

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

As was pointed out in the introductory chapter of this thesis, this study is concerned with the exploration of selected aspects of the teaching and learning of religious education in Saudi Arabian secondary schools. The main purpose was to explore the major aims of religious education as perceived by teachers and students and to probe into the nature of the learning experiences used in the delivery of the religious education curriculum. In this context, the role and use of the school textbook in the teaching and learning of religious education was also examined.

To meet the specific needs of the study, a questionnaire-based inquiry was conducted among teachers and students in Saudi Arabian schools. This chapter describes the main steps and procedures used to collect the data for the fieldwork element of the study. Pilot trials of the questionnaire are also discussed in this section, together with information about the background of the sample, the administration of the questionnaire and the analysis of data. Finally, problems and difficulties encountered in the study are considered.

A review of relevant literature helped the researcher to gain an insight into the strategies adopted by other researchers seeking to obtain similar educational data. The main findings from this review concerning research methods are given in section 3.3 later.

### **3.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND STUDY QUESTIONS**

Although in Saudi Arabia religious education benefits from special attention from the Ministry of Education, it is widely known that its aims have not been adequately realised and that its benefits to the learners are thus debilitated. There may be many causes of debilitation but they have not been investigated. Ibrahim and Alkalah (1986) stated that “students, teachers, learning strategies, and outcomes are closely related to the failure or the success of the curriculum” (p. 10). The problem is to look at the views of both parties, that is, the students and the teachers, to get a comprehensive view of the problems.

So, what are the teaching methods that are being used in religious education now? Are they appropriate for the 1990s? There is a startling lack of research in this area. This may be because religious education itself is seen as a subject which is inextricably bound to tradition and separate from the rest of the curriculum. Certainly, the government guidelines leave much to be desired and expect far too much material to be memorised, while the school timetable allocates less and less time. In today’s world, students expect school subjects to be of direct relevance to their life and to be geared to their needs. For example, if teaching methods which depend on transferring facts without the use of teaching aids are used to teach religious subjects, then students used to more modern methods may find their interest in the topics presented in the textbook low.

Religious education need not be presented in an old-fashioned way. Perhaps one problem may be that the teachers may suffer from lack of proper training and find their

own instruction ineffective. Moreover, the curriculum itself may not be suitable for the abilities of the students. In the light of recent innovations in teaching practice, we need to find out more about what goes on in the average classroom, to discover how religious education itself is perceived by both teachers and students, and what students expect to learn from it. It should then be possible to make practical suggestions for improvement.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions in relation to religious education in Saudi secondary schools:

1. What are teachers' and students' views about the aims and objectives of religious education?
2. What are the teaching and learning strategies that are used in the provision of religious education?
3. What resources are used in religious education programmes?

In practical terms, this involves an examination of the following issues:

- a. The most important aims and objectives of religious education as perceived by students and teachers; the abilities and skills which religious education should develop in the students.
- b. The nature of teaching approaches and the kinds of learning experiences that teachers claim to provide; students' perceptions of these experiences and their involvement in them; the use of resources in the provision of religious education.

- c. The extent of coverage and use of controversial issues in religious education.
- d. The factors which influence the teaching and orientation of religious education courses.
- e. The main uses of religious education textbooks by students.

In the Saudi context, the subject of this study is important for the following reasons:

- Religious education is very important for students generally in Islamic society, since religion affects every aspect of everyday life.
- Religious education is widely felt to be inadequate in the schools.
- Religious education is one of the few topics taught in schools which attempts to develop compassion in young students.
- Assessment criteria for religious subjects are practically non-existent and this has led to stagnation in the development of the subject.
- There is a general lack of research in this area.

At this stage, attention has to be drawn to one important limitation in the exploration of the issues and questions for study identified above. This is that, because of the organisation of education in Saudi Arabia and the customs relating to it, the study had to be limited to boys' schools and the religious education staff operating in them. The

strict segregation of schools (and their staff) according to gender, which is a hallmark of the Saudi education system, would not have allowed the researcher - as a male - to extend this enquiry to the girls' school sector.

### **3.3. ISSUES OF RESEARCH AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.3.1. CHOICE OF RESEARCH STRATEGY**

There are various ways in which educational research may be classified. For example, we may classify research according to:

- i. the research method(s) used;
- ii. the area(s) of interest reflected in them;
- iii. the type of data collection employed;
- iv. the purpose(s) pursued.

The literature abounds with detailed discussion of these different classifications. Among the contributors to these discussions are Best (1981), Turney and Robb (1971), Mouly (1978), Mason and Bramble (1978), Verma and Beard (1981), Slavin (1984) and Mann (1985).

Whilst it is useful, in the design of research studies, to be aware of the various types of, and approaches to, educational research, in the end decisions about research methods to be adopted are largely influenced by pragmatic considerations. In the present case, for example, the following points played a major part in the choice of the research strategy chosen.

