

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a review of the literature on a number of aspects of religious education. In the main, it deals with issues concerning religious education in Saudi Arabia since these are of direct relevance to the study reported in this thesis. However, in the initial parts of this chapter, some general aspects of religious education are examined.

The literature review relating to general aspects of religious education is based on information obtained from the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), the Bath Information Data Service (BIDS), the American Dissertation Abstracts, and the British Index of Theses and Dissertations. In addition to these sources, Saudi Arabian libraries were used to collect further information of relevance to the present study.

Generally speaking, the results of the literature review were disappointing, in that the number of publications dealing with religious education is quite limited. Even in the Saudi context, where religious education occupies a very prominent position, only a few research studies on aspects of religious education could be found. All these are reviewed in detail. In addition, information contained in government reports is also referred to, as appropriate.

2.2. VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Education links attainment of knowledge with the development of human abilities. Religion links personal and social development and integrates knowledge gained in other areas: personal, academic and social. As Grimmitt (1987) argued, cultural history has indicated the shaping influence upon each individual that makes him different and unique; to him, religious education is concerned with the development of conscience, which is a significant influence on human shaping. Religious education seeks to introduce each new generation to the attitudes, beliefs and practices of a particular religion, focusing upon the tradition and history of the faith and placing ethical concerns into an interpretative context of example situations.

Religious education is very important for children, because it emphasises the relationship between human beings and God (Allah, in the Islamic context). It encourages the idea of a higher authority; it gives guidance on what is normally expected to be correct and on moral behaviour, and so it allows the potential for everyone to be good and just despite their backgrounds. Because it is concerned with the whole person (that is, body, soul and feelings), and gives guidance in living from birth, a person's belief and faith may help him avoid making mistakes or harming others (Madhkoor, 1989). In this way, religious education acts protectively. It also helps people to understand their existence in this life and encourages kindness, support, good behaviour and improvement of the mind. It seeks to prepare the student for faith and to pull him out of egocentrism into an appreciation of the societal context in which

he exists (Sudjana, 1988), thereby providing a unifying centre for the individual's life. This assists the individual in the pursuit and discovery of self-knowledge.

According to Grimmitt (1973), religious education concentrates upon the 'interpretative', through focusing upon the function of beliefs. It enables individuals to order their inner experience and create personal meanings. Becoming self-aware leads to development of one's moral, religious and spiritual consciousness. The deepening of personal faith, through which religious adherents seek to fulfil the spiritual quest, is accompanied by the awareness of self as part of a spiritual unity of faith.

Holly (1978) extends Grimmitt's viewpoint by arguing that religious education not only helps students to enrich their general experience and establish their own values, attitudes and philosophy of life, but that it also strengthens their community links and leads to an appreciation of the significance of God.

2.3. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AS SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TRAINING

John Dewey summed up the social usefulness of education when he wrote that, as education is pragmatic in nature, or practical and utilitarian in social intent, the school has to be an epitome or model of the social reality around us. It should train the pupil to use his wits and talents in order to serve society. Thus education is the basis of preparation for life in the future (Dewey, 1917). Dewey's thoughts on social involvement may be extended to religious education as a community activity:

Education is the organisation of the child's endeavour to take part in the social response. To condition the child's individual activity, on the understanding that he would take part in his social involvement, is indeed the only sound way for social advance (p.28).

Hussein and Ashraf (1979) expresses the viewpoint that religion involves society and that creed, morality and values are the foundations of the social edifice. If these foundations are strong, anything built on them is also sound. Thus, in their view, education is the basis for social betterment and progress, and should inform moral action and satisfy the needs of people. Accordingly, the school should transmit the wisdom, learning and skills of past ages to the future. Hence, religious education is essential in social training because it prepares good foundations, despite a changing environment. Muslims believe that Islam provides an outline for the organisation of society and covers all the social aspects of economic, political and family relationships.

