomplete examination at that stage. More conclusions and reflections appeared while completing the chapter on findings and discussion. Therefore, I found that it was better to develop a third/final version of the model. It did not disagree with previous ones; however, it presented some new relations and interactions. More details and discussion are provided in the following section.
5.3 The final version of the model and summary of the findings

This section discusses the final version of the model by taking each component in turn (Figure 5-3). In addition, it attempts to link between the findings and the main conclusions based on a discussion of the findings. The main aspects of this model are explained as follows.
Figure 5-3 The final version of the underlying model

5.3.1 Policy

5.3.1.1 Centralisation

The policy and instructions of the SLDP are made within the MOE. Although policy makers might ask for suggestions from teachers or supervisors, their suggestions are not considered through a formal system (such as voting). These suggestions might be considered by policy makers (selected experts) who have all of the right to formalise policy. Because of that, I highlighted in the model (centralisation) underneath the word ‘policy’. This centralisation appeared to cause dilemma where teachers complained that their suggestions and different needs in the field were not addressed by the MOE. Although this problem is persisting, a gradual move towards decentralisation by Saudi MOE is anticipated by Hakeem (2012).
5.3.1.2 International views

The field and knowledge of LD were introduced to Saudi Arabia based on international research mostly done overseas. Recently, various research efforts have been conducted in Saudi Arabia. However, since the policy of the SLDP was made, no critical development has happened. Effectively, the adopted definition and main instructions (e.g. the consideration of IQ-discrepancy) are still the same. In addition, these instructions were adopted based on practice in the US (Alquraini, 2010; Habeeb, 2006); however, the majority of its states currently are adopting different instructions (e.g. response to intervention, RTI). Generally, the development of policy seems to be very slow. Particularly, if policy makers argue that old instructions are better, I wonder why many problems in the SLDP (e.g. inaccurate measures) remain unresolved.

Based on national views, the policy does not seem to adopt results or recommendations from national research. For example, although the Learning Disabilities Scale for Primary Schools Students (Alsartawi, 1995) was published by a major university in Saudi Arabia, it was not adopted in the programme. In fact, the policy does not adopt any measure, scale or assessment from outside the MOE, and it remains apparent that the adopted scale is very simple. Therefore, the effectiveness of the policy seems to be a weakness because of centralisation and lack of consideration of new research.

5.3.2 Instructions

LD teachers receive instructions from both the manual and supervisors. The supervisors direct teachers and notify them about recent circulars that are issued by the MOE. The manual is assumed to be the main source of rich details about the implementation of the SLDP. Dusenbury et al. (2003) reported that the fidelity of implementation is likely to be enhanced by detailed instruction manuals on how to implement the intervention, which is in contrast to the effect of ambiguous instructions. In this study, participants pointed out that the manual lacked detail about the mechanisms of some processes. In addition, much difference was identified in the ways of implementing certain techniques, also related to the lack of detail in the manual.
5.3.3 Influences

Ideally, the instructions are assumed to be adopted as they are. However, in real practice, these instructions come across a variety of influences and conditions, which interact one with the other. This shows the complexity of analysing various reasons and underlying factors that play roles in shaping and impacting on the intervention of the SLDP. This complexity is expected to be found in this study as it has been indicated in similar studies of interventions. For example, Deniz (2002) discussed the evaluation of training interventions and explained its complexity, where many overlapping factors exist with continuous dynamic interactions between different aspects and dimensions of organisational goals, trainees, training circumstances, and instructional technologies.

The influences (see the circle in the model, Figure 5-3) seem to be more effective and active when certain conditions exist (see the square in the same model). The differentiation between the influences and conditions in the model is subtle and not always guaranteed. This means that the conditions could become influences and vice versa. The influences appeared to have the power to shift the assumed identification to different directions. This power can be resisted in some situations if the conditions were positive. For example, when the head teacher (external factor) asks the LD teacher to register a student who does not have LD, the LD teacher’s response to this influence has a relation to the surrounding conditions such as focusing on the number of teachers’ tasks rather than quality. This means that when this LD teacher registers this student and makes an individual plan for him/her, the teacher will be considered formally as a teacher who has completed his/her tasks even though there are other students who have more priority to be registered. Therefore, registering such a student will not cause a problem for the teacher because he/she will not be required to do additional work nor will he/she be considered negligent of his/her duties. However, if the focus was directed to supporting SWLD regardless of their number, registration of other students would mean spending more time and effort on something that is not included in the LD teachers’ consideration. In this case, the LD teachers will probably show more resistance to accepting the head teacher’s request.
5.3.4 Decision making and actual identification

LD teachers’ decisions in managing and applying the identification process appeared to be the result of interactions between the instructions, influences and conditions. These interactions do not affect only conducting the identification; but rather, their effect starts before the identification process (e.g. when making the plan) and lasts up to after finishing the identification. Consequently, the results might indicate having or not having LD, but the decision is made in a way that is inconsistent with the results. This includes the effect of allocating resources as it plays a role in the decision-making process (Armstrong & Squires, 2015). For example, as all LD teachers have to support a specific number of SWLD, the number of students in their schools could affect their decision. This means if LD teachers have a small number of students in their schools, they might decide to support students with general poor reading after supporting all students with clear LD. However, other teachers could list some SWLD on the waiting list because of the high number of students in their schools.

5.3.5 Registered students

The results of identification are highly dependent on different factors that are related to the implementation of the SLDP (see Section 4.2.3). Based on a review of 500 studies that presented clear empirical evidence, Durlak and DuPre (2008) asserted that outcomes are affected by the level of implementation. Students are registered in the SLDP mainly based on the LD teachers’ decisions. In many occasions, LD teachers are aware, while they make the decision of including some students in the programme, that these students’ learning difficulties are not associated with LD. On other occasions, an LD teacher realises (after registration and during teaching) that some of the registered students do not in fact have LD; and sometimes, even after their realisation of this mistake, they continue their plan with these students. This raises two important problems in the programme. First, forms of inequity appear where the support differs from a teacher to another and where some students receive more support while there are others (not registered) who have more priority (see Section 4.2.4). Second, this phenomenon reveals inconsistency between the results and the aims of the SLDP. The way of tackling the problem can be through two considerations. First, addressing all the dilemmas that exist in the policies, implementation, influences and conditions can make the programme easier to implement. Although this way could result in better
consistency, it seems very difficult to resolve all the dilemmas based on the current situation understood from the findings. Second, the aims of the programme could be amended in a way that allows serving SWLD and reducing the possibility of inequity and inconsistency. For example, this can be through the consideration of the Response to Intervention model (RTI) or similar approaches where LD teachers are not required to serve a limited number of students; rather, they try to provide possible quality of intervention in a suitable way for students’ needs and the capacity of the LD teachers whether through one-to-one instruction, support in the regular classroom, or cooperation with regular class teachers.

5.3.6 The gap between policy and practice

The policy of the SLDP, including the instructions, is not always applied in real practice as it is. This shows that there is a gap between policy and practice in general. Such a gap does exist within educational interventions across nations (Boal & Mankowski, 2014; Bringewatt & Gershoff, 2010; Forman et al., 2009; Poon-McBrayer, 2012). The results of this study discussed that some students with LD are not identified which deprived them of the service. This is in line with a report by Poon-McBrayer (2012) who asserted that people with special needs might not receive their rights when there is a gap between policy and practice.