- i. The study was to explore the perceptions not only of a large sample of students (about 500 was thought desirable, in the first instance), but also of a fairly large - and, hence, representative - sample of teachers. The latter aspect in particular led to the early realisation that a questionnaire-based enquiry would be the most appropriate methods. An interview-based approach was ruled out, simply because it would not have been suitable for the large sample to be covered by the study.
- ii. The choice of a questionnaire-based approach was reinforced by the fact that the collection of the data had to be carried out by the researcher single-handedly within two limited time spaces of about four weeks each. This provided little more time than was necessary for travel to the schools participating in the study and the in-situ administration of questionnaires.

The decision to employ questionnaires as the main instruments for the empirical part of the research was taken at a fairly early stage of this study. In view of the central role of the questionnaires, a careful review was made of advice and comments offered in the literature on questionnaire design and their validity.

### **3.3.2. RESEARCH ISSUES IN QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN**

A questionnaire comprises a series of questions or statements to which individuals are asked to respond. Ary and Jacob (1979), Wiersma (1986), Wolf (1988) have suggested that questionnaires can best be used for collecting information about conditions, practices and opinions. Lovell and Lawson (1970), Verma and Beard (1981) support

this, but also point out that questionnaires can be used to explore and determine attitudes and feelings, as well as opinions. Oppenheim (1992) and Good and Hart (1952) claimed that, if the items in a questionnaire are easily understood by the respondent, then accurate relevant information will be obtained. Verma and Beard (1981) further advised that questionnaires should be brief and, if possible, allow for a variety of answers, rather than require dichotomous responses.

The advantages of questionnaires over other methods of data collection have been discussed by a number of authors. For example, Oppenheim (1992) and Turney and Robb (1971) mention that questionnaires can be distributed, at minimum effort and low cost, to large population samples, thereby ensuring good representativeness of the responses obtained. Also, as Verma and Beard (1981) and Slavin (1984) have pointed out, questionnaire-based data are usually easier to process and analyse than data collected by other methods, for example, interviews, and hence provide better opportunity for comparisons between population subsamples to be made.

On the other hand, there are some limitations associated with the use of questionnaires. For example, the respondents may not answer all the questions or they may not answer them completely or correctly. This could happen when the respondent is careless, has faulty perceptions or is not interested in the topic. Some respondents deliberately tend towards more favourable or less favourable responses because of social influences (Nisbet 1970, Duncanson, 1970). Despite the limitations, questionnaires are widely used in research in education and other social sciences. Phillips (1987), for example, found that nearly 90% of recently published research articles in American journals of sociology utilised questionnaires to collect data.

Writers like Best (1981), Keeves (1988) and Turney and Robb (1971) have offered general guidance on the construction of questionnaires, for example on the type of questions to ask and the types of answer pattern to use for closed items. According to Welsberg and Brown (1977), Good (1963) and Van Dalen (1979), (Williamson, 1977), the task of designing a questionnaire is very complicated. It needs patience to construct every item with accuracy in order to avoid strange wording and unfavourable expressions. The main factor is clarity. They emphasised that complex and confused wording should be avoided, as did Brigham (1975) and Wiersma (1986). Wiersma (1986) and Wolf (1988) suggested that the interest and motivation of respondents are important factors in the design of questionnaires.

There are two types of questionnaire. The unrestricted or open-ended questionnaire leaves the respondent free to state his own answers. The restricted or closed questionnaire provides of a number of statements, and the respondent selects one or more choices, by either ticking or circling one of the stated scale-points.

The questionnaire designed for this study contained a mixture of closed and open-ended items, the latter covering points for which it was difficult to anticipate the range of likely answers.

### **3.3.3. DESIGN OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES**

The main tool for this study was a set of two elaborate questionnaires, one for students, and one for teachers in Saudi secondary schools. The purpose of these



questionnaires was to explore the following issues concerning the religious education curriculum and its implementation.

1. The aims and objectives of religious education, as perceived by teachers and students, respectively.
2. The teaching strategies and learning activities employed in religious education programmes.
3. The resources used by teachers in religious education programmes.
4. The range and nature of controversial issues discussed in religious education programmes.
5. Factors influencing the teaching of religious education programmes.
6. Views about the nature and use of religious education textbooks.

Issues 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 were covered in both the teacher and the student questionnaires, whilst issue 4 featured only in the teacher questionnaire.

These forgoing issues were chosen because they are arguably the most common issues in relation to religious education in Saudi Arabian secondary schools. It was hoped that this survey would provide some indication of current practices, which could then lead to suggestions for improvement in some of the chosen areas.

Details about the design of each questionnaire are given in the following section of this chapter. It should be mentioned at this stage that both questionnaires were originally

drafted in English by the researcher, with help and advice from his supervisor. In devising and formulating items for inclusion in the questionnaires, relevant books and journals concerned with the fields of teaching in general, and the teaching of religious education in particular, were consulted.