Ibn Khaldun (1957) showed that the social environment has a great influence on learning. He asserts that educational institutions have a duty to teach people to adapt to their social environment. Therefore, he argues, if religious education trains the student for social involvement in a changing environment and prepares them for the future, then religion will have an impact on society since it constitutes a way of understanding and interacting with social reality. He concludes that “a healthy society needs religious education as it offers the only format for debate which focuses on the needs and responsibilities and moral development of the individual and those of society, both traditional and modern, together with individual and collective aspects of adoption to the spiritual environment of faith” (quoted in Basheer 1977, p.36).

2.4. THE PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Islam provides complete and comprehensive guidance in all social, economic, political, moral and spiritual aspects of life and human conduct (Abdullah, 1982). This guidance

is governed by the principles of the Holy Quran and the tradition of the Prophet, Mohammed. As Annawawi (1989) aptly points out, the importance of education was emphasised by the Prophet Mohammed himself, in the words:

He who goes forth in search of knowledge is in the way of God until he returns (p. 437).

Thus, it is incumbent upon every practising Muslim to seek knowledge.

This knowledge may take many forms according to the individual's need for spiritual and intellectual development, and it need not be academic. Improving one's behaviour or improving the quality of one's life can be appraised as the entirety of all that is necessary to learning in Islamic education. The emphasis in Islamic education is not only on the acquisition of knowledge, but on the application of that which is learned (Alghazali, 1967).

Knowledge in the form of moral education is at the core of Islamic philosophy. The attainment of a good character is a true aim. The child needs intellectual and physical strength, for learning practical work and training his character, feelings, will, taste and personality. The philosophy of Islamic education is to cater for the growth of a person in all its aspects: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific and linguistic (Alebrashi, 1975). Mojawer (1976) considered the strengthening of moral and intellectual development to be the major factor in the teaching-learning process.

If the role of religious education in the Islamic context is to strengthen pupils' beliefs, it is necessary to ensure that teaching strategies are used which can achieve this. They should inform pupils about correct ways to worship and help them to prioritise their

duties and avoiding wrongdoing. The Islamic religious education courses must therefore place heavy emphasis on the methods of transmitting knowledge and skills relevant to these aims.

Education itself signifies the transmission of experience from one generation to another. That the cumulative experience of past generations may be contained in folklore, traditions, customs and poetry was hypothesised by Hussein and Ashraf (1979). They divide these experiences into two groups:

- i. experiences in the form of skills or technical knowledge whose nature varies from age to age and which is bound to change constantly;
- ii. experiences based on certain constant or permanent values embodied in religion and scripture.

The latter values embrace such basic concepts as, for example, the place of man in this universe.

2.5. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The purpose of religious education in schools can be seen as helping the students to discover values and beliefs which stem from, or are supported by, their religion. In terms of the Islamic religion, this means preparing students to live appropriately in a Muslim society, as well as preparing them for the life to come. To a large extent, this purpose is common to all religions. For example, in relation to the Christian faith, Alves (1967) argued that:

The purpose of religious education is to help our pupils build up a worthwhile sense of direction in life, to help them achieve a valid perspective on the whole business of living. (TES, p. 1001)

Brown (1996) indicated that “religious education aims to give young pupils opportunity to develop their knowledge and to encourage an awareness and understanding of belief and practice” (p.2). Therefore, religious education is an essential part of the school curriculum.

As far as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is concerned, the aims of religious education in schools are closely linked to the Islamic culture and traditions of the country, as well as to the acts of faith that are at the heart of the Islamic religion. This is clearly demonstrated by a number of statements which are set out in a policy document for education in Saudi Arabian secondary schools issued by the Saudi Ministry of Education (Secondary School Curriculum, 1974).

According to this policy document, the aims of religious education include:

- (The development of) a firm belief in Allah as God Almighty and in Mohammed as God’s Prophet and envoy sent to save mankind from the darkness of ignorance to the light of Islam.
- (An appreciation of) the Islamic concept of the Universe which entails the preservation of man and life and teaches that the entire world is subject to the laws of God in order that each creature would fulfil his duties as consistently as possible without hindrance to others.