This study highlighted some gaps in different areas, such as lack of cooperation from classroom teachers (section 4.1.1.7), shortcomings in applying and coordinating a multi-disciplinary team (section 4.2.3.2) and focusing only on one aspect of LD (section 4.1.2.4). Different reasons seemed to play a role in generating such a gap in the SDLP, which include lack of funding, training and other resources. In addition, teachers’ perceptions played a role in applying the intervention according to their understanding and interpretation of its concepts. This is in line with the findings of various studies (Kavale et al., 2009; Poon-McBrayer, 2012) which highlighted that the controversial nature of LD presents obstacles to the operationalisation of the existing definitions in the practice of LD identification.

However, the extent of this gap is not always similar in different situations. It sometimes becomes very clear while in some circumstances it becomes unobservable, and this is related to the conditions and policies for such circumstances. For example,
the gap might be reduced or may disappear when the LD teacher is highly experienced, the related policies are very clear, and the student’s difficulties are relatively distinctly identified.

5.4 Summary

This chapter addressed the development of the underlying model and discussed the main aspects of its final version. No key differences were appeared between the first and second version of the model in which the second one was reinforced by more examples and clarifications. However, the final version has key developments based on the research results and discussion. For example, some conclusions about policy and the registered students have been added. Furthermore, the positions of the influences and surrounding conditions have been reformulated with raising an indication of a possible interaction between the influences and the policy. It can be concluded that this model assists in relating and structuring the results of the whole current study; and therefore, it helps to understand the phenomenon of the identification of SWLD in the Saudi schools context. It, also, facilitates to locate different factors (e.g. international views of LD) that impact on the identification and how these factors might influence the SLDP. In addition, this model could be tested and developed based on other contexts in future research. The next chapter presents the conclusions of the present study, including its limitations and implications.
Chapter 6
Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The qualitative study undertaken in this thesis resulted in many theoretical, practical and personal contributions. At a theoretical level, this research reviewed the existing literature and offered critique of the theories in the field of special education and learning disabilities in particular. From a practical perspective, data-driven policy recommendations and management implications are offered for the benefit of decision makers and researchers in this field. There is also an element of personal learning on the part of the researcher. All three levels are discussed in this conclusion chapter as well as the limitations of the research and the possible areas for theoretical and empirical development in future studies.

6.2 Summary of the study

The aim of the current study was to investigate the process of identification of students with learning disabilities (SWLD) in the Saudi learning disabilities programme (SLDP). I applied a qualitative approach to explore the meaning, factors and influences in the context of the SLDP from the views of the teachers who work and interact in this setting and environment. I found that this approach assisted me to discuss very complex questions and look deeper into many profound concepts and issues. This provided me with rich data which were analysed in a way that allowed me to observe and relate patterns and themes. The findings were discussed and organised in a way that can be used to address the research questions set at the beginning of the study. The results showed the roles of the concept of LD, the context, teachers’ beliefs, policies, the fidelity of implementations and some other factors in the identification of SWLD. Also, these findings highlighted the gap that exists between policy and practice. In other words, the reality of the current situation was found to be different from the expectations and the aims of the SLDP. In the following sections, I will summarise the main research findings in accordance with the research questions. It is worth highlighting that these questions are much interconnected and each has effects on the others. However, RQ1 emphasises more on practice while RQ2 focuses more on policy.
1- How do teachers on the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme SLDP identify Students with Learning Disabilities (SWLD)? For instance:

- Why are SWLD identified in this current process?
- How does the referral process take place?
- How do contextual factors (family and school administration) affect the identification process?

The findings related to this question have been addressed in five related themes which are: screening and referrals, priorities in registration of students in the SLDP, the context of LD identification, techniques and tests for identification, and the concept of LD.

6.2.1 Screening and referrals

This study shows that participants used the term screening to refer to paying attention to, and acquainting themselves with, the students who are retaking courses. This is practised because LD teachers believe in its importance as an indication of LD, and also because of the general direction of the MOE towards reducing the number of students who are retaking courses, which reflects on the SLDP as a way to support this movement. However, the referral process is more valued by LD teachers’ perceptions as classroom teacher know and provide sufficient detail about their students because of their regular communication with them. By contrast, no detail about students’ skills, strengths and weaknesses are offered with the list of students retaking courses. Although the referral process was found to be important, the participants raised a concern about whether classroom teachers do have enough information about LD. The survey indicated that the majority of participants thought classroom teachers did sometimes refer students with unsatisfactory achievement rather than those with LD. Accordingly, participants asserted the importance of providing classroom teachers with courses/training about LD. In addition, the study presented the lack of, and the need for, collaboration work between classroom and LD teachers for the benefit of students, whether in identification or in making the teaching plan.
6.2.2 Priorities in registration of students in the SLDP

The results showed that registering students in the SLDP is influenced and prioritised based on different factors related to the contexts, LD teachers’ understanding and policies. These factors can be categorised as follows:

1- Referrals made by classroom teachers who are good at teaching are given more priority as the students they refer are more likely to be suffering from LD rather than lacking quality instruction. This implies that LD teachers often find many referred students who were provided access to inadequate education rather than having real LD.

2- Referrals in early years of education are prioritised, as explained by participants, which serves as an early intervention. However, absence of ‘follow-up’ and lack of attention to late primary years was also identified.

3- Prioritisation of students retaking courses was also considered by participants because of the possibility of LD among those students, as well as the existing pressure from the schools’ administration which aims to reduce the number of students retaking courses.

4- Prioritisation of students with reading difficulties was identified, which is associated with views that literacy is more important than maths.

5- Prioritising students with specific needs was arranged according to the results of the diagnostic tests (students with very poor results), although the validity of these tests is uncertain.

6- Students with cooperating parents were also prioritised as participants believed that the possibility of having real LD is higher when students need much support from their parents, while facing learning difficulties.

6.2.3 The context of LD identification

The results of this study have shown that the identification process is strongly influenced by different contextual factors which include: 1- social, family and economic circumstances; 2- classroom and quality of education.

First, several socioeconomic factors were found to have a clear effect on students’ achievement; these factors include poverty, living in rural areas and low parental education, which can be related in some situations. For example, most rural areas have
high levels of poverty and low parental education. In such situations, both quality of schooling and children’s educational achievement were negatively affected. With poor schooling and low general achievement of schoolchildren, LD teachers face challenges to differentiate between LD and other general learning difficulties which are caused by lack of support and poor education.

Second, many registered students were found to have no LD after a period of being on the SLDP. The initial misidentification was attributed to absence of support in the classroom and poor quality of education which resulted in misleading assessment outcomes.

6.2.4 Factors affecting registration

Many factors presented a direct influence on LD teachers to register students on the SLDP, although some of these students did not necessarily have LD. Examples of such influences came from classroom teachers who sometimes attempted to cover problems related to their teaching or from the school administration to meet the demands of students’ families. In addition, the Department of Education tended to refer students who have other types of learning difficulties, such as slow learners, whom the LD teachers had to register onto the programme.

