

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the results obtained from the teacher questionnaire. As discussed in Section 3.4.1, Chapter 3, the teacher questionnaire consisted of six sections, each dealing with specific issues in religious education. Section 1 was concerned with the aims and objectives of religious education; Section 2 dealt with the teaching methods and learning experiences used by teachers in their religious education courses. Section 3 concentrated on the use of resources and references in the teaching of religious education; Section 4 examined the extent to which controversial issues were included in religious education courses; Section 5 examined some factors that influence the teaching of religious education; finally, Section 6 focused on questions concerning the religious education textbooks used by students.

Each section consisted of a number of predetermined rating items which required teachers to indicate their views on particular aspects of religious education by selecting an appropriate point on a rating scale. The items themselves had been developed to represent particular ‘constructs’ but these constructs had not been validated prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Hence, it was considered important to carry out a construct validation as part of the evaluation of the questionnaire data.

Two techniques were employed for the validation of the constructs: factor analysis and reliability analysis. The first of these was used in order to identify clusters of items which, because of the affinity among them, could be regarded as being representative of a particular construct or 'scale'. In instances where such scales emerged, reliability analysis was applied to the items within a scale in order to examine the degree to which each item fitted the scale. The analyses were carried out by means of the appropriate programs provided by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer package. These programs are described in Paul and Colin (1996) and Bryman and Cramer (1997).

It should be pointed out that the foregoing techniques were applied only to data obtained from the predetermined items in the various questionnaire sections, where this seemed appropriate. Open-ended returns were excluded from any statistical validation.

In the following sections of this chapter, the results derived from the teacher questionnaire are presented and discussed. Each chapter section corresponds to one of the questionnaire sections referred to above and discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Data relating to the validation of questionnaire items are included in the relevant sections of this chapter.

4.2. TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

4.2.1. INTRODUCTION

This part of the teacher questionnaire explored the most important aims of religious education as perceived by secondary school teachers in Saudi Arabia. As was described in section 3.4.1, Chapter 3, twenty items were devised to represent the following aspects of religious education:

- i. 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.
- ii. Students' personal responses towards religious education, through the development of attitudes and values which encourage worship, morals and ethical behaviour.
- iii. The development, through religious education, of social responsibility, the understanding of life issues and students' leadership qualities.

The initial attribution of items to these aspects was also described in Chapter 3. However, since this attribution had been made on a purely theoretical basis, that is, not based on teachers' ratings of the items concerned, the initial task in the evaluation of the questionnaire data was the validation of the original constructs. This part of the

work is described in the following subsection which is then followed by the presentation and discussion of results based on the validated scales.

4.2.2. VALIDATION OF THE CONSTRUCTS RELATING TO THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

For this purpose, the answers received from teachers in the sample to the twenty rating items were factor-analysed, using principal factor analysis followed by Varimax rotation. A total of four factors resulted, accounting for 53 per cent of the total variance.

Table 4.1 briefly describes the content of the items in this questionnaire section and shows their Varimax loadings. The item number in the first column corresponds to the portion of the item in the questionnaire (see section 1 of the Teacher Questionnaire in Appendix 1) For the association of each item with a factor, its highest loading was chosen. Loadings below 0.3 have been omitted, in line with conventional practice.

The order in which the factors and related items appear in Table 4.1 is in itself of no particular significance, since it is determined by the statistical procedure used. Nevertheless, it is expedient to discuss the factors in the order in which they appear in the table.

Table 4.1: The Loading of Aims and Objectives of Religious Education on Rotated Varimax Factor Analysis

| Item | Description | Loadings on factors | | | |
|------|---|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| | | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 | Factor 4 |
| 1 | A detailed knowledge of the Quran and other important Islamic laws. | | | | 0.53 |
| 2 | A basis for life in an Islamic society. | | 0.49 | | |
| 3 | An appreciation of the origins and historical development of the Islamic religion. | | 0.69 | | |
| 4 | An awareness of the influence of religion and religious movements on contemporary society. | | 0.67 | | |
| 5 | An understanding of the origins and characteristics of the major world religions and faiths. | | 0.46 | | |
| 6 | The ability to understand and critically appraise religious interpretations of life issues such as war, hunger, death, etc. | | 0.66 | | |
| 7 | A sensitivity towards the 'non-rational' aspects of experience, e.g., beauty, wonder, awe, etc. | | | 0.61 | |
| 8 | Tolerance towards, and understanding of, peoples with other faiths and religions than one's own. | | | 0.60 | |
| 9 | An understanding that religious belief is a universal dimension of human experience. | | | | 0.62 |
| 10 | A commitment to the pursuit of religious activities, e.g., regular worship and adherence to the laws of Islam. | | | | 0.76 |
| 11 | A knowledge of the life and work of great religious leaders. | | | | 0.62 |
| 12 | The desire to search for a faith by which to live. | | | 0.63 | |
| 13 | An appreciation of the contribution of the Islamic religion to Arabic culture. | | | 0.63 | |
| 14 | A detailed knowledge of the work and functions of religious institutions. | | | 0.43 | |
| 15 | Insight into the rites and conventions associated with religious practices, e.g., prayer, fasting, etc. | 0.58 | | | |
| 16 | The ability to respond to personal crises in the spirit of religious faith. | | | 0.60 | |
| 17 | A belief in the teaching of the prophets. | 0.64 | | | |
| 18 | An interest in the pursuit of a career in religion, after leaving school. | 0.71 | | | |
| 19 | A knowledge of the foundations of religious rules and practices. | 0.61 | | | |
| 20 | An interest in the pursuit of religious knowledge. | 0.71 | | | |

Factor 1: Five items were found to load on this factor, all with moderate to high loadings. The items with the highest loadings (Items 18 and 20), both express what may be described as ‘personal commitment to religion’ (‘Interest in the pursuit of a career in religion, after leaving school’. ‘Interest in the pursuit of religious knowledge’). The remaining three items (Items, 17, 19, and 15, in the order of decreasing loadings) refer to specific aspects of religious knowledge which, it may be argued, relate closely to the ‘personal interest in religion’ theme that appears to underlay this particular factor.

Consequently, it may be suggested that the items loading on Factor 1, taken together, express the notion of involvement in religion and spiritual matters.

Factor 2: Of the five items loading on this factor, three had fairly high loadings, in excess of 0.65. The main idea underlying these (Items 3, 4 and 6) appears to be the relevance of religion to contemporary life and society. This is indicated by Items 4 and 6. Coupled with this is an awareness of the cultural aspects of religions (in terms of their origins and development in history); this is expressed by Items 3 and 6. The remaining item (Item 2) also makes reference to ‘life in society’, albeit in the context of Islam.