- (Acquisition of knowledge of) the ideals revealed by Islam for the rise of a humane, prudent and constructive civilisation guided by the message of Mohammed to realise glory on earth and happiness in the hereafter.
- (An appreciation of) the close association between the history of our nation and the heritage of our Islamic religion, and the benefits that we derive from the lives of our predecessors which guide our present and future.
- (The realisation that) God has bestowed on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia the proctorship and guardianship of Islam's sacred places and the defence of the land on which revelation descended upon the Prophet Mohammed and (that) through the adoption of Islam as Creed, law, constitution and way of life, the kingdom has great responsibility in leading humanity to Islam and setting it on the right path.

The foregoing policy statements provide a general framework for the role and objectives of religious education in Saudi Arabian schools. An educational policy document issued by the Ministry of Education in 1974 identified specific objectives for religious education, as seen in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: The Objectives of Religious Education in Saudi Secondary Schools.

Description of religious education objectives
1. Developing in the student the various basic skills and creating clear thinking.
2. Encouraging the student to further study in Islamic law.
3. Training the student to be able to distinguish between good and bad.
4. Creating in the student an acquaintance with other religions.
5. Developing in the student a knowledge of Islam as the true religion and the ability to eradicate from his religion all wrong creeds.
6. Forming in the student a suitable methodical mentality to help him in dealing with individuals or other groups of people, in accord with the Islamic religion.
7. Forming strong relationships between strength, honesty and behaviour.
8. Orientating the students towards study and a desire for knowledge.
9. Helping the student to maintain good behaviour and encouraging him towards temperance and morality.
10. Developing in the student a sense of religion which affects all his attitudes and leads him to adopt Islamic doctrine as his standard.
11. Helping the student to show good conduct which will lead to good experiences that are essential in student life.
12. Improving the morals of society, through teaching the morals of Islam which are marked by fraternity, co-operation, a sense of duty and the shouldering of responsibility.
13. Providing the student with skills and knowledge, appropriate to his age, to enable him to organise and make wise plans.
14. Developing the student's personality so that it is in accordance with Islamic ideals.
15. Improving the condition of the society in which the student lives, and training the student in communicating the ideas of Islam to others.
16. Encouraging the student toward insights through an Islamic curriculum and giving him information about previous cultures.
17. Providing the student with knowledge about how to solve all problems in his life.
18. Protecting the student against dangers in society and life.
19. Religious education as a basic component of all stages (primary, intermediary and secondary) of education in all their branches.

Source: Ministry of Education 1974.

Most of these objectives are not defined in detail, but are intended to shape a true Muslim in the best way. What is evident, though, is that the objectives - taken together - relate to practically every aspect of the student's life.

Abo-Aleyneyn (1987) argued that the aims and objectives of religious education should focus predominantly upon the needs and position of contemporary society (and the individuals in it) and not just be concerned with basic religious values, traditions and rules. Essentially, this is a call for religious education programmes to be given, and seen to be given, what is frequently described as 'relevance' to the learner's life and the problems encountered in it. In this sense, religious education has to be 'outward-looking' in its purpose and intentions.

Cox (1970) expresses a similar view when he argues that religious education should help pupils to understand the nature of the society in which they live (he specifically mentions 'secular society' in this context) and should enable them to think rationally about the state and place of religion in it. Referring to a pluralistic society as he sees it in existence in Western countries, he goes on to argue that religious education should develop in students the knowledge and skills that enable them to evaluate objectively, and on the basis of informed opinion, the many conflicting statements about religion that they are likely to encounter. Hence, such students would be able to work out for themselves, and to defend cogently, their own religious position.