6.2.5 Techniques and tests for identification

LD teachers applied different techniques to identify students with LD. Interviews were highly valued and applied by participants, whereas other techniques (such as evaluating students’ work and observation) were less widely applied. Although the participants had the same SLDP manual which explained the identification process, various types of differences were identified in the participants’ perceptions, choice of techniques and methods of implementation of these techniques. For example, the observation was not applied by all participants, and even for those who applied it, several differences were clear in their way of implementing this method due to the absence of basic requirements, such as preparing an observational framework. These differences appear to have resulted from several factors such as lack of time, ambiguous guidelines and differing levels of teachers’ enthusiasm.
In addition, this study discussed the main tests used in the SLDP. For the IQ-discrepancy test, the survey showed that 55% of the participants never used it, while almost all participants valued its importance as a useful diagnostic tool. The reasons for the lacking use of this technique include the complexity of referral procedures and lack of confidence in the IQ results issued by the assessment centre. However, the value and the need for the IQ test were associated with adopting the IQ-discrepancy model. This showed a contradiction to policy as its use by teachers is encouraged but not facilitated, which leads teachers to pursue personal, improvised endeavours based on weak scientific grounds. However, the main test, which is compulsory and used by all participants, was an academic one. Although its value was recognised by participants, they criticised its lack of standardisation and inability to assess developmental aspects.

6.2.6 The concept of LD

The research findings demonstrated extensive overlap between the participants’ perceptions of LD, which is expected to be a result of the similarity of their preparation courses. Their views of the concept of LD included discrepancy notions, exclusionary criteria, such as other disabilities, symptoms of academic problems and development issues, such as attention deficits. In addition, participants raised some related concepts such as carelessness and slow learning. The concept of carelessness was used to refer to students who lacked motivation or support from their families, which resulted in unsatisfactory achievement. These students, along with slow learners, were sometimes registered onto the programme because of misidentification or due to pressure from other people such as classroom teachers.

Registration on the SLDP was found to be associated with formal and informal labelling. Formal labelling was intended to provide the service and was limited to the period time in which this service was delivered. Informal labelling did not appear to be associated with teachers’ or students’ negative attitudes, except in situations where the programme was newly started in a school, a situation which is associated with lack awareness about LD, which often changed later.
2- How do teachers view the policies around identification strategies and registration as being valid, necessary, and efficient? And why?

The study shows that LD teachers receive instructions from their supervisors and the manual of the programme. The MOE is the only authority that makes, decides and approves policies of the SLDP. LD teachers were asked to send their suggestions about the programme to the MOE through their supervisors. However, a claim was raised that their suggestions were not taken seriously as they did not observe any related changes. In addition, participants complained about the gap between policies and their theoretical studies at university; they studied different teaching and identification methods and they were not provided with the needed tools in their school to apply them.

For teacher training, the findings indicated that LD teachers valued the preparation programme, which is a four-year undergraduate course. However, many participants raised a concern related to the absence of follow-up training.

Two challenges to the implementation of SLDP were identified; ambiguity and complexity. The results showed that the manual has a certain level of ambiguity, in that it does not clarify important details about the mechanism of implementation. In addition, the programme is a complex operation that requires coordination by many people, some of whom are required to have special skills. In addition to the teachers, this multidisciplinary team should include an educational psychologist, parents and other professionals. The vast majority (77%) of participants agreed that forming a working multidisciplinary team is definitely important for effective identification. However, this team is mostly not applied or coordinated in reality; particularly, no psychologists were provided for schools or on the SLDP. In addition, the participants asserted that there is a need for support from other professionals such as speech therapists and sociologists, who can be visiting members of the multidisciplinary team.

Different policies and practices of the SLDP were also discussed in relation to equity. Possible forms of inequity which were identified include bias in assessment, which can cause misidentification. Another source of lack of equity is the limited number for SWLD who can be enrolled in each programme, which means that some SWLD might not receive the service. In both of these examples, some SWLD tend to receive the service while some others, who are also deserving of enrolment, may not.
6.3 Personal learning

The research conducted in this study was an interesting, engaging and a challenging intellectual journey. From a personal perspective, I benefitted immensely from this research study by observing and experiencing the challenges of bridging the gap between the theoretical aspects and practical implications in the implementation of the suggested models. Furthermore, as a result of extensive reading on the subject, I have gained a broad understanding of the concepts of special education as well as theories and arguments of catalysts in the field of LD. Additionally, in terms of the Saudi Arabian context, I have become more informed about the policy of special education and the inner workings of the SLDP as a model programme implemented by the MOE. Moreover, as result of conducting this study, I have gained invaluable background knowledge of recognizing investigation approaches and methodologies of research. For example, I have learned to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative approaches as well as to differentiate between them based on their strengths and weaknesses, and consequently, to make informed judgement about contexts in which one is more suitable than the other in a particular study. Furthermore, over the course of this study, I have acquired useful transferrable skills, such as time management, organisational, planning as well as IT and research skills, which will be of benefit throughout my academic career. Finally, as a result of the valuable knowledge, enjoyment, practical applications and importance of this study, I have been highly motivated to continue conducting further research and studies in the field of special education, particularly, in the context of Saudi Arabia.

6.4 Limitations of study

The limitations of this research stem from its small sample size which can hinder any claims of generalisation of the findings from the sample in question to the wider population. However, the main findings were found to be in line with other national and international research which can support the consideration of these findings in the broader context. Also, the sample involved only some stakeholders but not others. It focused on the views of LD teachers. However, there are other stakeholders involved in the programme such as classroom teachers, parents and the students themselves, who could have enriched the study with their perceptions of the programme.
In addition, as this research is qualitative-based, there is a danger of subjectivity from the researcher and participants, although every effort has been made to remain impartial and self-regulated. Furthermore, the data collection was carried out and analysed in Arabic then translated into English. This could cause a certain degree of loss of meaning in some areas, such as the participants’ quotations. For an illustration of the efforts made to counter the last limitation, I provide some parts of the Arabic transcripts where the reader can observe the statements of the participants (see appendix 6).

### 6.5 Contribution to knowledge

This study intended to explore the processes of identification that are employed in the SLDP. It covered the characteristics and features of the programme and offered in-depth insights into the subject from LD teachers’ perspectives. The study contributed to the understanding of SLDP in a rarely addressed context, i.e. in Saudi Arabia, and offered an addition to the body of literature in the field of LD by presenting empirically derived data. The theoretical and empirical contribution of this study constituted a response to the need highlighted by the limitations of previous studies focusing on learning disabilities in Saudi Arabia. The study indicated that the process of identifying LD is not entirely objective; there are many contextual, endogenous and exogenous factors that shape the process, which are associated with SLDP procedures and management. Also, this study can probably help to enrich resources available on the Saudi context in general by giving an example of how a Saudi phenomenon can be researched and what methods can fit with the Saudi culture.

Internationally, the over-reliance on research conducted in developed countries and Western-based models and conceptualisations means that other contextual and societal idiosyncrasies and culture-specific matters are often ignored, which may cause these societies difficulties and dilemmas in implementation. Therefore, this study can meet the need to enrich the subject of LD by having drawn signification insights from different contexts and experiences. For example, this study provided an understanding of Saudi teachers’ views on LD and how they can be addressed. Thus, through such efforts, the nature of learning disabilities in Saudi Arabia in the teachers’ views may become clearer to the international audience. Accordingly, it is important for those who are interested in LD to be acquainted with learning disabilities programmes that have been successfully implemented in other societies. In doing so, a nation that is planning
to introduce a learning disabilities programme can adapt certain aspects and concepts of established programmes so that they closely fit with their system of education, culture and values. In addition, the outcomes of study corroborate ideas and arguments made by international research reports in the area of LD and add more findings to the body of knowledge in this field. This has led to me revising my conceptualisation and developing the final model as discussed in Chapter 5. Based on this account, it can be seen how this study fits and contributes to both national and international research and has practical implications for the programme in question.