The nature of the items loading on Factor 2 suggests that this factor is broadly concerned with the appreciation of the role of religion in society and life events.

Factor 3: Six items loaded on this factor, namely, Items 7, 8, 12, 13, 14 and 16. The loadings were uniformly high for five of these, just in excess of 0.60. Only Item 14 had a distinctly lower loading (0.43).

Although the items appear to deal with different aspects of religion and people's viewpoints towards religion and religious experiences, they have one common feature. This is that they express different facets of what essentially is a 'personal response' to religion and religious issues. For example, wonderment and awe (Item 7), tolerance towards others (Item 8) and the ability to respond positively to personal crises (Item 16) illustrate this, as does the characteristic expressed by Item 12 (searching for a faith by which to live). The remaining item (Item 14) does not fully support the theme of this factor but, since its loading is relatively weak, this should not detract from the essential nature of Factor 3.

In the broad sense, it may be suggested that the basic construct emerging for this factor is that of a personal response to religion and religious experiences.

Factor 4: Four items loaded on this factor, three (Items 9, 10, and 11) with loadings above 0.6 and the fourth (Item 1) with a lower loading of 0.53.

Initial inspection of the four items does not suggest that they share a common theme. Two of them (Items 9 and 10) focus on religious activities and experiences, whilst the remaining two point to knowledge of the Quran and the work of great religious leaders. A possible link between these two aspects may be that the kind of knowledge

implied in Items 1 and 11 may be regarded as a prerequisite for an involvement in religious activities. However, this link is a speculative one.

Nevertheless, the fact that the four items load simultaneously on the same factor is indication of a certain degree of commonality among them. Given the nature of these items, perhaps the most appropriate label for the scale corresponding to this factor is “Commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws”.

4.2.2.1. Reliability of the Scales Derived from the Factor Analysis

As has been seen, the factor analysis of teachers’ responses to the ‘Aims and Objectives of Religious Education’ Items in Section 1 of the teacher questionnaire gave rise to four separate scales, corresponding to the four factors identified. In order to examine the internal consistency of items within each scale, Cronbach-alpha reliabilities were calculated. The results are summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Cronbach-Alpha Scale Reliabilities for the ‘Aims and Objectives of the Religious Education’ Domain.

| Scale | Scale description | Items included | Alpha reliability |
|-------|--|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Involvement in religion and spiritual matters. | 15, 17, 18, 19, 20 | 0.77 |
| 2 | Appreciation of the role of religion in society and life events. | 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 | 0.77 |
| 3 | Personal response to religion and religious experiences. | 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16 | 0.78 |
| 4 | Commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws. | 1, 9, 10, 11 | 0.59 |

As the data in Table 4.2 show, the internal consistency of the items in the first three scales is sufficiently high for these scales to be accepted as sound operational scales. For the fourth scale, the alpha reliability value is somewhat lower (at 0.59%), but even

this is still acceptable. However, this lower value reflects the slight thematic inconsistency within the scale to which attention has already been drawn.

4.2.3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF TEACHERS' RATINGS OF THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

For the purpose of presenting and discussing teachers' ratings of the aims and objectives of religious education, the following procedure has been adopted. First, teachers' ratings for the four constructs (scales) identified from the factor analysis are presented. Thereafter, each scale is considered separately.

4.2.3.1. Teachers' Ratings of the Four Scales of Aims and Objectives of Religious Education

To compare teachers' views of the importance of the aims and objectives associated with the four scales, mean ratings and related standard deviations were worked out from teachers' ratings on the items in each scale. These ratings were made on a five-point scale ranging from 5 = very important to 1 = of no importance.

Table 4.3: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations for the Four Scales Expressing 'Aims and Objectives of Religious Education'

| Scale | Scale description | Mean ratings | Standard deviations |
|--------------|--|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Involvement in religion and spiritual matters. | 4.37 | 0.94 |
| 2 | Appreciation of the role of religion in society and life events. | 4.07 | 0.65 |
| 3 | Personal response to religion and religious experiences. | 3.87 | 0.64 |
| 4 | Commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws. | 4.89 | 0.36 |

The data in the Table 4.3 show convincingly that aims relating to fostering in students a 'commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws' are given the highest importance rating by teachers. The mean rating of 4.89 is very close to the 'very important' end of

the rating scale. The relatively small standard deviation suggests that there is a high degree of consensus among teachers concerning the importance of this scale.

The next most important scale, in teachers' views, is that concerned with aims and objectives relating to students' involvement in religion and spiritual matters, although in this case the standard deviation is rather large (0.94). This suggests some divergence of opinion among the teachers.

Students' appreciation of the role of religion in society and life events ranks next in importance, as perceived by teachers. The mean rating for this scale is just above 4, which corresponds to the 'important' scale point.

The scale concerning students' personal response to religion and religious experiences receives the lowest importance rating by teachers although the mean rating still points to this aspect being given a fairly high degree of importance.

The general conclusions to be drawn from the consideration of teachers' mean ratings on the four scales are as follows:

1. Commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws is seen by teachers as the most important aim of their teaching of religious education. This is followed, in terms of importance, by students' involvement in religious and spiritual matters.
2. Aims concerning the development of students' understanding of the role of religion in society and in relation to life events of a general, as well as personal, nature are not accorded the same high importance as those referred to under 1.

Thus, students' acceptance of the conventions and requirements of the Islamic religion appears to be uppermost in teachers' minds, as the desirable outcome of their religious education programmes.

4.2.3.2. Teachers' Ratings of Individual Aims and Objectives of Religious Education

In this part of the section, teachers' ratings of the importance of individual aims and objectives of religious education are discussed. This supplements the information given in the previous section in which teachers' ratings of the four scales were considered.

The purpose of looking here at particular aims and objectives is to highlight those aspects of religious education that, in teachers' perception, are of the highest importance and to identify those that merit relatively less importance.

An initial categorisation of the aims into two groups was made on the basis of their mean ratings, as follows:

- i. Aims with mean rating of 4.5 and above (on the five-point scale) were regarded as 'high importance' aims.
- ii. Aims with mean ratings below 3.5 were regarded as 'less importance' aims.

The choice of these mean ratings is admittedly somewhat arbitrary but can be justified in terms of the semantic meanings that can be associated with the scale values. Thus, a mean rating of 4.5 and above is close to the 'very important' end of the rating

spectrum, whilst a mean rating of 3.5 or less is indicative of at least some reservation about the importance to be attached to an aim or objective.

Table 4.4 lists all aims in the four scales in terms of their mean ratings and standard deviations, as well as the distribution of responses of teachers' importance ratings. 'High importance' aims are indicated by bold roman mean ratings, whereas 'lower importance' aims are indicated by italicised bold mean rating figures.