Views like those expressed by Abo-Aleyneyn for an Islamic society and by Cox for a Western society are not endorsed by other writers, who see induction into a particular faith to be the primary objective of religious education. For example, Hussein and

Ashraf (1979) argued that: “Religious education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality of man: spiritual, intellectual, imaginative, physical, scientific, linguistic, both individually and collectively and motivate all these aspects towards goodness and attainment of perfection”. They conclude that: “the ultimate aim of Muslim education lies in the realisation of complete submission to Allah on the level of the individual, the community and humanity at large” (p.44). Muhammad (1986) endorses this view when he states that the primary goal of Islamic education is “moral refinement and spiritual training”. He elaborates this by asserting that Muslim educators recognise as an important purpose of religious education the refinement of morals, the encouragement of virtue, the teaching of propriety and the preparation of the student for a life of sincerity and purity.

Western writers have expressed the same sentiment, though perhaps not in quite so definite a way. For example, the document ‘Religious Education in Secondary Schools’ (City of Birmingham Education Committee, 1975) contains the statement that “religious teaching should lead children towards commitment to achieving the faith” (pp. 4-5). Similarly, the National Curriculum Council (1990a) stated, in relation to the 1988 education reform act, that the new curriculum was to “promote pupils’ spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development; and to prepare them for the responsibilities of adult life” (p.1). The Department for Education (1994) explained the aims of religious education in schools as follows:

Religious education in schools should seek to develop pupils’ knowledge, understanding and awareness of Christianity, as the predominant religion in Great Britain, and to encourage respect for those holding different beliefs. (p.16)

Ahier and Ross (1995), mentioned in relation to National Curriculum Council 1989 that “religious education is to help pupils respond to their present lives and prepare them for work, and to explore the values and beliefs which influence the individual and his relationship with others” (p.81). Thus, in both instances, the emphasis is yet again on the development of moral values and a commitment to the faith.

It emerges from this brief discussion that, as far as the aims of religious education are concerned, two pole positions can be identified. On the one hand, the stress is on the induction of the individual into the concepts and practices of his faith, which is then also seen as a means of upholding and perpetuating societal values, in the religious, moral and ethical sense. On the other hand, the emphasis is on the learner’s personal development and his ability to cope with, and respond to, the events and crises in his own life.

Obviously, these two positions need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, some authors argue that religious education programmes must address both positions. Alshafei (1984) and Sinbol (1993), for example, assert that religious education must seek to satisfy and respond to students’ intellectual, spiritual and emotional needs and, at the same time, provide them with knowledge of traditional religious beliefs, so as to lead them to an appreciation of God and appropriate religious practices.

The list of general objectives for religious education in Saudi Arabia, given above, contains statements which reflect and represent both positions. However, it goes beyond them in that it also emphasises the role of religious education in relation to the Saudi society as a whole. Objectives 12 and 15 address societal issues directly and

appear to be in line with Yamani's (1968) demand that (religious) education must "recognise the social and moral objectives of Saudi society" (p.18).

There is no doubt that the objectives laid down for religious education in Saudi Arabian schools are all justifiable and praiseworthy. Yet, one must raise a number of questions about them. For example:

- i. How 'realistic' are the objectives in the sense that they are, or can be, achieved by current religious education programmes?
- ii. Assuming that the objectives cannot all be accorded the same priority in actual religious education programmes, how do teachers and pupils rate the relative importance of different dimensions of religious education?

The present research addresses itself to these and related issues.

2.6. SUBJECTS IN THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Religious education courses in secondary schools in Saudi Arabia cover five subject areas. These have to be studied at all educational levels. The subject areas are as follows:-

