The purpose of this study was to compare and contrast teacher roles in two early childhood education settings—a U.S. Montessori preschool and a traditional Saudi public preschool—and to examine the philosophical, cultural, and theoretical influences on those roles. Cognitive constructivism, social constructivism, and multi-cultural theories were used as a research framework. Data was collected from the two teacher cases in their respective settings through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and lesson plan/student assessment documents.

The study’s findings showed that the roles of a U.S. Montessori preschool teacher and the roles of a Saudi traditional preschool teacher are generally much the same. Though the contexts and the surrounding national cultures and educational philosophies contrast significantly, the work of an early childhood teacher can be summarized in five categories which were consistent between data contexts: academic instruction, relationship with students and other adults, personal and professional development, behavioral management, and environmental preparation. Complementing this general role similarity between contexts, however, was the contrast in aspects of these roles between the two case teachers: the degrees of their attention to their roles, their efforts to perform these roles with excellence, and the
application of their philosophies within their particular preschool settings and national cultures. Internationally, ECE programs need clarity about teachers’ responsibilities and a greater awareness of the cultural and philosophical influences on preschool teachers’ work.