Table 4.4: Distribution of Teachers' Importance Rating of Different Aims and Objectives of Religious Education (Including Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation)

| Item | Description | Degree of Importance (per cent) | | | | | Mean Rating | S.D. |
|--|---|---------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|------|
| | | Very important | Important | Moderately Important | Little Importance | No Importance | | |
| Scale 1: Involvement in religion and spiritual matters. | | | | | | | | |
| 15 | Insight into the rites and conventions associated with religious practices, e.g., prayer, fasting, etc. | 80.9 | 16.2 | 2.1 | 0.8 | 0.00 | 4.77 | 0.52 |
| 17 | A belief in the teaching of the prophets. | 73.2 | 20.7 | 3.9 | 1.8 | 0.3 | 4.65 | 0.67 |
| 18 | An interest in the pursuit of a career in religion, after leaving school. | 59.3 | 28.8 | 6.3 | 2.6 | 2.9 | 4.39 | 0.94 |
| 19 | A knowledge of the foundations of religious rules and practices. | 26.1 | 47.9 | 19.7 | 4.5 | 1.8 | 3.92 | 0.89 |
| 20 | An interest in the pursuit of religious knowledge. | 34.7 | 48.9 | 11.1 | 3.7 | 1.6 | 4.11 | 0.86 |
| Scale 2: Appreciation of the role of religion in society and life events. | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | A basis for life in an Islamic society. | 52.9 | 37.1 | 7.1 | 1.8 | 1.1 | 4.39 | 0.79 |
| 3 | An appreciation of the origins and historical development of the Islamic religion. | 30.1 | 43.4 | 19.9 | 4.0 | 2.7 | 3.94 | 0.95 |
| 4 | An awareness of the influence of religion and religious movements on contemporary society. | 64.6 | 23.7 | 9.5 | 1.3 | 0.8 | 4.50 | 0.78 |
| 5 | An understanding of the origins and characteristics of the major world religions and faiths. | 24.3 | 40.6 | 26.4 | 6.9 | 1.8 | 3.79 | 0.95 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|------|
| 6 | The ability to understand and critically appraise religious interpretations of life issues such as war, hunger, death, etc. | 26.4 | 40.3 | 23.6 | 6.5 | 3.1 | 3.80 | 1.00 |
| Scale 3: Personal response to religion and religious experiences. | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | A sensitivity towards the 'non-rational' aspects of experience, e.g., beauty, wonder, awe, etc. | 7.7 | 21.5 | 35.4 | 22.6 | 12.8 | 2.89 | 1.12 |
| 8 | Tolerance towards, and understanding of, peoples with other faiths and religions than one's own. | 31.7 | 43.3 | 19.0 | 3.7 | 2.4 | 3.98 | 0.93 |
| 12 | The desire to search for a faith by which to live. | 66.2 | 27.2 | 5.2 | 0.8 | 0.5 | 4.58 | 0.68 |
| 13 | An appreciation of the contribution of the Islamic religion to Arabic culture. | 30.0 | 41.3 | 20.0 | 7.4 | 1.3 | 3.91 | 0.95 |
| 14 | A detailed knowledge of the work and functions of religious institutions. | 16.3 | 34.9 | 31.8 | 10.8 | 6.3 | 3.44 | 1.08 |
| 16 | The ability to respond to personal crises in the spirit of religious faith. | 51.0 | 40.6 | 7.1 | 1.0 | 0.3 | 4.41 | 0.69 |
| Scale 4: Commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws. | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | A detailed knowledge of the Quran and other important Islamic laws. | 94.8 | 5.0 | 0.3 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 4.95 | 0.24 |
| 9 | An understanding that religious belief is a universal dimension of human experience. | 96.1 | 3.1 | 0.5 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 4.95 | 0.30 |
| 10 | A commitment to the pursuit of religious activities, e.g., regular worship and adherence to the laws of Islam. | 94.0 | 6.0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 4.94 | 0.24 |
| 11 | A knowledge of the life and work of great religious leaders. | 90.3 | 7.8 | 1.8 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 4.89 | 0.37 |

i. 'High Importance' Aims

As is seen from Table 4.4, altogether eight of the 20 aims fell into this category. Of these, four were from the 'Commitments to the Islamic religion and its laws' scale which had already been identified as the scale rated most highly by teachers. The remaining four aims too, drawn from the other scales, may be claimed to relate closely

to aspects concerning the Islamic faith. This is particularly true for Aims 15 and 17 in Scale 1, which refer to the conventions of the Islamic religion and to the teaching of the prophets.

ii. 'Lower Importance' Aims

Only two of the aims were given ratings below 3.5. The first of these (Aim 14 in Scale 3) concerned the acquisition of knowledge of the work and function of religious institutions and received a mean rating just below the 3.5 cut-off point. The interesting point about this aim is the diversity of teachers' opinion: about 50% thought this aim to be important or very important. Of the remaining teachers, a substantial proportion attached little or no importance to this particular aim.

The same diversity in opinion is also observed for the aim receiving the lowest mean rating (Aim 7 in Scale 3). This is concerned with the emotional, 'non-rational' aspects of religion. Evidently, the majority of teachers regard these aspects as relatively unimportant or, at best, of moderate importance. One possible explanation of this is that teachers may feel unable to do justice to this aim in their teaching of religious education.

4.2.3.3. Teachers' Selection of the Most and Least Important Aims of Religious Education

In the final part of the questionnaire section dealing with the aims and objectives of religious education, teachers were asked to identify what they considered to be the three most important and three least important aims. This information was thought to be useful to provide an independent check of the information derived from the

importance rating of individual items which has already been discussed in the foregoing part of this chapter section.

Of the 384 teachers in the sample, 360 (that is, 93.7%) responded to this part, although not every responding teacher identified three aims for the ‘most important’ and the ‘least important’ category.

In the evaluation of the responses received, it was decided not to pay any attention to the order in which individual aims had been listed. The reason for this was that the questionnaire had not specifically asked teachers to place their chosen aims in order of highest or least importance, respectively, although - admittedly - some teachers might well have done so subconsciously.

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 give the results derived from this part of the questionnaire. In each case, the ‘top’ five aims given by teachers are listed, in the order of the frequency with which they were mentioned. The percentage figures relate to the total number of responses received in the ‘most important’ and the ‘least important’ category’ respectively.