The Holy Quran: This is the Holy Book of God Almighty as revealed to the Prophet Mohammed via the Angel Gabriel. It is revealed in clearly understandable Arabic and has remained unique until today, thus emphasising its Divine origin. The Quran is considered the last testament and enshrines all the basic teaching of earlier revelations. It is the fundamental source of guidance and is believed by Muslims all over the world

to be final and unchangeable in spite of changing human values and standards or human opinions and desires. The Quran deals with all the important aspects of human life and the main source of law in Islam. The Quran is smaller in size than the New Testament. It consists of one hundred and fourteen chapters of very unequal length. There are 6666 verses in the Quran and it was revealed over a period of 22 years and 5 months (McDermott and Ahsan, 1986). Muslims believe in all the revealed books which are mentioned in the Holy Quran. These Holy books are: {(*Tawrat*) Torah of Moses (*Musa*); the (*Zabur*) Psalms of (*Dawud*) David; the (*Injil*) Gospel of (*Isa*) Jesus and; the Holy Quran revealed to Mohammed; the Holy Quran also mentions (*Suhuf-Ibrahim*) Scrolls of Abraham}

Interpretation of the Holy Quran: (*Tafseer*) refers to the discipline of interpreting and explaining the meaning of the Holy Quran, which needs to be fully and correctly understood.

Islamic Tradition: (*Hadith or Sunnah*) which refers to the collecting, recording and authentication of the sayings, reports, deeds and silent affirmations of the Prophet Mohammed. It was recounted by his household, progeny and companions. Hadith is considered the second most important source of information of Islamic law and Islamic faith after the Holy Quran. There are some (*Hadith*) known as (*Hadith-Qudsi*) sacred Hadith, having been divinely communicated to the Prophet Mohammed.

Theology: (*Tawheed*) is the most important and main principle of the beliefs of Islam; it means asserting the oneness and uniqueness of God in every possible way.

(*Tawheed*) means Allah the One and only One God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgement (the Oneness of Allah).

Jurisprudence or Islamic law: (Fiqah) is the explanation of Islamic rules. It could be described as the legalistic or jurisprudence side of Islam. It explains all the laws and rules of Islam contained in the Holy Quran and the (*Hadith*).

2.7. PROBLEMS FACING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

In view of the great importance attached to religious education in the Saudi Arabian school education system, it is not surprising that aspects of its practice and implementation in schools should have come under scrutiny from time to time. However, there is little evidence that this scrutiny has at any stage been undertaken on a major and systematic basis: in the main, such work as has been reported in the literature represents small-scale enquiries frequently undertaken by just one person (as is the case for this study also). Nevertheless, these enquiries have yielded useful and interesting information about some of the problems facing religious education in Saudi Arabian schools.

In the following subsections, the examination of contemporary problems in Saudi religious education is conducted under three headings, as follows:

1. Problems relating to the aims of religious education.
2. Problems concerning the content of religious education courses.

3. Problems concerning textbooks and learning experiences used in religious education.

2.7.1. PROBLEMS RELATING TO THE AIMS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SAUDI SCHOOLS

Skran (1991), reviewing the aims of Islamic education set by the Ministry of Education in 1974, found these to be rather general and not adequately geared to the needs of individual learners. He argued that religious education should shape pupils' character, but in a way that should enable them to solve problems and communicate their solutions. This, to his mind, was not adequately addressed by the existing objectives. For example, the Educational Policy 1974 stated the following aims:

Religious education as a basic component of all stages (primary, intermediary and secondary) of education in all their branches.

Encouraging the student to further study in Islamic law. (pp. 6-7)

Mousawari (1993) had observed that most of the aims stated by the Ministry had been left rather vague, with insufficient detail being provided to make them 'translatable' into curricular activities. Nevertheless, he broadly endorsed the aims as representing "the best way to shape a true Muslim". He concluded: "Most Arab and Muslim countries have legislation for their education systems. However, the educational policies in these countries did not explain this legislation clearly in details. He adds that, no analysis studies have been carried to find out whether or not this legislation is suitable to educate the Muslim generations, and meet the needs of individuals and the Islamic society" (pp. 152-173).

Faraj (1984), in a study concerning Islamic sources of educational objectives in the secondary school in Saudi Arabia, concluded that “because the Saudi society is a Muslim one, the Quran was considered to be the main source of educational objectives. Thus, the secondary school educational objectives are based on the Quran” (p.45). Another study, by Metwalli (1987), examined the theoretical dimension of the Saudi education system; in it, the conclusion was reached that “the education policy in Saudi Arabia aims to promote the Islamic belief among students and to help the student to learn values of Islam” and that, in the end, “the education system in Saudi Arabia concentrates on instructing the individual in spiritual and social values” (p. 64).