6.6 Implications

This study has implications for several stakeholders and sectors. These are summarised under three main headings which are LD teachers, schools, policies and research. Consideration of these implications would assist in the development of the SLDP, schools and Saudi education in general. Also, it is hoped that the outcomes of this study will positively influence international practice in the field of special education as there are many common areas that have been identified between the Saudi and the international educational practices. In addition, this study provides researchers with a practical example finding a suitable method for a specific culture or context.

6.6.1 Implications for LD teachers

LD teachers should rethink about the challenges that were discussed in this study and take a step towards the development of the programme in light of the research conclusions. The results of this research emphasised the need of LD teachers for additional development, which is contrasted by the observation that they do not attend training or courses (except the initial university preparation course), mainly because training is not provided by the MOE. However, a few participants managed to attend and appreciated a free course at another institution, which is King Salman Centre for Disability Research. Therefore, LD teachers should not stop their personal improvement and should take advantage of any suitable available courses, workshops or networks. It is worth indicating that the currently practised activity of visits between LD teachers, which is called ‘mutual visits’, has the potential to enhance their experience if it is capitalised on appropriately.
In addition, this study showed the importance of overcoming routine and moving away for the change-resistant tendencies that some LD teachers were reported to have, a step which will facilitate further development of their practices. In this regard, LD teachers should be reminded of the general aim of the SLDP, which is to identify and support all SWLD in schools. Indeed, efforts should be made by teachers to identify and eradicate practices they became accustomed to, which are not consistent with providing inclusive service to all students with LD (e.g. the practice of addressing literacy but not maths). For a positive change, LD teachers are encouraged to inform the MOE through their supervisors about challenges, barriers and needs in the field of LD, which are particularly related to the SLDP, as they are the main stakeholders who are engaged in the programme.

6.6.2 Implications for schools

Generally, the findings provide a valuable opportunity for schools to identify what is required to improve or develop their practice if they are lagging behind or there are cases of inefficiency, inconsistency or inequity. This study showed that schools have a critical role in addressing LD with better identification of SWLD and implementation of the SLDP by providing students with quality education. Several factors were found to influence achieving better education generally, and supporting SWLD in particular. First, classroom teachers are the cornerstone of educational practice. Improving their quality of instruction is expected to enhance all students’ learning outcomes and avoid referring students who face general learning barriers. In addition, these teachers will be more effective in supporting the SLDP if they are provided with effective and relevant training courses about LD. Second, classroom arrangement was found to be important in students’ learning. This includes the number of students in class and their positions in the classroom. Third, collaboration between school staff was highly emphasised by participants. Understanding and assessment of students’ difficulties often require different people, such as classroom teachers, LD teachers and school counsellors. As school administrations have authority over their staff, they have a responsibility to facilitate and coordinate and maybe participate in achieving effective collaboration. This might require improving the general culture of staff in different aspects, such as communication, teamwork, motivation, and special educational aspects. In addition, LD teachers need much support from schools to facilitate communication with parents,
6.6.3 Implications for policy

Saudi Arabia is seeking educational development in different areas, including special education, which is why a growing number of schools are participating in the SLDP. This developing practice should be supported, evaluated and accelerated by appropriate research. The findings of this study have the potential to influence Saudi policy in this area. Policy makers should consider the findings and directives that emerged from this study and rethink about what is suitable and what is not practical in the processes of applying the SLDP. Here, several implications are highlighted in the following points.

1- Participants highlighted that the manual suggested including psychologists in the assessment and in the multidisciplinary team in particular; however, this recommendation is not practised in reality. This raises a concern about the importance of not only making psychologists available to the SLDP, but also the significance of reviewing the applicability of the manual, which could raise its credibility among teachers and also facilitate more fidelity of implementation.

2- The manual was found to be lacking essential detail and clear mechanisms of implementation. Improving such drawbacks is expected to enable LD teachers to be more confident and able to follow the instructions as intended by the policy.

3- Better results of identification could be achieved by improving the current tools of assessment. For example, the processes of interviews and observation need to be supported by more appropriate frameworks. Also, it is possible to introduce some of the discussed screening tests, such as the Learning Disabilities Scale for Primary Schools Students (Alsartawi, 1995); currently, the only adopted assessment in the SLDP is prepared by LD teachers.

4- The MOE has a practical responsibility to support classroom teachers, LD teachers and stakeholders by appropriate training, courses or workshops. The findings of this study uncovered the needs of LD teachers for further special training in LD and identification processes as the preparation course was viewed as insufficient in many areas and new developments in the LD field.
5- Varying limitations of LD teachers’ works and practices seem to have resulted from deficiencies in the educational system such as a lack of training, clear manuals and motivation. Improved implementation and practice will probably appear when such deficiencies are addressed.

6- Many challenges, barriers and problems were found in the SLDP which seem to be addressable by applying the response-to-intervention (RTI) model. Therefore, researchers and policy makers should consider this model for more effective development in supporting SWLD.

6.6.4 Implication for national and international research

Although this study is conducted specifically to address the SLDP, the findings and discussions highlighted many trends and patterns which are relevant to, and common with, international practices and research. Therefore, the following points will consider both the Saudi and international contexts.

1- Because of some Saudi traditions, interviewing females by the opposite gender faces some kind of restriction. Because of that, many researchers limit their interviews to participants of the same gender. This study provided a possible solution for this question; interviews with female teachers were conducted using instant messaging (IM) software (WhatsApp in this case). This approach was found to be comfortable for participants and useful for data collection. Therefore, this study is expected to be useful for researchers who face such cultural issues when collecting data in Saudi Arabia or similar social contexts. Furthermore, because of the advantages of this approach, it can be adopted to address several other challenges in research beyond contextual restrictions within countries. For example, it can be applied to tackle challenges of discussing sensitive topics where participants are not comfortable to face or talk to the researchers in person.

2- As the underlying model provides a general picture and clarification of several processes, factors and gaps about identification of SWLD on the SLDP, it might need customisation or development to be considered for other research that adopts a different sample and other research methods. Also, it can be considered by international research that is interested in similar phenomena; this can also be seen as a way to build upon previous knowledge.
3- Although this study assists in filling some gaps in Saudi literature, more research about identification and supporting SWLD is required; particularly, this subject is complex and overlaps with many aspects in the education system. Also, supporting the Saudi educational context by research could help to reach the growing development of concepts, models and interventions that have been established in the field of LD. For example, investigating the applicability and effectiveness of the RTI model, dyslexia friendly approaches and inclusion methods in Saudi schools is expected to enhance learning outcomes, the educational system and research in general. Such investigations should include how high quality of education can be achieved and what the possible implications of this factor would be within the SLDP. In addition, future studies can be conducted using larger sample sizes from different cities and including other stakeholders, which would allow the researcher to conduct a more detailed investigation about context-specific factors.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 Ethical clearance

Ref: DJK/PhD/86053930

31st March, 2014

Mr Fahad Alnaim
(via email: fahad.alnaim@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk)

Dear Fahad,

I am pleased to inform you that the Postgraduate Director of Research, acting on behalf of the Postgraduate Research Degrees Committee, has approved the following application(s):

For permission to undertake fieldwork in Saudi Arabia from 9th March 2014 until 30th June 2014 under regulation 6 for the degree of Ph.D.