Table 4.5: Teachers’ Identification of the ‘Most Important’ Aims of Religious Education.

| Order of Mention | Number of Aim and Description | Number of Mentions | Percentage of Mentions |
|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | 1. A detailed knowledge of the Quran and other important Islamic laws. | 242 | 22.5 |
| 2 | 9. An understanding that religious belief is a universal dimension of human experience. | 241 | 22.4 |
| 3 | 10. A commitment to the pursuit of religious activities, e.g., regular worship and adherence to the laws of Islam. | 156 | 14.5 |
| 4 | 11. A knowledge of the life and work of great religious leaders. | 111 | 10.3 |
| 5 | 4. An awareness of the influence of religion and religious movements on contemporary society. | 73 | 6.8 |
| Total number of responses | | 823 | 76.5 |

Table 4.6: Teachers' Identification of the 'Least Important' Aims of Religious Education.

| Order of Mention | Number of Aim and Description | Number of Mentions | Percentage of Mentions |
|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | 7. A sensitivity towards the 'non-rational' aspects of experience, e.g., beauty, wonder, awe, etc. | 187 | 19.7 |
| 2 | 14. A detailed knowledge of the work and functions of religious institutions. | 171 | 18.0 |
| 3 | 19. A knowledge of the foundations of religious rules and practices. | 19 | 9.3 |
| 4 | 13. An appreciation of the contribution of the Islamic religion to Arabic culture. | 13 | 9.0 |
| 5 | 5. An understanding of the origins and characteristics of the major world religions and faiths. | 71 | 7.5 |
| Total number of responses | | 461 | 63.5 |

The results in Tables 4.5 and 4.6 broadly confirm the findings reported in the previous sections. Aims chosen by teachers as the most important ones are clearly oriented towards the Islamic religion, its laws and conventions. Obviously, teachers feel that the induction of students into these aspects has to receive the highest priority in their religious education programmes.

Aims listed by teachers as being least important tend to be concerned with personal response to religion and religious experiences. In fact, these aims all deal with the personal knowledge that could be obtained by the student's own experiences and his ability to understand such information. Thus, the teachers considered these aims of least importance.

4.2.4. CONCLUSION

This section has been concerned with the exploration of teachers' perceptions of the aims and objectives of religious education. On the basis of their importance ratings of some 20 different aims, it was found that these divided into four broad categories or 'scales' namely:

- i. Aims relating to students' involvement in religion and spiritual matters;
- ii. Aims concerned with students' appreciation of religion in society and life events;
- iii. Aims relating to students' personal response(s) to religion and religious experiences;
- iv. Aims describing different facets of students' commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws.

The aim related to commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws was regarded as of primary importance in religious education programmes. The importance, to the teachers, seems to be in that concentration on aspects concerned with Islamic faith which influence the student to be more aware of Islamic instruction. Aims relating to personal response to religion and religious experiences seem to be least important in religious education programmes. The other two scales which related to 'involvement in religion and spiritual matters' and 'appreciation of the role of religion in society and life events' were also seen to be important in religious education. However, aspects of the 'non-rational' were regarded as unimportant by the teachers.

The data analysis for the open-ended part determined that all the scales achieved high mean ratings and confirmed the above results, since it was found that the aim concerning 'Islamic religion and its laws' was selected by the majority of the teachers to be of most importance, while the aim concerned with 'personal response to religion and religious experiences' was considered to be of least important. These results indicate that religious education should concentrate on the topics which are practically relevant for students to learn. This concentration should be primarily on the Islamic laws, to build up an awareness of its rules and faith in the students, and within this general information, other issues can be mentioned briefly.

4.3. TEACHING METHODS AND INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES USED IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

4.3.1. INTRODUCTION

The second part of the teacher questionnaire enquired into the teaching methods used by teachers of religious education and the nature of the learning experiences provided by them for their students. The rationale for including this line of enquiry in the present study is that a religious education curriculum is not simply defined through the aims that are pursued in it, but that it also covers the learning activities to which the learners are exposed.

As in the case of the enquiry into teachers' perceived aims of religious education described in the preceding section, this part of the questionnaire also comprised two subsections. The first comprised 13 rating items, each describing a different kind of teaching/learning activity, to be rated by teachers in terms of its 'frequency of use'. The rating scale consisted of five points ranging from 'always' (=5) at the one extreme to 'never' (=1) at the other. The second subsection, which was open-ended, invited teachers to identify additional teaching methods and learning activities not included among the rating items.

The rating items were written to represent the following constructs:

- i. Formal teaching approaches, controlled or directed by the teachers, with emphasis on information dissemination.
- ii. Teaching approaches designed to promote active student involvement in learning activities, for example, through independent study assignments, participation in role-playing, etc.

iii. Use of, or recourse to, ‘outside resources’ for learning, that is, resources not located within the school itself. For example, visits to outside places, the use of video-materials providing vicarious experiences and the involvement of experts from outside the school were covered by this.

4.3.2. VALIDATION OF THE CONSTRUCTS TO THE TEACHING METHODS AND INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES USED IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

This was carried out by means of a factor analysis of teachers’ responses to the 13 rating items. Principal component analysis followed by Varimax rotation, along the lines described for the validation of the aims/objectives constructs in the previous section, gave rise to the results listed in Table 4.7. The variance accounted for by the two factors was 50%.

Table 4.7: The Loading of Teaching Methods and Instructional Approaches Items on Rotated Varimax Factor Analysis

| Item | Description | Loading | |
|------|---|----------|----------|
| | | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
| 1 | Formal teaching, with emphasis on presentation of information. | | -0.58 |
| 2 | Presentation of stories/case studies, followed by open discussion in class. | | 0.67 |
| 3 | Viewing of video-tapes or films in which religious matters are presented. | 0.67 | |
| 4 | Presentation of video-tapes or films in which controversial matters are raised. | | 0.54 |
| 5 | Visits to places of religious and/or historical interest. | 0.82 | |
| 6 | Talks or presentations from ‘outside’ experts on religious matters (e.g., Imam or members of a religious order). | 0.59 | |
| 7 | Debates on controversial issues, such as hunger and poverty in the world, etc. | | 0.90 |
| 8 | Study visits to charitable and welfare organisations, e.g., orphanages, homes for the elderly, etc. | 0.79 | |
| 9 | Use of ‘role playing’ exercises in which students portray different characters and interests. | 0.71 | |
| 10 | Use of ‘field-work’ exercises in which students collect information from members of the public and others (e.g., on attitudes towards specific matters of religious concern). | | 0.67 |
| 11 | Independent study assignments, requiring individual students to ‘research’ particular areas (e.g., through use of library facilities and/or interviews). | | 0.58 |
| 12 | Invitation to students to suggest topics for discussion during religious education lessons. | | 0.58 |
| 13 | Involving students in the reading aloud of passages from holy texts, during lessons. | | 0.42 |

As is seen from the Table 4.7, the 13 rating items separated fairly evenly on two factors. The first of these, comprising Items 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9, clearly points to teaching approaches involving, or relating to, the use of 'outside resources'. It corresponds unambiguously to point iii above.