In contrast to this, Alshafei (1984) reported that the Islamic education curriculum was not relevant to students’ daily life and that it did not assist them in solving problems of everyday living. Although Alshafei’s finding does not specifically refer to the aims and objectives of religious education, it is safe to interpret his findings to imply that these aims and objectives lacked relevance, at least in some directions. His statement that “students feel that matters of living are separated (in religious education) from matters of religion” (p.124) supports this interpretation.

In a wider study of the school curriculum, including the Islamic education curriculum, in Saudi Arabia and the other ‘Gulf States’ (Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirate, Bahrain and Oman), the Arabic Education Centre (1980) found that Islamic education courses were not, generally, working to the objectives specified for them. Indeed, the study reported that some of the Gulf States did not even have particular objectives for their religious education curricula. In addition, the study found that some of the

students' cultural and emotional development was not adequately considered in religious education programmes. Others had no guidelines for the selection of material for their religious education programmes, and psychological and social issues were not considered in the selection of content. The report asserted that students' personal Islamic behaviour should be a major criterion for the evaluation of curricula, not only in Islamic education courses, but in all areas of school work. Islamic education in particular should further the student's own growth in order to help him learn how to find solutions for his personal life.

It may be argued that the aims referred to in the preceding paragraph are connected with the principals of human behaviour or what may be called 'ethical values'. Religious education thus has a set of complementary aims with the enhancement of man's knowledge at their base. Together with the information necessary for a healthy intellectual and spiritual growth, these aims help satisfy pupils' questions about their behaviour, conduct and responsibilities in society. The course of Islamic education should both emphasise moral values and encourage good practice of living.

Aims in teaching are as important as planning is in building. Textbooks with no aims plunge students and teachers alike into uncertainty and, in consequence, focus and motivation are lost in teaching. Clear educational aims are thus essential for both teachers and pupils. In particular, the aims have to be communicated. Unfortunately, this has not happened in, for example, textbooks. The Educational aims are only alluded to in the general curriculum plans and in the Educational Policy documents, without any attempt to translate them into 'operational' statements. Thus, it is not at all certain whether the aims are clear to teachers, let alone their pupils.

This situation provides justification for one of the aspects examined in this study, namely, teachers' and pupils' perceptions of the aims of the religious education courses with which they are concerned.

2.7.2. PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE CONTENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COURSES

In theory, there should be a close relationship between the content of an educational programme and its aims. Goals and objectives should have a direct effect on the selection of curricular content and, in turn, on the choice of learning experiences. If these relationships are not established in practice, there is a danger that incoherent learning experiences result for pupils and these have limited educational value.

Logically, the selection of curricular content follows the setting of aims and objectives. Although the term 'content' may suggest that the concern is with 'subject matter', the notion of content goes beyond this. For example, as Ezat (1978) points out, content should be seen as 'planned experiences'. Another, equally valid, interpretation is that content represents the facts, values and information presented to pupils to bring about desired behavioural changes. What these changes are meant to be, should ideally follow from pre-specified educational objectives.

As far as the content of the Saudi religious education curriculum is concerned, this has remained static over a considerable period of time. This observation is supported by a statement made in the Education Documentation No. 29 (1988) of the Saudi Ministry of Education, which reads:

The Islamic curriculum in the three grades of secondary school has remained unchanged for over 20 years, except for modifications to Islamic law. (p. 5)

Essentially, the content of contemporary religious education programmes in Saudi Arabian schools reflects the traditional ‘subject matter’ that forms the substance of the five areas for religious study already described in section 2.6 of this Chapter (The Holy Quran; Interpretation of the Holy Quran; Islamic Tradition; Theology; and Islamic Law). It is largely concerned with facts and information (that is, ‘knowledge’) of a religious nature, to be transmitted through the educational process. This knowledge tends to be largely, if not entirely, derived from religious traditions and sources. In other words, the Saudi religious education curriculum is largely defined in terms of the content of the areas of learning from which it is derived.