If any changes take place during the course of the research you should discuss these with your supervisor to ascertain whether additional ethical approval and/or a revised risk assessment is required.

Supervisory obligations continue during a period of fieldwork and it is the responsibility of you and your supervisory team to ensure that mandatory milestones within eProg are kept up-to-date.

You are also reminded that for fieldwork duration of more than three months, you must vacate your allocated desk space; remove any personal belongings and return keys, where applicable, to the PGR Office.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Debbie Kubiena
Senior Postgraduate Research Administrator

Cc: Garry Squires/Caroline Bond—Supervisors
Research Degrees Cttee → CL → Student File
Calendar/Audit file
Appendix 2 Participant information sheet and consent form

English version

Identification strategies in the Saudi learning disabilities programme:
Teachers' perspectives

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study. The researcher name is Fahad Alnaim, a PhD student in the University of Manchester. He has to conduct a study that needs data collecting as a part of the PhD thesis. So, he is carrying out this study which aims to explore the nature of learning disabilities programme in the Saudi Arabian schools from the perspective of the LDS's teacher. This form asks your consent to participate in the study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?
Fahad Alnaim
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road Manchester
UK M13 9PL

Title of the Research
Identification Strategies in the Saudi Learning Disabilities Programme: Primary Teachers' Perspectives

What is the aim of the research?
This research aims to explore the nature of learning disabilities programme in the Saudi Arabian schools in relation to the strategies used for identifying students with learning. It will explore what identification methods are being realistically applied and examine its strengths and weaknesses from perspective of those teachers who are main responsible for serving students with learning disabilities. By providing a clear picture
of the programme, it is hoped that educationists and learning disabilities programme makers can learn more about what is really happening in Saudi schools in terms of identifying students with learning disabilities.

**Why have I been chosen?**

The researcher looked for teachers who have been in charge for serving students with learning disabilities for more than four years. You, as some others, have this experience and are expected to provide some explanation about the applied identification strategies.

**What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

The researcher needs to ask you about information related to the applied identification strategies are applied for students with learning disabilities. Also, the researcher needs to ask you about the strengths and weaknesses of these strategies from your perspectives.

**What happens to the data collected?**

Data collected will be used for the purpose of PhD thesis.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

The data will be stored and kept secure. The transcripts of the interview will be destroyed just after submitting thesis in about three years later. Every participant will be anonymous whether in transcripts or the thesis itself.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and then the researcher will destroy any data has been collected from you.

**Will I be paid for participating in the research?**

The participation in this study is voluntary, so there is not payment provided.

**What is the duration of the research?**

This interview will be in two sessions for about 45 minutes.

**Where will the research be conducted?**
The place will be arranged in the school.

**Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

It will be part of the PhD thesis which should be accessible by anybody. Also, it might be published in a journal in future.

**Contact for further information**

My email: fahad.alnaim@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

My supervisor email: Garry.Squires@manchester.ac.uk

**What if something goes wrong?**

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093
Identification strategies in the Saudi learning disabilities programme: Teachers' perspectives

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes

5. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant ___________________________ Date ___________________________ Signature ___________________________

Name of person taking consent ___________________________ Date ___________________________ Signature ___________________________

Fahad Alnaim

_____________________________ ___________________________ ___________________________
استراتيجيات التعرف على ذوي صعوبات التعلم في البرنامج السعودي: وجهات نظر المعلمين

نموذج المعلومات للمشاركين بالدراسة

أنت مدعو للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة والتي تقوم بها الباحث فهد النعيم طالب الدكتوراة بجامعة مانشستر. والذي عليه إجراء هذه الدراسة والتي تتطلب جمع بيانات كجزء من رسالة الدكتوراة. وتهدف هذه الرسالة إلى الكشف عن برامج صعوبات التعلم في السعودية والتحديد طرق التعرف على ذوي الصعوبات من خلال وجهات نظر معلمي صعوبات التعلم. هذا النموذج يتطلب موافقتكم للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة. قبل اتخاذك لقراءة الرسالة من المهم أن تعرف ماذا يحدث هذا البحث عليه. أرجو أن تأخذ وقتك لقراءة 내용 الرسالة وتثق فيها من خلال وجهة نظر المدرسين الذين هم المسؤول الأساسي في خدمة الطلاب ذوي صعوبات التعلم.

من هو الذي يقوم بإجراء الدراسة؟

فهد النعيم
منى الين ويلكنسون
جامعة مانشستر
UK
M13 9PL

عنوان البحث

استراتيجيات التعرف على ذوي صعوبات التعلم في البرنامج السعودي: وجهات نظر المعلمين

ما هو الهدف من هذا البحث؟

وتهدف هذه الرسالة إلى الكشف عن برامج صعوبات التعلم في السعودية والتحديد طرق التعرف على ذوي الصعوبات من خلال وجهات نظر معلمي صعوبات التعلم. سوف تبحث هذه الرسالة عن الطرق المستخدمة فعليا ومناقشة نقاط القوة والضعف فيها من خلال وجهة نظر المدرسين الذين هم المسؤول الأساسي في خدمة الطلاب ذوي صعوبات التعلم.

لماذا تم اختياري للمشاركة؟

البحث يتطلب جمع بيانات من المعلمين القانونين على اكتشاف وتدريب الطلاب ذوي صعوبات التعلم. وهلاء المعلمون ينبغي أن يكونوا من أماكن وخبرات مختلفة. وأنت كمعلم لذوي الصعوبات من المتوقع أن تثرى هذا البحث بمشاركتك.

ماذا سأسأل عنك إذا شاركت؟

الباحث يحتاج أن يسال معلومات تتعلق برامج صعوبات التعلم في السعودية والتحديد طرق التعرف على ذوي الصعوبات من خلال وجهات نظرك. وذلك بالسؤال عن الطرق المستخدمة فعليا ومناقشة نقاط القوة والضعف فيها من خلال وجهة نظرك.

كيف سيتم استخدام المعلومات المجمعة؟

سيتم استخدامك لأغراض رسالة الدكتوراة.
كيف سيتم الاحتفاظ بسرية البيانات؟
البيانات سيتم تخزينها والإبقاء عليها محفوظة. البيانات سيتم إتلافها بعد الانتهاء من الرسالة. كل مشارك سيوضع له اسم مستعار سواء كان في البيانات الخام أو في الرسالة.

ماذا سيحدث عندما لا أريد أن أشارك أو عند تغيير رأيي؟
كل هذا يرجع لك. عندما توافق على المشاركة سيظل لك الحرية على الانسحاب متي شئت وبدون إعطاء أي سبب وعدها سيحفز الباحث كل البيانات التي قدمتها مسبقا.

هل سيتم إعطائي مبلغ مالي مقابل المشاركة؟
المشاركة هنا تطوعية لذلك ليس هناك أي مبالغ متعاطف.

كم مدة المشاركة في البحث؟
مدة المقابلة ستكون حوالي 45 دقيقة.

هل ستطبع مخرجات البحث؟
نعم، رسالة الدكتوراة تكون متاحة في الإنترنت وقد ينشر أجزاء منها في بعض المجلات.