The second factor comprises the remaining items, but Item 1 has to be considered in isolation from the others, because of its negative loading. The main items on this factor are thematically strongly related in that they all point towards learning activities requiring or facilitating strong student involvement, including independent learning (expressed through Items 10 and 11).

The inclusion in the second factor of item 4 (use of videos/films on controversial matters) is interesting because a similar item, also referring to the use of videos/films (Item 3), loads strongly on the first factors. Evidently, it is not the use of the video/film medium that matters in this case, but the purpose for which it is employed. Controversial matters are clearly viewed differently from general religious matters in this case.

The fact is that Item 1 (which refers to the use of formal, teacher-directed teaching activities) loads on the same factor as the items expressing learning activities with strong student involvement, but in the approach (negative) direction clearly expresses the contrasting nature of this item, compared with the others.

The results of the factor analysis lead to two major constructs for the teaching

methods/instructional procedures area. Items belonging to the two constructs may thus be grouped together to form ‘scales’ concerned, respectively, with:

1. The use of non-school resources and outside experts in the teaching of religious education. (Items 3, 5, 6, 8, and 9 form this scale).
2. The employment of learning strategies requiring active student involvement and/or independent learning activities. (Items 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13 form this scale - note that Item 1 has to be omitted because of its contrasting nature to the others.)

4.3.2.1. Reliability of the Scales Derived from the Factor Analysis

To test the internal consistency of the two scales, alpha-reliability values were calculated. These are given in Table 4.8. It is seen that the alpha values for the two scales are well above 0.7, which indicates a high internal consistency of the items in each of the scales.

Table 4.8: Cronbach-Alpha Scale Reliabilities for the ‘Teaching Strategies of the Religious Education’ Domain

| Scale | Scale Description | Items in Scale | Alpha Reliability |
|--------------|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Use of ‘non-school’ resources and outside expertise. | 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, | 0.75 |
| 2 | Employment of learning strategies requiring active student involvement, including independent learning. | 2, 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13 | 0.78 |

4.3.3. TEACHERS’ USE OF DIFFERENT TEACHING METHODS AND INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COURSES

The results of the exploration of teachers’ use of different activities in their teaching of religious education are presented in three sections. In the first, the focus is on the general use of teaching methods falling into the two scales derived from the factor-

analysis discussed in the forgoing part of this chapter. In the second, the extent to which teachers use some specific teaching methods is identified and discussed. Thereafter, in the final section, the results from the open-ended part of the questionnaire section on teaching methods and instructional approaches are given.

4.3.3.1. Teachers’ Use of Different Kinds of Teaching Methods and ‘Resources’ in Their Religious Education Programmes, Based on the Two Scales

Table 4.9 gives teachers’ mean ratings on the two scales and their standard deviations. For comparison, the relevant data for the first rating items (use of formal teaching procedures, which emphasis the dissemination of information) has also been included.

Table 4.9: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation of the Two Scales Expressing ‘Teaching Methods of Religious Education’

| Scale | Scale Description | Mean Rating | Standard Deviation |
|--------------|---|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Use of ‘non-school’ resources and outside expertise. | 1.69 | 0.63 |
| 2 | Employment of learning strategies requiring active student involvement, including independent learning. | 3.06 | 0.62 |
| | <u>Item 1:</u> Use of formal teaching, with emphasis on the dissemination of information. | 3.61 | 1.10 |

It is immediately apparent from the mean ratings in Table 4.9 that teachers’ use of, or recourse to, instructional procedures which are based on, or related to, ‘outside school’ resources or expertise is rather limited. The actual mean rating of 1.69 places their use between the scales points denoted as ‘never’ (=1) and ‘seldom’ (=2).

For the second scale, which is broadly concerned with the use of learning strategies requiring or facilitating active student involvement, the mean rating is somewhat higher than for the first. Even here, however, the mean rating is only close to 3 which denotes

‘occasional use’ and, hence, far away from what would constitute regular or frequent use.

Since the teaching strategies brought together in the two scales find relatively little application by teachers, it is reasonable to assume that the use of ‘formal teaching’ should be correspondingly high. However, as the additional entry in Table 4.9 shows, this is apparently not so: the mean rating of 3.61 for ‘formal teaching’ points to a fairly regular use of this strategy, but does not suggest that it represent the dominant approach.

The explanation for these somewhat unexpected findings lies in the rather large standard deviation value for the ‘formal teaching’ item. This suggests a great diversity in teachers’ responses. A detailed look at the distribution of these responses (given in Table 4.10) does indeed show that well over 50% of all teachers in the sample reported to use ‘formal teaching’ either ‘always’ (24%) or ‘often’ (34%).

The result that about 15% of the teachers reported to be using formal teaching either rarely or not at all, is difficult to understand and accept in the light of the researcher’s personal knowledge of Saudi school teaching. The most likely explanation for these findings is that the teachers concerned, realising that ‘formal teaching’ is not always regarded as a sound and acceptable method, placed themselves in a better ‘higher’ category in their responses to this questionnaire item than would be justified on the grounds of their actual practice.

4.3.3.2. Teachers' Use of Some Specific Instructional Procedures

Table 4.10 summarises the results of teachers' responses to the individual items in the questionnaire section concerned with teaching methods and instructional procedures used in religious education.

Table 4.10: Distribution of Teachers' Frequency of Use Rating of Different Teaching Strategies/Learning Activities in Religious Education (Including Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation)

| Item | Description | Frequency of use (per cent) | | | | | Mean Rating | S.D. |
|---|--|-----------------------------|-------|--------------|--------|-------|-------------|------|
| | | Always | Often | Occasionally | Seldom | Never | | |
| Scale 1: Use of Outside Resources. | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Video or films on religious matters. | 0.5 | 3.0 | 9.2 | 34.0 | 53.4 | 1.63 | 0.81 |
| 5 | Visits to places of historical and religious interest. | - | 3.5 | 10.8 | 31.6 | 54.1 | 1.64 | 0.81 |
| 6 | Talks from outside experts. | 1.6 | 2.9 | 26.5 | 28.7 | 40.2 | 1.97 | 0.97 |
| 8 | Visits to charitable or welfare organisations. | 0.8 | 2.4 | 11.9 | 32.3 | 52.6 | 1.67 | 0.84 |
| 9 | Role-playing exercises. | 1.1 | 1.6 | 10.2 | 29.2 | 37.9 | 1.59 | 0.82 |
| Scale 2: Use of Teaching Strategies Promoting Students' Active Involvement in Religious Education. | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Formal teaching, dissemination of information. | 23.8 | 33.7 | 26.7 | 11.5 | 4.3 | 3.61 | 1.10 |
| 2 | Presentation and discussion of case studies. | 8.7 | 26.6 | 45.1 | 14.8 | 4.7 | 3.20 | 0.96 |
| 4 | Use of video-films on controversial issues. | 11.3 | 22.0 | 27.1 | 15.0 | 24.7 | 2.80 | 1.33 |
| 7 | Debates on controversial issues | 53.2 | 30.7 | 8.5 | 4.5 | 3.2 | 4.26 | 1.01 |
| 10 | Data/information collection via field work. | 6.9 | 19.5 | 41.7 | 17.4 | 14.3 | 2.87 | 1.10 |
| 11 | Independent study assignments. | 2.1 | 11.8 | 29.9 | 29.7 | 26.5 | 2.33 | 1.06 |
| 12 | Student-led and originated discussions. | 6.1 | 13.9 | 27.5 | 28.8 | 23.7 | 2.50 | 1.17 |
| 19 | Student involvement in lessons through reading, etc. | 39.3 | 29.6 | 20.3 | 3.4 | 7.4 | 3.90 | 1.18 |