Tyler (1949) argued cogently that, although an area of learning must function as a major source of the content of a curriculum relating to that area, it cannot be the only source. In fact, he pointed to two additional sources: the learner, with his interests and needs, and society itself, with its needs, values and concerns. Consideration of the content of the Saudi religious education programme does not lead to the conclusion that Tyler’s ‘additional sources’ were a significant factor in its selection. It is of interest to note at this stage that the educational objectives laid down by the Saudi Ministry of Education for religious education programmes in schools do, indeed, refer to the three sources mentioned by Tyler, at least by implication. This is evident from the list of these objectives given on pages 34-36. The fact that the content of the programmes focuses on only one of them, points to a mismatch or discrepancy between curriculum objectives and curriculum content.

A further critical observation can be made. This is that no reference appears in the specification of the content of religious education courses in Saudi schools, to possible or desirable learning experiences to be provided for pupils. From a theoretical point of view, this is indicative of a very narrow definition of 'content' having been adopted by the Saudi Directorate of Curriculum and Educational Development (which has responsibility for formulating the religious education curriculum). From a practical point of view, this means that teachers - as implementers of the curriculum - have little guidance about how to organise their teaching and manage their pupils' learning. As will be seen in the next section, this absence of guidance has had (and still has) adverse effects on the conduct of religious education in Saudi schools.

2.7.3. PROBLEMS CONCERNING TEXTBOOKS AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES USED IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In Saudi education, the textbook occupies a central position, in two ways:

- i. It is a major teaching and learning aid.
- ii. It is the main means of defining, in practical terms, what is to be learned (and, hence, taught) and what is not.

In other words: the textbook is a major instrument for defining 'the curriculum' to teachers and pupils alike.

Three recent studies have highlighted some of the shortcomings of religious education textbooks and their use in Saudi schools. Yahya (1985) observed that, not infrequently, there is a lack of logical sequence in the presentation of subjects in textbooks. This, he found, caused confusion for pupils.

A major failing of the books was that they gave no information about the learning aims that pupils were meant to achieve or about suitable learning activities for pupils to carry out in order to enhance their learning or to motivate them towards it. It is true that some books, for example, those for the jurisprudence (*Fiqah*) component, specify certain exercises for pupils to complete. However, this is not a general feature of the books, in that other books do not contain such exercises.

Shami (1994) observed that teachers of religious subjects place much emphasis on the memorisation, by pupils, of the content of religious textbooks. He also noted that teachers rarely use any teaching aids other than the blackboard. This is indicative of the important role of the textbook in the Saudi school system. Ofi (1995) also reported that textbooks provide no guidance for the teacher about teaching methods and learning experiences to be arranged.

In an earlier study, Alshafei (1984) examined possible reasons for students' abandonment of their Islamic education. One of the factors identified by him was the teaching methods used in religious education programmes. A particular conclusion drawn by him was that students forsook their religious education programmes because the teaching methods used in them were antiquated and led to boredom. (Incidentally, he also detected a rejection of religious education because students perceived the curriculum as 'not relevant' to their own daily life and the issues encountered by them.)

Attention may also be drawn, in this context, to the work by Adar (1969) and by Kempa et al. (1985, 1990a, 1990b), which demonstrated that different students

respond differently (adversely or positively) to different teaching methods and that conventional 'passive' teaching approaches have appeal for only a minority of students. Other students, in contrast, find such methods uninspiring and demotivating.

The author's personal experience greatly supports Shami's and Alshafei's findings concerning teaching methods. Much of the religious education teaching in schools appears to be strongly oriented towards 'learning the textbooks' and little evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, came to his attention to suggest a wide-spread use of teaching methods that are not strictly 'textbook bound'. However, in view of the fact that no detailed study had previously been undertaken into the nature of teaching strategies and learning experiences employed for religious education in Saudi schools, this aspect was covered by the present investigation.