للاتصال لمزيد من المعلومات
fahad.alnaim@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk
Garry.Squires@manchester.ac.uk

ماذا إذا حدث أمر غير ما ينبغي؟
إذا كانت هناك أي قضية تتصل بالبحث فضل ما ناقشتها مع فريق البحث الرجال الاتصال على العنوان أو الرقم التالي:
Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL’,
by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk,
or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093
استراتيجيات التعرف على ذوي صعوبات التعلم في البرنامج السعودي: وجهات نظر المعلمين

نموذج الموافقة

1. أنا أقر أنني قرأت المعلومات المرفقة بالأعلى وأعطيت الفرصة للنظر في المعلومات والسؤال على أي نقطة وتمت إجابات مرضية.

2. أنا أعلم أن المشاركة تطوعية وأن لي الخيار على الإسحاب أي وقت دون إعطاء أي سبب.

3. أنا أعلم أنه سيتم تسجيل المقابلة صوتيا.

4. أنا أوافق على قضية أن البيانات ممكن أن تنشر بغير الاسم الصريح في كتاب أو مجلة.

5. أنا أوافق على المشاركة في هذا المشروع.

اسم المشارك: ...................................
التاريخ: ..................................
التوقيع: ..................................

اسم الباحث:......................................
التاريخ:..........................................
التوقيع:............................................

شكرا جزيلا فهد النعيم
Appendix 3 Data collection tools

1. Questionnaire

English version

Part 1

Demographic information

Please choose only one on each of the following items:

A. How many years of experience do you have teaching with LD?
   □ 0-2 years
   □ 3-4 years
   □ 5 years or more

B. Where have you taught?
   □ Only in the inner city
   □ Only in the suburbs of the city
   □ In both of them

C. What is the approximate achievement level of your school students?
   □ Excellent
   □ Good
   □ Weak

D. How many students does your school have?
   □ 100 -299 students
   □ 300 – 499 students
   □ 500 – 700 students
   □ More than 700 students
Part 2

Please tick (√) each of the following items according to the **Degree of importance** (in your opinion) & your actual **frequency of use** of each item.

**Important Note:**
If there is a difference between your opinion (Degree of importance) and your actual use, justify it in the box below each item.

**Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Degree of importance</th>
<th>Frequent of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√ important</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>helpful</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not needed</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Justification**
Although I think it is important I do not always use it because parents do not show response

---

**Identification Methods: Degree of importance & Frequent of use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Degree of importance</th>
<th>Frequent of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Asking for a notice about LD students from</td>
<td>important</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>class tutors</td>
<td>helpful</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not needed</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Justification**

| 2   | Reviewing records for students repeating a | important            | always          |
|     | course                                     | helpful              | sometimes       |
|     |                                            | not needed           | Never           |

**Justification**

| 3   | Interviewing students suspected of having  | important            | always          |
|     | LD                                         | helpful              | sometimes       |
|     |                                            | not needed           | Never           |

**Justification**

<p>| 4   | Giving an informal test for academic skills | important            | always          |
|     |                                            | helpful              | sometimes       |
|     |                                            | not needed           | Never           |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Giving the diagnostic test</td>
<td>important</td>
<td>always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>helpful</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not needed</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Giving IQ test to find the discrepancy between the IQ level of the student &amp; his/her achievement</td>
<td>important</td>
<td>always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>helpful</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not needed</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Checking each student portfolio (which includes students' health condition along with their previous academic achievement)</td>
<td>important</td>
<td>always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>helpful</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>not needed</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3

Please tick the appropriate answer (Yes definitely, Yes to some extent, No to some extent, No definitely) by putting (√) in the column of your choice. There is a space after each item in case you like to add any comment or clarify any related issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Yes definitely</th>
<th>Yes to some extent</th>
<th>No to some extent</th>
<th>No definitely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you think that there are students with LD that are not identified because they have not been referred to the LD tutor and did not have to repeat any course?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Would forming a multidisciplinary team (including a psychologist) be necessary to identify LD?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Is the specified period for the process of detection and diagnosis enough to discover students with LD?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you think that the LD tutor is sufficiently qualified to identify students with LD and diagnose them very well (regardless of the officially required diagnosis)?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you have confidence that you can identify students with LD with the potentials which are available to you now such as tests, methods of observation, interviews, etc...?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Do you find that the LD concept (as you understand) applies to students enrolled in the programme?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Do you think that the programme of LD is very similar to a remedy programme (so that students are helped because of academic weaknesses, as an example; but not to overtake real LD?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 4

Please tick the appropriate answer (Yes, always/ Usually/ Sometimes/ Rarely/ No never) by putting (√) in the column of your choice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Yes always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>No never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Does a classroom teacher refer low achievement students (i.e. not those show LD)?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you find trouble after the diagnosis in deciding whether or not a student has LD?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you face pressure from the school administration in enrolling some students who have no LD?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you limit your diagnosis of LD students to the first three grades?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do students, who are on the waiting list, have the chance to enter the programme at some point in the future?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 5
Open-ended questions

1- After identification process, what are the priorities/reasons that lead you to register some of identified student in the programme while list the other on the waiting list?

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

2- How many students from the 12 students registered in the programme do you think suffer from real LD in your opinion? Why?
A- Number of students registered in the programme:
........................................................................................................................................
B- Approximate number of students with real learning disabilities:
- Reason if there is a difference or no difference between A & B:
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

3- What are the significant strengths and weaknesses in diagnosing and identifying students with LD in the programme?

Strengths: ........................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

Weaknesses: ......................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

4- What do you recommend to improve the process of diagnosing and identifying students with LD?
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

Thanks for your participation!

FAHAD
القسم الأول: معلومات شخصية

الرجاء اختيار إجابة واحدة لكل من الفقرات التالية:

أ- عدد سنوات تدريس ذوي صعوبات التعلم
   □ 0 - 2 سنوات
   □ 3 - 4 سنوات
   □ 5 سنوات أو أكثر

ب- مكان المدرسة/المدارس التي قمت فيها بتدريس ذوي صعوبات التعلم
   □ داخل المدن
   □ في القرى أو الهجر
   □ في كل منهما

ج- المستوى التعليمي العام لطلاب مدرستك ككل
   □ ممتازون
   □ جيدون
   □ ضعيفون

د- عدد طلاب المدرسة
   □ 100 - 299 طالباً
   □ 300 - 499 طالباً
   □ 500 - 699 طالباً
   □ 700 طالباً فأكثر
القسم الثاني

أشر بوضع (√) لكل فقرة على العمودين المقابلين لها: درجة الأهمية (حسب اعتقادك) & درجة الاستخدام (حسب استخدامك في الواقع) فيما يتعلق بالطرق المشار إليها للتعرف على ذوي الصعوبات.

تنبيه مهم:

في حال كان الاختياران في الفقرة الواحدة ليسا في الصف (الدرجة) نفسه/ها، يستحسن تعليل هذا الاختلاف بين درجة الأهمية والاستخدام في خانة التعليل (انظر للمثال بالأعلى).

أما إذا كانا في نفس الصف (مثلا مساعدة وأحيانا) فالتعليل غير مطلوب إلا إذا أحببت أن تعلق عليه فهذا جيد.