a. Use of Non-School Resources and Outside Expertise

Considering the items in the 'use of non-school resources and outside expertise' scale first, it is evident that none of them features significantly in teachers' repertoire of teaching methods. If responses in the 'never' and 'seldom' columns are combined, they

account for the overwhelming majority of teachers - over 80% in the case of three of the items and close to 70% for the remaining two.

There is no obvious reason for the fact that few, if any, teachers do not include in their programmes visits to places of historical and/or religious interest, or to relevant organisations of good work. Such places are normally readily accessible and could, hence, be visited for educational purposes.

Admittedly, educational visits to outside places usually require careful planning and organisation. It may be that teachers (or schools) find the additional works that arises from this rather burdensome: it is thus easier not to engage in such activities.

There can be no doubt that teachers' failure to look towards, and use, 'out-of-school' resources in their religious education courses is to the detriment of their students. It leaves the links between school and community unexplored; it deprives students of valuable and motivating learning experiences through which their interest in, and commitment to, religious education could be enhanced. Lastly, it leaves them without a genuine appreciation of how, in practical terms, religion and culture interact.

b. Learning Strategies Requiring Student Active Involvement

Of the items in the second scale (Learning strategies requiring active student involvement), three seem to receive much attention. These are 'formal teaching' reported by over 50%; 'student involvement by reading' reported by 70%; and above all the conduct of debates on controversial issues - and indeed over 80% of the teachers claim to be engaging in these either always or regularly. If this information can

in fact be relied upon, then the picture for debate on controversial issues is very positive one, because such debate would probably raise student awareness of the relevance of religious education to everyday life events. However, it could also be that teachers' responses to this particular item are somewhat exaggerated, simply because teachers realise that the conduct of such debates is educationally desirable, and that in practice the picture may be somewhat less positive.

The other teaching strategies frequently used by the majority of teachers concerned students' involvement in lessons, for example, through reading and similar activities, but it is not entirely clear from the teachers' responses what the nature of involvement is. Nevertheless, it is well established that teachers, instead of reading passages from the textbook or Quran themselves, call upon their students to read aloud to the rest of the class. In the strict sense, this is a form of student involvement.

Reference to the item concerning formal teaching has already been made previously and no further comments have to be made. It is sufficient to say that, this is a teaching method which is very extensively used by a majority of the teachers.

At the other end of the use scale, four items appear for which the mean rating falls below 3. The teaching strategies expressed by these items are thus not frequently used by teachers and the distribution data indicate this. The use of 'study assignments' receives the lowest of these ratings. Although such teachers claim to be using this technique at least 'occasionally', it is not something those teachers did very strongly. The same is true for the students leading and student originating discussion; when

these happened, they were rare events. The same is true for the ‘fieldwork’ activities and ‘independent learning’ which seem to be not very well used activities.

The use of video film on controversial issues likewise appears at this low level. Despite the fact that controversial issues are clearly the subject of discussion and debates, the use of video film seems to be very limited. According to the teachers, debates on controversial issues are commonplace. It could of course be argued that, the availability of such films may be limited, but this is not borne out by the fact that nearly a third of the teachers reported to be using this particular medium frequently.

Basically, teaching strategies which promote genuine student involvement, including independent learning, are not used to as high a degree as one might wish. It is generally established and it is generally expected that when these teaching strategies are used, they have a motivating effect on students. These enhance their interest not only in the subject, but also in the process of learning the subjects. As has been argued, student interest in religious education is at a relatively low level in Saudi Arabian schools, therefore the adding of more enterprising, more challenging and more engaging teaching strategies might be at least one way of improving the situation of religious education programmes.

4.3.4. TEACHERS’ RESPONSES TO THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION CONCERNING TEACHING METHODS AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

The purpose of the open-ended part in the questionnaire section dealing with teaching methods was to identify any instructional approaches that had not been covered by the

rating items in the structured part. Teachers were invited to identify up to three ‘additional’ teaching procedures used by them.

As was expected, not all teachers in the sample responded to this part of the questionnaire. Indeed, as Table 4.11 shows, 302 of the 384 offered no responses. This represents close to 79%. Of the remaining teachers, just under 16% gave one response whilst about 6% of the teachers specified more than one ‘additional’ teaching method.

Table 4.11: Distribution of Teachers’ Response Pattern to the Open-Ended Question Asking for the Identification of Additional Teaching Methods Items

| Responses provided | Number of teachers | Percentage of teachers |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| No response given. | 302 | 78.6 |
| One response given. | 60 | 15.6 |
| Two responses given. | 12 | 3.1 |
| Three responses given. | 10 | 2.6 |
| Total | 384 | 100.0 |

The total number of responses received from the teachers amounted to 114. These were scrutinised in detail in order to identify the range and nature of any additional teaching procedures used by teachers (or claimed to be used). On the basis of this scrutiny, it was possible to assign the responses to five response categories, as follows:

- a. Statements which merely repeated, or elaborated on, teaching methods already specified in the structured part of the questionnaire section. For example, reference was made to ‘group discussion’ or the use of ‘discussion methods in the classroom’ - already covered by Items 2 and 12, in the Table 4.7; some teachers referred to ‘visits to religious leaders’ - already covered by item 6.

The majority of responses (about 35%) fall into this category.

- b. Statements which specified particular teaching approaches, usually by means of a single name or phrase, without any elaboration of these being provided. Frequent mention was made of, for example, 'dialectical methods' and 'catechetic methods' but no information was given about the nature of the learning and teaching activities associated with them. Consequently these terms are difficult to interpret in any meaningful way, although they may be assumed to imply 'teaching by discussion' (for the first) and 'teaching by asking and answering questions' (for the second).

About 29% of teachers' responses were of this kind.