Each questionnaire had an opening section in which background information about the respondents and their schools was sought. In the case of the teachers, this information covered the following:

- i. The school area 'City name of the school location'.
- ii. Age.
- iii. Academic and teaching qualifications.
- iv. Subject specialisation.
- v. The institution attended.
- vi. The numbers of years of teaching experience.

In the case of the students, the background information sought covered the following:

- i. The school area 'City name of the school location'.
- ii. Age.
- iii. Grade.
- iv. The specification.

There was no *a priori* assumption made that all the background information would

ultimately be used in the evaluation of the questionnaire data. Nevertheless, it was thought important not to miss out on the collection of this information, just in case specific comparisons were called for during the data evaluation process.

### **3.4. THE QUESTIONNAIRES**

In this section, the structure and content of the substantive part of the two parallel questionnaires, for teachers and students, respectively, is described. No further details are given about the introductory section of each questionnaire in which, as has already been stated, background information about the respondents was sought.

#### **3.4.1. THE TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE**

This comprised six sections, each dealing with a separate aspect of religious education in Saudi schools. The following descriptions should be read in conjunction with the copy of the questionnaire which is given in Appendix (1).

##### **Section 1: Aims and Objectives of Religious Education**

This section focused on the aims of the religious education programme and the importance attached to them by teachers. Twenty questions, probing into three aspects, were formulated.

The first aspect concerned the extent to which religious education should help the students to acquire knowledge about the Quran, Islamic law, and the history and development of Islam and other religions. Items 1, 9, 15, 17, 18, 19 and 20 related to this aspect.

The second aspect was covered by Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10, and was concerned with students' personal responses towards religious education, through the development of attitudes and values which encourage worship, morals and ethical behaviour. The purpose was to discover to what extent teachers thought these aims to be important.

The third aspect covered was concerned with the development, through religious education, of social responsibility, the understanding of life issues, and students' leadership qualities. It was covered by Items 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 16.

Teachers were asked to indicate the importance of each item on a five-point scale: very important, important, moderate, low, and none. Additionally, teachers were asked to select the three most important and the three least important aims.

## **Section 2: Teaching Strategies and Learning Activities in Religious Education**

The second section of the teacher questionnaire aimed to identify the most frequent learning activities and teaching strategies used in the religious education programmes provided by teachers, because teaching methods and learning experiences were considered to be at the heart of the educational process. Thirteen items were devised which explained the way in which the teachers deliver the subjects. The items covered different facets of teaching methods and strategies, and related to three main aspects:

- i. Teachers' use of non-standard teaching strategies for religious education, which were described as 'outside resources'. For example, these included visits to places outside the school, the use of relevant videos, and the involvement of experts from outside the school. Items 3, 5, 6 and 8 related to this aspect.

- ii. The provision of opportunities for the discussion and exploration, in the context of religious education, of ‘controversial’ issues relating to the students’ personal concern and to societal welfare. Items 2, 4, 7, 10, 11 and 12 covered these issues. (Note: the nature of the controversial issues covered was examined in section 4 of the teacher questionnaire.)
  
- iii. The use of formal teaching strategies, controlled or directed by the teacher, with emphasis on information dissemination. Two items related to this: 1 and 13.

Teachers were asked to assess the extent of their frequency of use of each of the teaching methods, on a five-point scale ranging from ‘always’ to ‘never’. In addition, they were invited to identify, in the open-ended part, any additional teaching methods and learning experiences used by them but not covered by the items in the questionnaire.

### **Section 3: Use of Resources in Religious Education**

The third section of the teacher questionnaire aimed to discover the extent of teachers’ use of different types of teaching resource for religious education in Saudi Arabian secondary schools. It also sought to explore the types of reference material used by teachers in their religious education programmes. It was realised that the extent to which different resources could be used, depended on their availability. Therefore, the questionnaire section was subdivided in order to identify (a) whether the listed resources were available, and (b) to what extent they were used.

Nine rating items were designed to identify different types of resources for religious education which could have been used by teachers. These were:

- i. Standard textbooks prescribed by the educational authority; these were formal school books and covered by Item 1. (Since the use of standard textbooks is commonplace, this item was included for confirmatory purpose.)
- ii. Written or printed material for use in religious education - for example, reference books, supplementary reading material, articles from newspapers and pamphlets; this aspect was covered by Items 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9.
- iii. Visual and audio resources, for example video recordings, and other recorded materials; these aspects were covered by Items 6, 7 and 8.

Teachers were asked to assess the extent of their use for each resource on a five-point scale, ranging from 'always' to 'never'. Additionally, they were asked to indicate the availability of the listed resources ('yes' or 'no'). An open-ended part was included in this section of the questionnaire to give the teachers an opportunity to list any additional resources not included in the given list.

#### **Section 4: Controversial Issues Discussed in Religious Education Courses**

Section 4 of the teacher questionnaire sought to explore the extent of coverage of controversial issues in religious education programmes, and to consider the teachers' views on the inclusion of such in their teaching programmes.