مثال:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>نص الفقرة</th>
<th>درجة الاستخدام</th>
<th>درجة الأهمية</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>عملي اختبار مبديني مسحي لكل الطلاب بالدراسة</td>
<td>دائما</td>
<td>مهم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الإحالة من معلم الصف</td>
<td>أحيانا</td>
<td>مساعد</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الاستشارة من والد الطالب</td>
<td>أبدا</td>
<td>غير محتاج إليه</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

التعليل

بالرغم من أن الاختبار المسحي مهم إلا أنى لا أطبقه لأني لا أجد الوقت الكافي لتطبيقه

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>نص الفقرة</th>
<th>درجة الاستخدام</th>
<th>درجة الأهمية</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>الإحالة من معلم الصف</td>
<td>دائما</td>
<td>مهم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>مسح قوائم الطلاب المعدين والمكملين</td>
<td>أحيانا</td>
<td>مساعد</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>مقابلة الطالب</td>
<td>أبدا</td>
<td>غير محتاج إليه</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

التعليل

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>نص الفقرة</th>
<th>درجة الاستخدام</th>
<th>درجة الأهمية</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>مسح قوائم الطلاب المعدين والمكملين</td>
<td>دائما</td>
<td>مهم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>مقابلة الطالب</td>
<td>أحيانا</td>
<td>مساعد</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>اختبار مبديني غير رسمي للمهارات الأكاديمية</td>
<td>أبدا</td>
<td>غير محتاج إليه</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

التعليل
**القسم الثالث**

أرجو اختيار الإجابة الأنبوب (نعم بالتأكيد / نعم إلى حد ما / لا إلى حد ما / لا بالتأكيد) بوضع علامة (√) في الخانة المناسبة، وهناك مساحة تحت كل فقرة إذا أحببت التعليق عليها أو رغبت بتوضيح أمر ما:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>رقم</th>
<th>نص الفقرة</th>
<th>فقرة</th>
<th>رقم</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>هل تعتقد أن هناك طلاب يعانون من صعوبات تعلم لكن لا يتم اكتشافهم بسبب أنهم لا يتم تحويلهم وكونهم غير مكملين في أي مادة؟</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>هل العمل على إيجاد فريق متعدد التخصصات (بما يتضمن أخصائي نفسي) ضروري للقيام بالكشف عن ذوي صعوبات التعلم؟</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>هل المادة المحددة لعملية الكشف والتشخيص كافية للاكتشاف ذوي صعوبات التعلم؟</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>هل تعتقد أن معلم صعوبات التعلم مؤهل التأهيل العلمي والمهني الذي يمكنه من الكشف عن ذوي الصعوبات وتخصصهم تشخيصًا جيدًا (بغض النظر عن التشخيص المطلوب عليك نظاميًا)؟</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>هل لديك الثقة الكافية بأنك تستطيع الكشف عن الطلاب ذوي صعوبات التعلم بالإمكانيات (مثل الاختبارات، أساليب الملاحظة والمقابلة، الخ) المدروسة لك حاليا؟</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>هل تجد أن مفهوم صعوبات التعلم (كما نفهمه أنت) ينطبق على الطلاب المتخصصين ببرنامج الصعوبات؟</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
هل تعتقد أن برنامج صعوبات التعلم أشبه ما يكون ببرامج التقوية (بمعنى أن الطالب يتم مساعدته لضعف دراسي مثلا، ولكن ليس لأن يتجاوز صعوبات تعلم فعلية)؟

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>رقم</th>
<th>نص الفقرة</th>
<th>نعم دائمًا</th>
<th>غالباً</th>
<th>أحياناً</th>
<th>نادراً</th>
<th>لا أبداً</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>هل يقوم معلم الصف العادي بتحويل الطلاب ذوي التحصيل المنخفض (وليس من لديهم مظاهر صعوبات تعلم)؟</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>هل تجد حيرة بعد التشخيص في تحديد كون الطالب يعاني من صعوبة أو لا؟</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>هل تجد ضغوط من إدارة المدرسة لضم بعض الطلاب ممن لا يعانون من صعوبات تعلم إلى البرنامج؟</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>هل تتصر في الكشف عن ذوي الصعوبات على الصفوف الأولية؟</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>هل الطلاب على قائمة الانتظار تتاح لهم فرصة للالتحاق بالبرنامج؟</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

القسم الرابع

أرجو اختيار الإجابة الأنسب (نعم دائمًا / غالباً / أحياناً / نادراً / لا أبداً) في الخانة المناسبة، وهناك مساحة تحت كل فقرة إذا أحببت التعليق عليها أو رغبت بتوضيح أمر ما.
القسم الخامس
الإجابات المفتوحة

1- بعد عملية التشخيص وتحديد الطلاب المؤهلين للالتحاق برامج الصعوبات، ما الذي يجعلك تعطي أولوية للالتحاق بالبرنامج لبعض هؤلاء الطلاب دون الباقي الذين سيكونون في قائمة الانتظار؟

2- كم طالبا تقريباً من ال12 طالبا أو ال9 طالب المنضمين في البرنامج عندك تعتقد أنه يعاني من صعوبات تعلم فعالة؟ ولماذا؟
أ- عدد الطلاب الملتحقين بالبرنامج:  
ب- عدد الطلاب الذين عندهم صعوبات التعلم فعالة في اعتقادك: ...............................................................
- تحليل الاختلاف أو عدم الاختلاف بين أ و ب:

3- ما هي أبرز نقاط القوة و الضعف في عملية اكتشاف وتشخيص ذوي صعوبات التعلم في البرنامج؟
نقاط القوة هي: ..........................................................................................

نقاط الضعف هي: ..............................................................................................................

4- ما هي مقترحاتك لتطوير عملية اكتشاف وتشخيص ذوي صعوبات التعلم؟

أشكر لكم وقتكم وجهدكم في إكمال هذا الاستبيان
تقبلوا مني أطيب التحايا
فهد النعيم
2- Interview questions

1- Really interesting in finding out how you identify SWLD, can you tell me about it? How do you do that? Where do you do that?

2- How do you know that you have got the right students? What do you do if think a student whose involved in this service as not dyslexic?

3- What do you do if you think that there might something wrong in the assessment? Why?

4- Why do you think that these students have learning disabilities?

5- Who decide to involve these students in this service? How such decisions are made? Why?

6- What strategies do you follow to find out learning disabilities? Why? How come?

7- Why you use these specific strategies? Are these strategies imposed by the Department of Learning Disabilities? Explain please?

8- Do you follow strategies you find it useful from your own experience?

9- What do you think about IQ test in the identification? do you use it? is it important?

10- What do you think the strengths and weaknesses of the applied strategies?

11- Have you come across students who are misidentified?

12- What strategies do think are needed to be replaced, cancelled or added?

13- Have you changed your way of identification in your professional journey? Why or how?

3- Focus group questions

1- How do you see the effect of economic aspects on identification of students with LD?

2- Do you consider the development aspect in your assessment?

3- How do you deal with official requirements and the manual?

4- How does the collective teaching affect the identification or registration of students with LD?

5- Do you make a follow-up plan for registered students?