- c. Statements in which particular aspects of teaching were referred to, but which could not be interpreted as representing distinct teaching approaches. A common example was: 'giving students the opportunity to revise'.

Just under a quarter of responses fell into this category.

- d. Statements which merely referred to a particular teaching resource, without identifying a distinct teaching method. For example, the 'use of newspapers articles' or of a specific textbook was mentioned, but the percentage of responses of this type was rather small (about 5%).
- e. Statements in which teachers identified teaching approaches not listed in the rating tables. Only eight of 114 statements could be assigned to this category, representing 7 per cent. Among them were the following:

- Asking students to prepare talks or presentations.
- Requiring students to collect and collate material on specific topics of religion.

It can be argued that the statements in category (e) do not express teaching strategies or procedures which are genuinely different from those in the rating table.

Nevertheless, in as much as they point to activities not directly mentioned in the table, they merit special mention here.

Generally speaking, it has to be said that the responses received to the open-ended part of the questionnaire section dealing with teaching methods were disappointing, for two main reasons:

- i. The overall response rate was low in that only one out of every five teachers in the sample answered it.
- ii. By and large, it failed to reveal any teaching methods and approaches beyond those listed in the items in the rating table.

One possible conclusion that could be drawn from the latter is that the items in the table, taken together, represent a reasonably comprehensive listing of all or most teaching methods commonly used by Saudi teachers in their religious education programmes. However, it is also possible that teachers' conceptualisation of different instructional strategies and their characteristics is insufficiently strong for them to be able to offer open-ended information about their existing practices. The low response rate would support this point.

4.3.5. CONCLUSION

This part of the teacher questionnaire explored the types of teaching methods and learning activities provided by religious education teachers to their students in Saudi secondary schools. Two types of teaching methods and learning experiences were explored. These were:

- i. the use of non-school resources and outside expertise'; and
- ii. learning strategies requiring students' involvement and/or independent study.

The results obtained from the teachers' answers may be summarised as follows:

- a. For the use of formal teaching methods, the results of this study confirm that the majority of teachers used traditional teaching methods which depend on transferring information and knowledge from the school textbook.
- b. The use of outside resources was found to be rather limited; most of the teachers did not include in their programme visits to places of historical and/or religious interest, or to relevant organisations of good work. There are no obvious reasons for this; one can only speculate: two possible reasons are, the impracticability of arranging such visits or the difficulty of moving outside the school environment. The fact that involvement of outside experts in the delivery of religious education is rarely, if ever, sought suggests that school and community links are not explored.

- c. The use of teaching methods requiring active involvement by students was found in a type of formal teaching method; such activity invited students to read aloud a passage from the school textbook. However, 'controversial issues' was the only activity adopted by teachers in the religious education programmes. This suggests that teachers exercise some independent choice of teaching activities, as opposed to adhering strictly to syllabus requirements. The fact that they use such activities may be taken as an indication that they have good access to such materials.

- d. Most of the teachers' responses to the open-ended part did not express any additional teaching activities; most of their responses repeated what had already been written in the rating table. Most of their responses were considered as formal teaching requirements.

In summary, the teaching methods and learning activities which could increase students' motivation and interest in studying religious education programmes were not established by teachers or by religious education programmes. Therefore the inclusion of more enterprising and more engaging teaching methods may encourage students' attention and increase their interest in studying the subject, and this will improve the situation of religious education programmes.

4.4. USE OF RESOURCES IN THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

4.4.1. INTRODUCTION

The third section of the teacher questionnaire explored the nature and range of teaching resources employed by teachers in the delivery of their religious education programmes. In devising rating questions for this section, particular attention was given to:

- i. printed material, other than textbooks, used in religious education (for example, reference books, supplementary reading materials, articles from newspapers and magazines and pamphlets);
- ii. audio -and video- resources, for example, recordings of religious and other events.

Altogether eight rating items were written to cover the foregoing aspects. A ninth item which dealt with the use of textbooks, was also included to provide a contrast to the other items.

It was recognised from the outset that teaching/learning resources of the types indicated above could be used only if they were available. Consequently, teachers were also asked to indicate, in a separate column in the rating table, the availability of the resources referred to in the items. This was done on a dichotomous 'Yes/No' basis.

In a separate, open-ended part of the questionnaire section, teachers were invited to identify any additional resources used by them in their religious education programmes.

4.4.2. VALIDATION OF THE CONSTRUCTS RELATING TO THE USE OF RESOURCES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In order to validate the rating items used in this questionnaire section, the responses received from the teachers were factor-analysed, using the procedure already described in the previous sections. Table 4.12 gives a summary of the rotated factor loadings for the nine items.

Table 4.12: The Loading of Use of Resource in Religious Education Items on Rotated Varimax Factor Analysis

| Item | Description | Loadings | |
|------|---|----------|----------|
| | | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
| 1 | Textbook(s). | | -0.51 |
| 2 | Reference books on religious matters, other than prescribed textbook(s). | 0.74 | |
| 3 | Supplementary reading materials, e.g., pamphlets, leaflets, etc. | 0.82 | |
| 4 | Articles collected from newspapers or magazines, dealing with religious topics. | 0.75 | |
| 5 | Newspaper/magazine articles dealing with controversial issues. | 0.62 | |
| 6 | Films or video-materials showing religious events or locations. | | 0.83 |
| 7 | Films or video-materials dealing with or showing 'controversial' issues. | | 0.84 |
| 8 | Recordings of religious discussions or speeches by religious leaders, etc. | | 0.53 |
| 9 | Books and other reading materials for loan to students, e.g., in connection with homework.. | 0.66 | |

It is clearly seen that the items load on two major factors. Together these accounted for 60% of the total variance. Inspection of the items loading strongly on factor 1 shows that they are all concerned with printed materials of different kinds, other than formal textbooks. Three of the remaining items, all of which load on factor 2, are

concerned with the use of video- and audio- recordings and thus appear as distinct from the printed medium.

It is noteworthy that the ‘textbook’ item (Item 1) also loads on factor 2, but in the opposite sense to the ‘technology–media’ items. This suggests that teachers who favour the use of recorded materials, especially films and video-recording, tend not to be ‘textbook-bound’, compared with their colleagues who do not use these materials. An additional conclusion to be drawn from the factor analysis is that the use of ‘non-textbook’ printed materials is not significantly affected by the extent to which teachers are ‘textbook-bound’: the loading of item 1 on factor 1 was less than 0.4.

4.4.2.1. Reliability of the Scales Derived from the Factor Analysis

Table 4.13 gives the overall alpha-reliability values for the two scales derived from the factor analyses. Both values are in excess of 0.8, which is indicative of a high internal consistency of the scales.