A list of twelve different controversial issues was drawn up, to cover the following broad areas:

- i. Controversial issues relating to religious matters, such as fundamentalism in religion or conflict between religions: Items 7, 10 and 12.
- ii. Controversial issues relating to the welfare or well-being of persons or groups of persons in society: Items 3, 4 and 11.
- iii. Controversial issues concerned with ‘world affairs’ and environmental matters: Items 1, 2, 6 and 9.

As in other sections of the teacher questionnaire, opportunity was provided for additional controversial issues not listed to be identified by respondents.

In each case, the questionnaire explored (a) to what extent the controversial issues were covered by teachers in the religious education programme. (Teachers were asked to indicate the extent of coverage according to three scale points: ‘substantial’, ‘moderate’, and ‘none’); and (b) teachers’ views about whether the listed issues were suitable for inclusion in a religious education programme. (Teachers were required to indicate the appropriateness by selecting ‘yes’ or ‘no’.)

### **Section 5: Factors which Influence the Teaching of Religious Education**

Section 5 of the teacher questionnaire was concerned with the factors which may influence the teaching, conduct and orientation of the secondary school religious

education programme in Saudi Arabia. Factors considered in this section were the general rules and guidelines for religious education programmes issued by the Ministry of Education and regional educational authorities. It was thought that these rules could limit the teaching performance. However, because the teachers might find that some of the listed factors had no influence on religious education courses, this section was divided into two parts, which sought to explore the following questions:

1. Are the listed factors applicable to the teaching of religious education programmes?
2. To what extent have these factors influenced the conduct and orientation of the religious education courses?

This section consisted of eight questions identifying the most important influences on the teaching process of religious education. The items focused upon the following basic categories:

- i. Factors related to guidelines and regulations issued by the Saudi educational authorities, and their impact on teachers and the religious education programme.
- ii. Factors related to outside influences, which also affect the teaching of religious education. These include, for example, holidays in mid-course, and current events in public or political life.
- iii. Factors related to the school itself which had direct influence on the religious education programme. The school impact can be seen through the timetable, for



example, of the placement of the lesson at the beginning or end of the school day.

Teachers were asked to rate the influences on a four-point scale ranging from 'high' to 'none', with two intermediate points. Another category was provided for those who decided the particular question was inapplicable to their religious education programme. An open-ended question which was included under this section gave the teachers an opportunity to state any other factors that might have influenced the design and conduct of the religious education programme, but which were not listed in the questionnaire.

#### **Section 6: The Main Use(s) to which Students Put Their Religious Education Textbooks**

The final section of the teacher questionnaire asked the teachers' opinion of the main use(s) to which students put their religious education textbooks. The intention was to discover whether the students used the book to acquire basic knowledge and for examination purposes only, or as general reading materials to increase their general knowledge in the religious education course. Six items were included under this section; each item gave a different type of use of the religious education textbook.

For each item, teachers were asked to indicate the appropriate point on a four-point scale ranging from 'high' down to 'none'. In addition, they were invited to complete the open-ended part of this section, which consisted of two main questions:

1. What features make religious education textbooks interesting to the students?

2. How can current religious education textbooks be improved in content, presentation and layout?

### **3.4.2. THE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

This consisted of five sections which, taken together, covered broadly the same areas which were contained in the teacher questionnaire. However, there were some differences. Firstly, it was thought that the students would be less aware than their teachers of factors which acted as a constraint upon the conduct of religious education. Consequently, this aspect was less rigorously pursued in the student questionnaire than in the teacher questionnaire. To make this section substantial, issues concerning textbook use by students were included here. Secondly, the final section of the student questionnaire was used to elicit from the students ideas and suggestions about how their religious education programmes could be improved - a corresponding section in the teacher questionnaire would obviously not have been appropriate!

The following descriptions of the sections in the student questionnaire should be read in conjunction with the copy of that questionnaire given in Appendix (3).

#### **Section 1: Aims and Objectives of Religious Education Programmes**

The focus in this section was on students' perceptions of the aims and objectives of their religious education programmes. However, since it was thought that students would, or might, have difficulties in conceptualising the term 'aims' and 'objectives', the enquiry was focused on their interest in different aspects of religious education. Thus, students were asked to indicate the areas and themes they would like to learn about, and to identify the extent of their interest in the topics specified in their

textbooks. Positive and negative statements were included in altogether fifteen items which related to different topics from the religious education course and expressed different aims and objectives. In particular, the following dimensions were explored:

- i. The role of religion in normal life and society, with specific reference to the Islamic religion. Items 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11 probed into this aspect.
- ii. The relevance of religious education to the personal life of the student and to 'life events' he would or might encounter. Items 8, 12, 13, 14 and 15 dealt with this matter.
- iii. Students' interest in learning about religions other than Islam and about the ways in which religion viewed 'world events', for example, famine and natural disasters. Items 1, 2 and 5 related to this.