6- How do schoolchildren and class teachers view student with LD?
7- How do you apply observation in and out classrooms?
8- What information in portfolio do you find it useful for identification?
9- What do you think about the current diagnostic test?
10- Do you review previous students’ performance? Why?
11- Why do some teachers feel that the SLDP is similar to Remedial Educational Programme?
12- What do you think about the role of the class teachers in identification? Why?
13- What kind of support for identification do you receive from the school counsellor?
14- What is the role of the school administration in the identification?
15- Have you tried to raise awareness about LD in your school? How?
16- Do you have enough time for identification? What are the consequences?
17- Have you thought about engaging with students in their regular classroom as a way of identification and support? Can explain for me how and why did/did not you do it?
18- Have you ever changed your way of identification because of some influences? Why?
Appendix 4 Coding the entire transcripts via MaxQda
Appendix 5  Manual mapping by the usage of stickers
### Appendix 6 Parts from the Arabic transcripts

#### a) From Teacher Interview 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>الباحث</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>طبيب جميل، كيف تفهم أن هذا عدده صعوبات تعلم. متى تقول أن هذا الطالب عندما صعوبات التعلم، أيش هي صعوبات التعلم في وجهة نظرك؟</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>المعلم</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>هي اضطراب معين يعيق الطالب في المناهج الدراسية و ما يكون له عواقل خارجية، مثل المشاكل في السمع أو في البصر. يعني مشاكل تكون في السبب أي خلا هذا الطالب عندما صعوبات تعلم و إذا ما كانت موجودة ما كان عنده صعوبات التعلم. يعني يبيني طالب ما يشوف أو ضعف في البصر قطبيعي أنه ما يقدر يتعلم الحروف مثل اللفظ السوحي. فصنعب وأي احكم عليه انه طالب صعوبات تعلم. يعني لازم ندرس جميع الجوانب المحيرة فيه. قد يكون عنه اهمال. و احيانا طالب صعوبات التعلم ما تكتشف أن عنه صعوبة تعلم إلا بعد ما نبدأ ندرسه يوم و ثلاثة و أربعه و خمسة. فكتشفنا أنه والله البيت غير متجاب معي و الولد ما يتحسن معي في المدرسة و يروح البيت مهمل. فهذه تلغي خاصية أن الطالب طالب صعوبات تعلم. طالب صعوبات التعلم يكون عنه مشكلة عضوية مثل التنسبان. تشوف الطالب ما شاءه بحاول و يتجاوز معاك وتتشوف البيت يتجاوز معك. مثلا في أول أيام أمور ينتقل بي حتى المغرب يقول يا استاذ الولد أنا راجعته له ولكن يوم جاك نسي. فإذا تطبق عليه مواصفات صعوبات التعلم ( نسبان تشلت ) هنا مشكلتنا في معظم المدارس يمكن تأخذنا المعاطف أكثر يعني أنا عندي مثلا المقرر أولا 9 طلاب فانتك اخذ بشكل غيري وبين جميع العلمين. والله يا استاذ هذا الطالب ممكن يحتاج و يحاول عليه. و معلم جالب طالب وهو ماهو طالب عندي هو. وجعلنا معا و نكلنا معه واستدعينا أبوه و المرشد الطلابي و اكتشفنا بعدة بعد ما اعترف أبوه قال ان هو ما عنده صعوبات و لكنه مهمل و يقول ما ابغا اذكر. فانت لازم نطلب على السبب إذا طحت على السبب بتطلع الجواب. لاني حين لو اخذت الطالب ( أي طالب ) و قلت هذا طالب صعوبات تعلم و بسرعة اختبار و تشخيص ما بستفيد. بدروه مرة و مرتين و ثلاثة و بعدين 2 إذا ما عرفت مشكلة الطالب. يعني.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**b) From focus group 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>مستوى زملائه.</th>
<th>معلم 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>يس إذا تغيّي الحاجة الصحيحة لازم يكمل الخطبة.</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ايش فضلك بالحاجة الصحيحة ؟ تقصد نظاميا ؟</td>
<td>المعلم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الحاجة الصحيحة أن المهارات المطلوبة منه تقتضي الطالب.</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نظاميا يعني ؟</td>
<td>المعلم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نظاميا. و حيّي لو قالك الله تحسن هذا الطالب. معيشيا يا إستاذ. تحسن. يس لازم يكمل البرمجة. يقرأ الأحرف وكل ممكن أو سويه له اختبار بيقرأ الأحرف وكل شيء وكل شيء و لكن يجي عدد الكلمات وأما يقرأ الكلمات. فتكون لنا اخذ نقص نقصي يعني. يعني أوى هو بدأ يتهجأ مثلاً و لكن روح للمهارات الأكبر بعدها من التروين والمروان والآمالي!</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ايوه بن إذا قال المدرس تحسن معناه أنه تحسن.</td>
<td>المعلم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>المعلم يبقى في حاله هو. يقوله هو بدأ يمشي حاله. ما تمحال من الناحية الحقيقيه. قام يمشي حاله! و يبغاك تأخذ بديل!</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>و ماتت الصلاصه. يعني يعطيك ديل تقومه و كذا. يبغاك نفس الشئ ات كتطبيه حركة يمشي حاله ردو.</td>
<td>معلم 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>المفروض أن هناك نقطة محددة يجب أن يصل لها الطالب اذا ما يجني الطالب هذا و ينقص عن هذه الفئة. ما يفرط عنه المعلم!</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>يرجعه ذلك مستقبلنا هو ترى. يرجعه الله و يرجع له غيره.</td>
<td>معلم 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>إذا المرفوع الشني أعطي الطالب استراتيجيه للتعلم و كذا استغي من المصادر.</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>الطريقة ما تكونتاستراتيجية الأل في حافلة معينة. البقيه كل مهاراتنا لها استراتيجية معينة.</td>
<td>معلم 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>تقدّر ترتيب استراتيجيه واحدة بجميع المهارات (صعبة).</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>لا يوجد! لا كل مهاراتنا لا بد أن كل مهارة استراتيجية معينة.</td>
<td>معلم 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>إذا كان كل مهارة لها استراتيجية معينة. معناها أن كل مهارة منفردة أيضاً يكون لها استراتيجية معينة.</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>لا هو بدأ ينوع.</td>
<td>المعلم</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>هل هذه الاستراتيجية متعلقة بنوع المهارة أو متعلقة بتطبيق الطالب؟</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>بطريقة تعلم الطالب. هو أكتب مني كمعلم صعوبات استراتيجية في التعلم من خلال تحسينه في الصف أو مراقبة أداءه بين زملائه يتحقي الهدف. فلا بأس من أنه يخرج.</td>
<td>معلم 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>إذا أقول لك أنك في الدروس الواحد يعني أن تكون الدروس على الطالب يمكن أن تكون أكثر من استراتيجية واحدة و يمكن أن تكون استراتيجيين وأي الفكرة أنني أعطي الطالب ذا استراتيجية للتعلم. ما يعطيه واحدة و يجلس يعم على الكل.</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>عرفت كيف؟</td>
<td>معلم 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>استطاعتك أكثر من استراتيجية عشان يصير عنه مرونة.</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>انت بتوافق في الاستراتيجيات في تدريس المهارات بتكونها أعطت للطالب أكبر جزء في الاستراتيجيات. يعني ممكننا أنا في المهارة ممكن استخدم الاستراتيجية و ممكن في المهارة.</td>
<td>الباحث</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
c) From the questionnaire

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2- If you are in grade 12 or 9 and you have any questions about the program, please submit them in Arabic or English.

3- What is the criterion for submitting the questionnaire?

4- What are the possible causes and factors that contribute to the lack of awareness of the program?