



University of Exeter  
Graduate School of Education

**Teaching and Learning Thinking Skills in the Kingdom  
of Saudi Arabia: Case studies from seven primary schools**

Submitted by

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, teaching and learning thinking skills in primary schools through adoption of the infusion approach to thinking skills in school textbooks has increasingly become a focus of policy development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This study endeavoured to understand teachers' and students' experiences of teaching and learning thinking skills in primary schools. It aimed to explore teachers' and students' perspectives on, and current approaches to, the teaching and learning of thinking skills in the KSA primary curriculum; to investigate the impact of the factors which appear to guide teachers' and students' experiences of thinking skills in the classroom; and to identify possible challenges that face both teachers and students in developing these skills.

The study was undertaken within the interpretive paradigm. It adopts a socio-cultural perspective in its exploration of teachers' and students' experiences of teaching and learning thinking skills. Case study was employed as methodical way to yield in-depth detailed data to provide an understanding of the issues in the study. Three instruments of data collection provided insight: semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and group discussions. These presented a rich variety of data on topics regarding teaching and learning thinking skills, permitting triangulation to develop robust findings. The sample consisted of seven case study classes of male students from the upper years in primary schools in the KSA.

Several findings emerged from the data by using grounded theory analysis techniques, regarding the factors and challenges that influence teaching and learning thinking skills. Four significant outcomes are highlighted. The first is that teachers embracing the infusion approach to thinking skills as a natural part of the subject matter in textbooks was one of the most pervasive practices. Secondly, the study has highlighted the importance of the actual dynamics of interactions in classroom contexts via teachers' and students' complementary roles. Thirdly, spiritual/cultural inner motivation greatly influenced and shaped teachers' and students' practices of teaching and learning thinking skills. Fourthly, the study has shown the crucial importance of teachers' and students' identities in their performance of thinking skills. These four elements work together in a dynamic relationship in the particular socio-cultural context.

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## **Abbreviations and Terms**

**CAS:** The continuous assessment system

**CASE:** Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education

**CPD:** Continuing professional development

**GT:** Grounded theory

**KSA:** The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

**MOE:** Ministry of Education

**MOHE:** Ministry of Higher Education

**P4C:** Philosophy for Children

**ZPD:** The zone of proximal development