In addition, a 'neutral' item (number 15) was included to establish the degree to which students were mainly or predominantly interested in the matters described in their textbooks.

Students were asked to indicate their degree of interest for each item by selecting the appropriate point on a five-point rating scale ranging from 'very high', to 'never'. Students were also invited to complete an open-ended part by adding any other aspects of interest which they would like to learn about in the religious education course.

## **Section 2: Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills**

The aim of this section was to identify what knowledge and skills students hope to acquire through studying religious education, and to explore the ability of their religious education courses to develop these attributes in them. In some sense, therefore, this section may be regarded as an extension of the first section of the questionnaire.

Fifteen items were formulated, covering the following areas:

- i. The basic knowledge about Islamic laws and morals needed for life (covered by Items 1, 3, 4, 9, 10 and 15).
- ii. Skills needed to form relationships with, and be tolerant towards, people of different faiths and opinions. Items 5, 7, 8 and 13 related to this aspect.
- iii. The ability to debate and discuss issues of religious interest and implications, expressed by means of Items 6, 12 and 14.
- iv. Knowledge/skills relating to the student's relationship with his family and his responsibility for, and ability of, educating his offspring according to the Islamic faith. Items 2 and 11 probed into this aspect.

Students were required to indicate on a five-point rating scale ranging from 'very high' to 'none' the level of importance they accorded to each ability or skill. An open-ended part was included in this section to give the students an opportunity to add any abilities

they would like to develop through the religious education course but which were not listed.

### **Section 3: Learning Activities**

Section 3 of the student questionnaire enquired into the learning activities which students had encountered in the religious education courses.

Fifteen items were devised which identified different types of learning activity with focus on the following four main aspects.

- i. 'Outside' activities, not taking place inside the school. These included, for example, visits to museums and places of religious interest. Items 3, 4, 9, 10, 11 and 14 explored this aspect.
- ii. Formal learning activities as required by teachers in their everyday teaching, such as the study of textbook materials and homework preparation. Items 1, 5, 6 and 7 represented this aspect.
- iii. The use of reading and resource materials other than formal textbooks. Included in the items used here 2, 8 and 15 were reference to newspaper articles, video-tapes and other recordings, including films.
- iv. Activities requiring active student involvement, for example, the preparation and presentation of talks to other students. Items 12 and 13 related to this aspect.

Students were asked to indicate the frequency of their exposure to the various activities on a five-point rating scale, ranging from ‘never’ at the one extreme to ‘regularly’ at the other.

In the final part of this section, students were asked to add any other learning activities which they carried out on their religious education course but which were not listed in the given table.

#### **Section 4: Teaching Methods Used in Religious Education**

Section 4 of the questionnaire aimed to identify factors which influence students’ learning in religious education programmes. Six different possible influences were listed under this section, representing the following aspects:

- i. The influence of the content of the formal textbook on the conduct of religious education (Items 1 and 2).
- ii. The extent to which students’ ideas and interests were accommodated, or responded to, in religious education programmes (Items 4 and 6).
- iii. The extent to which teachers utilised the media for example, the use of articles from newspapers to explain certain events and explore current issues (Item 3).

Item 5 was included in order to establish the extent to which teachers use questions as a means of monitoring students’ learning.

Essentially, each item was required to be rated by students on a five-point scale assessing the frequency at which the particular aspects were encountered. The extreme scale points were ‘always’ and ‘never’.

### **Section 5: Suggestions for the Improvement of Religious Education Programmes**

In this section, the focus was on eliciting students’ views about the facets of their religious education courses which they liked and disliked, respectively. To enable them to do so without being influenced by a set of predetermined items, it was decided to leave this section ‘open-ended’.

An additional matter explored in this section, again in an open-ended way, was students’ views about their formal religious education textbooks. This was done on the realisation of the central role of the textbook in the Saudi school system. The particular issues about which information was sought were:

- i. The aspect of their religious education textbooks that students found pleasing and useful.
- ii. Ways of improving religious education textbooks to make them more attractive and useful.
- iii. The main uses to which students put their religious education textbooks.

Answers to these questions would, it was hoped, lead to positive recommendations about the future design of textbooks for religious education programmes in Saudi secondary schools.

### **3.4.3. TRANSLATION AND VALIDATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES**

Both teacher and student questionnaires were translated by the researcher into the Arabic language because the study took place in Saudi Arabia. The Arabic versions of the questionnaires were presented to be reviewed and checked, together with the English edition, by staff from the Curriculum, and the Islamic Studies departments, at the Faculty of Education at King Saud University. All of the reviewers held Ph.Ds, and three of them were professors; they were all fluent in English and Arabic. The questionnaires were also approved by the Postgraduate Studies Committee at King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Copies of the approved, stamped translations of the two questionnaires are given in Appendix (2 and 4).