In general terms, there can be no doubt that one of the professional responsibilities of the teacher is to create learning opportunities which are motivating (for the learner) and lead to the accomplishment of teaching objectives. Meajel (1992) has made this point most strongly. In this, he follows Clark and Starr (1981), who argued that teachers should consider the aims and objectives of the subject they teach and that they should reflect on the teaching strategies and techniques available to them in the light of their assessment of how pupils learn. They conclude, teachers must select methods which develop and increase their own personal teaching effectiveness.

Religious education teachers in Saudi Arabian schools clearly need to learn to address the issues pointed to in the foregoing paragraph. However, it has to be said that teachers of religious education in other countries, such as the Gulf States, have similar

professional needs. This would explain Hull (1984) and Chazan's (1985) observation that religious education can be made interesting to the students through learning materials, activities and programmes that are reasonably accessible and that exhibit some promise of success. Therefore, the teacher should relate lessons to the student's daily life.

2.8. CONCLUSION

This section dealt with a review of the literature on some aspects of religious education. Religious education has a set of complementary aims based on the personal and social development of morality and conscience, towards spiritual growth and good citizenship. In short, religious education plays an important role in developing morality. It could thus be said that religious education is appropriate to all developmental stages of life.

Given that religious education is very important to children, the question of where it should take place arises. Education which includes religious training has been said to provide a balance between intellectual and moral development. Religious beliefs are thought to be the source of other values, commitments and ethical principles, so the moral domain is part of religious education (Loukes, 1965; Cox, 1966; Alves, 1968; Bull, 1969; Gustafson, 1970; Bachmeyer, 1973; Morsey, 1977; Downey, 1978; Shawi, 1983; Sarwar 1992). Therefore man can be educated to act and think on higher moral levels chiefly within the context of religious education; thus it has a place within the context of the school curriculum.

Another argument for placing religion in the school lies in how religious knowledge is

transferred. Children learn the basics about their religion from their parents. In the community, children learn religious practices from relatives and friends, but they learn more about their religion in school than from any other source. School provides the structured environment of the religious education course to which they may bring questions, as well as a social environment in which to practice citizenship.

The literature review showed that the religious education programme in Saudi Arabia is, and has been, in crises. These crises can be seen clearly from the presentation of the subject; in the aims, content, teaching experience and in the textbook. The other problems derive from the peculiar stasis in which the curriculum has been embedded. Due to the lack of revision and planning, the aims and objectives of the course are unclear, so they have been practically interpreted, sometimes idiosyncratically. The aims of religious education are too generalised and do not contribute to developing the pupils' abilities and skill as needed. The content is not linked to the aims and it is difficult to make sense of the curriculum as a whole. The focus on the transference of huge amounts of information means that no attention is given to the pupils' understanding. There are no references or guidance notes for teachers to help them in organising the teaching. The religious education programme seems to be lacking in active learning strategies. Traditional teaching methods, rather than modern methods, are still predominant for religious education teachers.

Consequently, in addition to problems arising from the aims, teaching methods and presentation, the diminishing position of religious education within the context of the total curriculum arises. In the past twenty years, Saudi Arabia has become a very wealthy country. Increasing emphasis has been given to science and technology, to

keep up with technology and bring the country into the modern world. It is not surprising, then, that this emphasis is perceived by pupils and teachers in the school sector. The religious education programme has no longer the authority it once had within the school system because of science and technology gaining in importance. This is important, because the pupils who take on these values will be the citizens of tomorrow. Saudi society has an intimate relationship with religion; many of the tenets are necessary for social acceptance and some aspects of Islam are law. All aspects of the teaching procedures need revision in relation to new teaching methods, teaching aids and the introduction of modern technology. The textbook in particular needs completely replacing. The course material needs relating to everyday events for modern students, since it appears to locate religion outside modern life.