The aim of the review of the questionnaires, undertaken by staff members of the King Saud University was essentially two-fold:

- i. To ascertain that the content of the questionnaires, that is, the lines of enquiry represented in them, was considered appropriate for the Saudi secondary school situation.
- ii. To ensure that, in the translated versions of the questionnaires, all the items were clear and unambiguous in their meanings and that the language used was appropriate to the two target populations, namely, teachers and students.

Altogether 12 staff members contributed to the initial validation of the questionnaires, a number that was judged by the researcher and his supervisor to be sufficient for the intended purpose.



The results from the validation exercise were encouraging in that they supported the belief that the instruments were sufficiently comprehensive to permit the researcher to embark on the main study. Only a few minor changes had to be made to some sections of the questionnaires, in response to suggestions received, prior to the submission of the questionnaires to the Saudi education authorities for approval. Approval of the questionnaires was given in 1994. At the same time, the Saudi education authorities gave permission for the questionnaires to be administered in schools, to be answered by teachers and students, respectively.

No trial administration of the questionnaires was conducted in schools, since this would have necessitated additional approaches to the Saudi education authorities for permission to conduct such trials.

### **3.5. SELECTION OF THE STUDY POPULATIONS**

A decision taken during the early planning phase of this project was that the study should cover as representative a range of schools in Saudi Arabia as possible. In practice, this meant that the sampling of schools (that is, their teachers and students) should extend to all major population areas in the country.

Following a detailed survey of the literature concerning different approaches to population sampling for medium to large-scale questionnaire-based studies, the method of cluster sampling described by Fox and Tobias (1969) was regarded to be most appropriate for the present study. Cluster sampling may be viewed as the random selection of specific members of the total population and represents one category of

probability sampling. [The others are genuine random sampling, as described by - for example - Parry and Watts (1989), and systematic sampling, as defined by Freeman and Levin (1975).]

The 'clusters' chosen for the present study were four of the five administrative regions of Saudi Arabia which are the central, western, eastern, northern and the southern region. Each one of these administrative regions controls a number of educational districts and in each educational district there are many schools. The southern region was excluded from the study because of its enormous distance from the others and its relatively low population. Thus, the populations for the study were selected from secondary school teachers and students in the central, western, eastern and northern regions in Saudi Arabia. The respective administrative centres of these regions are Riyadh, Jeddah, Dammam and Medinah. The reason for choosing the four areas was that the areas have somewhat different characteristics. This, it was thought, might produce different views in teachers. The main characteristics of those areas will now be described.

1. The two major cities in the centre and the west of Saudi Arabia are Riyadh and Jeddah, respectively. Both are well known internationally but are very different. The emphasis in Riyadh, in the centre, is on politics and government; it is the capital of Saudi Arabia. In contrast, Jeddah which lies in the western part of the country, is one of most important commercial centres of Saudi Arabia. It is also a tourist centre in that it lies by the Red Sea coast.
2. The major population centre in the east of Saudi Arabia, is Dammam, which is

situated in the east in the heart of the Arabian Gulf. It is an industrial centre, the main source of oil, and it is not a base of pilgrimage. Dammam cultivates industrial skills and is more open about religious boundaries than, for example, Makkah (Mecca).

3. Medinah, in the north of Saudi Arabia, is a large city and one of the major holy centres of Islam, because the prophet Mohammed's mosque and burial place are located there. Like the population of Makkah (Mecca), the population of Medinah has a reputation for being conservative and strict in religious matters. Only Muslims live in Medinah.

The schools themselves were selected from lists provided by the educational authorities in the selected regions. Although this selection was made on a random basis, care was taken to ensure that the pool of schools chosen from each area was adequately representative of the whole range of schools in that region. Thus, the sample included schools from city centres, suburban areas and outlying districts. All the selected schools were under the control of the educational authority in each region.

The teachers in the final sample were teachers of religious education in public secondary schools for boys in the four regions mentioned. All were male, and most of them taught more than one religious education subject. The students in the sample were chosen from public secondary schools for boys in the same regions. Most of the students were aged between 16 and 18 years, although a few students were over 19 years of age.

Details about the teachers' and students' samples are given later in this chapter.

### **3.6. CONDUCT OF THE FIELDWORK**

A number of preliminary procedures had to be completed prior to the administration of the questionnaires. In the main, these were concerned with obtaining permission from the Saudi authorities to approach schools in the various regions previously identified for the purpose of administering the questionnaires.

As part of the preliminary procedures, the researcher visited each school selected for participation in the study, in order to explain to the school management staff the nature of the investigation and to negotiate local arrangement for the administration of the questionnaires.

The administration of the questionnaires itself required two further visits to each school, one for the initial distribution of the questionnaires, one for their collection. In a few instances, a third visit was required to collect previously incompleated ones.

The initial distribution of the questionnaires to teachers and students was linked to introductory talks being given by the researcher. In these, the purpose of the study was explained and information given about how the questionnaires were to be completed. Also, firm assurances were given that all replies to the questionnaires would be treated with the utmost confidence, that no-one other than the researcher would see the answers and that the results would be analysed for research purposes only. It was stressed that the study was in the respondents' own interest since it would help them with their own educational problems and would also help others in future.

The fact that the researcher himself undertook to collect all completed questionnaires personally, rather than to have the collection effected through third parties, did much to underline his assurance about the confidentiality of the replies given.

The total number of questionnaires distributed was 500 for the teacher questionnaire and 700 for the student questionnaire. Table 3.1 gives information about the completed questionnaires, according to area. It is seen from this that the completion or return rate was 77% for the teacher questionnaire, and 77% for the student questionnaire, respectively. Both these return rates must be regarded as very satisfactory and are certainly higher than those reported for similar studies elsewhere.

**Table 3.1: Information about Questionnaires Completed by Teachers and Students, respectively**

	Total numbers of questionnaires issued	Numbers of questionnaires returned				Total	Completion rate (%)
		Jeddah	Riyadh	Dammam	Medinah		
Teachers	500	118	99	89	78	384	76.8
Students	700	132	143	129	136	540	77.1

### **3.7. OUTLINE OF TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS**

In this, the final section of Chapter 3, a brief summary of the main characteristics of the teachers and the students in the experimental samples is given. This is based on the information collected in the introductory section of each questionnaire.

As could be established during the detailed analysis of the questionnaire data, none of the teachers' or students' characteristics interacted significantly with the main results

derived from the questionnaires. Thus, the present information about teachers and students in the population samples serves only descriptive purposes.

### **3.7.1. TEACHERS' CHARACTERISTICS**

In addition to their school affiliation, teachers provided background information about the following:

- i. their academic and teaching qualifications, including the type of institution from which these had been obtained;
- ii. their age and length of teaching experience;
- iii. their subject specialisation, that is, the principle subject taught by them.

The information obtained is summarised in Tables 3.2 to 3.5.

#### **i. Teachers' Qualifications**

As Table 3.2 shows, nearly 84% of the teachers in the study sample held at least a Bachelor's degree, with some 4% of them also holding a higher (Master's) degree. A small minority of the teachers (N=11, equivalent to 2.9%) did not hold graduate status, but were nevertheless 'qualified' in that they had obtained a teaching diploma.

**Table 3.2: Distribution of Teachers' Qualifications**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers</b>
Teaching diploma	11	2.9
Degree of BA. B.Sc.	308	80.2
Master degree	15	3.9
Other degree	50	13.0

Some 13% of the teacher sample stated that they were ‘graduates’ but without indicating the nature of the degree obtained by them. However, since they indicated that they had followed a four-year university programme, they can safely be included in the total cohort of graduates which, hence, amounted to over 97%. In this sense, the teachers must be regarded as academically ‘highly qualified’.

**ii. Teachers’ Age and Length of Teaching Experience**

Table 3.3 shows the age distribution of teachers in the sample, whilst Table 3.4 indicates the distribution of teachers by the length of their teaching experience in years.

The information is based on the returns from 383 teachers.

**Table 3.3: Age Distribution of Teachers in Study Sample**

<b>Age band /years</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers</b>
≤ 25	69	18.0
26-30	166	43.4
31-35	69	18.0
36-40	23	6.0
41-50	40	10.4
> 50	16	4.2
Total	383	100.0

**Table 3.4: Length of Teachers’ Classroom Teaching Experience**

<b>Teaching experience /years</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers</b>
≤ 5	195	50.9
6-10	101	26.4
11-15	25	6.5
> 15	62	16.2
Total	383	100.0

As the information in the two tables indicates, the sample of teachers participating in the study was strongly skewed towards the lower end of the age and experience

spectrum. Over half of the teachers were age 30 or below, with a substantial proportion falling in the lowest age category (25 years or less). The lowest age recorded was 23 years.

The experience profile of the teachers corresponds roughly to their age profile: about half of the teachers had had five years of teaching experience or less, with another quarter in the 6-10 year band. 'Senior teachers', by comparison, were sparsely represented in the sample.

Despite the obvious skew in the age and experience distribution of the teachers, the sample is nevertheless typical of the teacher population in all Saudi secondary schools. It reflects the substantial expansion in this education sector in recent years, which has led to a major recruitment of young teachers on a yearly basis. Thus, relatively young teachers with limited experience currently make up the bulk of the teaching force in Saudi secondary schools.

### **iii. Teachers' Subject Specialisation**

Although all teachers in the sample were involved in the conduct of religious education in their schools, this did not necessarily mean that they all had specialist qualifications in that subject. It is possible, for example, for teachers with qualifications on the Arts side or in the social sciences to contribute to the teaching of religious education, at least for part of their teaching time.

Table 3.5 gives a breakdown of the subject specialisms of teachers in the study sample. It is seen that the overwhelming proportion of them are specialists in 'Islamic



education’ which is the customary specialism of ‘main subject’ religious education teachers in Saudi secondary schools. Only 10 of the teachers in the sample were arts specialists, whilst another 27 failed to give an indication of their teaching specialism.

**Table 3.5: The Subject Specialisms of the Religious Education Teachers in the Study Sample**

<b>Subject specialism</b>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers</b>
Art subjects	10	2.6
Islamic education	347	90.4
Other subject (not specified)	27	7.0
Total	384	100.0

### **3.7.2. STUDENTS’ CHARACTERISTICS**

The main background information, other than school affiliation, sought from students in the study sample was:

- i. their level of secondary schooling, and
- ii. their area of specialisation within the Saudi secondary school system.

Both aspects are specific to the Saudi system and, hence, require brief explanation.

*Levels of secondary education.* These correspond to the three main years of secondary schooling in Saudi Arabia, generally from age 16 to 18. At the end of each year, students are required to pass examinations. On the basis of these, they are awarded passes at the level corresponding to that study year. Successful completion of secondary education means that the student has passed his examinations at all three levels. He thereby gains a qualification which entitles him to university admission.

*Areas of specialisation in secondary education.* First-year students in Saudi secondary schools follow a general studies programme. Thereafter, in the subsequent two years, they are given the opportunity to specialise to some extent, without altogether abandoning a pattern of general education.

The specialisation manifests itself through the student joining the one or other of two main streams (or ‘departments’) in Saudi secondary schools: the arts stream and the science stream.

Within each stream, further specialisation is possible. Thus, from the basis of the arts stream, students may opt either for ‘Islamic Studies’ or for ‘Management and Social Science’ studies. Similarly, on the science side, ‘Physical Science’ or ‘Applied Studies’ may be chosen.

In the context of the present study which focuses on religious education in Saudi secondary schools, the issue of specialisation is of potential importance because students in the science stream usually study less religious education than their colleagues on the arts side. This, it was hypothesised, could result in different perceptions about religious education being held by students in the two streams.

#### **i. Students’ Levels of Secondary Education**

Table 3.6 shows the distribution of students in the study sample according to their level of secondary education. It is seen from this that about 80% of the students were drawn from the upper two years of secondary education, that is, the phase during which

specialisation is permitted. The remaining students (N=115, equivalent to 21%) were first-year students.

**Table 3.6: Students' Level of Secondary Education**

Level	Number of students	Percentage of students
One	115	21.3
Two	203	37.6
Three	222	41.1
Total	540	100.0

Details about students' age were also collected as part of the background information, but are less useful in the context of the Saudi Arabian education system than in, for example, the British system of education. The reason for this is that, in Saudi Arabia, movement from one level to another is based on achievement-related 'promotion' rather than students' age. Therefore, students' ages do not exactly correspond to the levels of secondary education at which they study. As Table 3.7 indicates, the majority (67%) of the students in the sample was drawn from the 16 to 18 age band. However, a sizeable minority (almost 30%) was older than this, with 25 years being the highest age recorded.

**Table 3.7: Age Distribution of Students in the Study Sample**

Age range/years	Number of students	Percentage of students
≤ 15	20	3.7
16-18	362	67.0
19-20	135	25.0
> 20	23	4.3
Total	540	100.0

## ii. Students' Areas of Specialisation

Table 3.8 gives students' areas of specialisation at the second and third levels of their secondary schooling. Level One students have been excluded from the table since they were following an undifferentiated general studies programme.

**Table 3.8: Characterisation of Student Sample in Terms of Areas of Specialisation (Level Two and Level Three Students only)**

<b>Stream</b>	<b>Area of specialisation</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Percentage of students</b>
Art	Islamic Studies.	246	57.9
	Management/Social Studies.	23	5.4
Science	Physical Science.	150	35.3
	Applied Studies.	6	1.4
Total		425	100.0

As is seen from the table, the ratio of arts to science students in the sample was close to 2:1. This roughly reflects the ratio found among Saudi secondary students as a whole. Consequently, the study population may be considered adequately representative.

### **3.8. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, a detailed description has been given of the following:

- i. The choice of research strategy for the present study and the considerations that underlay this choice.
- ii. The development of the two questionnaires employed in the study and the nature of constructs and items represented in them.
- iii. Arrangements for the validation of the questionnaires by a panel of experts in Saudi Arabia.
- iv. The administration of the questionnaires in schools in four major regions of Saudi Arabia.

In addition, some information has been given to identify the main characteristics of the samples of teachers and students participating in this study.

For reasons already mentioned, it was not possible to carry out a trial administration of the questionnaires prior to the conduct of the main fieldwork. In view of this, the decision was taken to probe into the performance of the two instruments on the basis of the main fieldwork data and, if necessary, make any *post hoc* adjustments to the data carried into the full analysis of the questionnaire - derived information. Aspects of this are described in the subsequent Chapters in which the results of the study are presented.