Table 4.13: Cronbach-Alpha Scale Reliabilities for the ‘Use of Resources in the Teaching of Religious Education’

| Scale | Scale description | Items in scale | Alpha reliability |
|--------------|--|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Use of Supplementary Reading Material and Newspaper/Magazine, Articles, etc. | 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 | 0.82 |
| 2 | Use of Video-Recordings and other Recorded Materials. | 6, 7, 8 | 0.81 |

4.4.3. TEACHERS’ USE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The results derived from the section of the teacher questionnaire dealing with the use of teaching and learning resources are presented in a manner analogous to that used in the preceding sections of this chapter. In the first instance, the use of the two types of

resource represented by the two scales is considered. Thereafter, selected individual resources are discussed in terms of the extent to which they are used. This is coupled with an examination of their availability. Finally, the focus will be on additional resources used by teachers in their religious education.

4.4.3.1. Teachers' Use of Supplementary Printed and 'Media-Based' Teaching/Learning Materials

Table 4.14 shows the mean ratings and associated standard deviations for the two rating scales derived from the factor analysis.

Table 4.14: Results of the Mean Rating, and Standard Deviation of Resource Scale Analyses

| Scale | Scale Description | Mean Rating | Standard Deviation |
|-------|---|-------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Use of Supplementary Reading Material and Newspaper/Magazine, Articles, etc | 2.42 | 0.88 |
| 2 | Use of Video-Recordings and other Recorded Materials | 2.36 | 0.55 |

The mean ratings for both scales (2.42 and 2.36) are relatively low and fall between the scale points of 'seldom' and 'occasionally' each with a leaning towards the former. It is evident from this that teachers' use of either type of learning material is, at best, restricted. For the 'supplementary reading materials' scale, the standard deviation is somewhat larger than for the 'media scale'. This would suggest that teacher practice in using the former materials is somewhat more diverse. However, this can not detract from the conclusion that the rather low deployment of the two types of resource:

- i. is likely to result in an 'inward-looking' focus in the teaching of religious education, with relatively low attention being given to everyday and world events;

- ii. may, in the eyes of the students, render religious education into an isolated ‘academic’ area of study that lacks relevance to their normal life.

4.4.3.2. Teachers’ Use of Particular Learning and Teaching Resources

Table 4.15 lists the distribution of teachers’ ratings together with mean ratings and associated standard deviations, for each item in the two rating scales. The data for the item dealing with the use of textbooks are also included, to facilitate easy comparison.

Also included in the table is information concerning the availability of each kind of resource referred to in an item. This information is expressed in terms of the percentage of teachers who reported having access to the resource.

Table 4.15: Distribution of Teachers’ Frequency of Use of Different Teaching Resources in Religious Education Programmes (Including Mean Ratings, Standard Deviation and percentages of Teachers with Access to Resources)

| Item | Description | Frequency of use (per cent) | | | | | Mean Rating | S.D. | Percentages of teachers with access to resources |
|---|---|-----------------------------|-------|--------------|--------|-------|-------------|------|--|
| | | Always | Often | Occasionally | Seldom | Never | | | |
| Scale 1: Use of Supplementary Reading Material and Newspaper/ Magazine, Articles, etc. | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Reference books on religious matters. | 30.0 | 28.9 | 20.4 | 8.7 | 12.0 | 3.56 | 1.32 | 80 |
| 3 | Supplementary reading materials, pamphlets, etc. | 9.6 | 17.7 | 31.7 | 19.1 | 21.9 | 2.74 | 1.25 | 47 |
| 4 | Articles from newspapers on religious topics. | 2.9 | 8.3 | 21.7 | 24.9 | 42.3 | 2.05 | 1.11 | 65 |
| 5 | Articles from newspapers on controversial issues. | 2.0 | 3.7 | 19.0 | 21.9 | 53.3 | 1.79 | 1.01 | 19 |
| 9 | Books and other reading materials, for loan to students. | 2.3 | 7.8 | 26.0 | 22.3 | 41.6 | 2.07 | 1.09 | 45 |
| Scale 2: Use of Video-Recordings and other Recorded Materials. | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Textbook(s). | 81.6 | 12.8 | 3.1 | 0.6 | 2.0 | 4.72 | 0.73 | 100 |
| 6 | Films/videos showing religious events, etc. | 0.3 | 2.9 | 8.1 | 17.7 | 70.9 | 1.44 | 0.79 | 38 |
| 7 | Films/videos dealing with controversial issues. | 0.3 | 2.1 | 8.9 | 13.4 | 75.3 | 1.39 | 0.76 | 32 |
| 8 | Recordings of discussions/ speeches by religious leaders. | 2.9 | 5.8 | 23.6 | 22.2 | 45.5 | 1.98 | 1.09 | 20 |

Table 4.15 reveals clearly that the textbook is by far the dominant teaching resource (Item 1). Nearly 95% of the teachers reported to be using it either 'always' or 'often'. Next in terms of frequency of use are reference books on religious matters (Item 2). These too enjoy frequent use: nearly 60% of the teachers claimed this.

For other teaching/learning resources, the response distribution reveals that these have only limited use in normal teaching situations. Indeed, for some of them, more than 50% of the teachers report 'nil' (never) use. This applies particularly to filmed/video materials (Items 6 and 7) and to newspaper articles, especially those relating to controversial issues (Item 5). Only reading materials, such as pamphlets, designed or chosen to supplement the textbooks enjoy a moderate level of use.

Levels of use must, of course, be judged against the extent to which the various teaching/learning resources are available to teachers. At first sight, it would appear from the data in Table 4.15 that there is a broad correspondence between extent of use and the availability of the various resources. Those resources that are widely and frequently used (textbooks and reference books) are very abundant. Certain other resources, for example, newspaper articles dealing with controversial issues and (sound) recordings of discussions and speeches, are held by only a minority of teachers or schools. This automatically limits their use.

What can not be judged from the present information is whether, and to what extent, this broad correspondence between use and availability of resources can be attributed to a 'cause-and-effect' relationship. Could it be, for example, that the low use of some

of the resources is due to their non-availability (to the teachers not using them). Or does the extent to which the resources are held by teachers or schools merely reflect teachers' interest (or lack of interest) in them and their use?

In the case of the filmed or video materials, the availability reported by teachers suggests that these materials are, in principle, accessible to Saudi schools. Thus, their rather low use suggests that many teachers have yet to recognise the educational value of these materials and incorporate their use into their teaching programmes.

Perhaps the most revealing information obtained from the scrutiny of the single items is the very low attention that is paid, in the selection and use of resources, to 'controversial issues'. In both scales, the item referring to this aspect has the lowest ratings (Items 5 and 7). Teachers' treatment of controversial issues is examined in the next section of this Chapter – therefore, no further comments about this are warranted at this stage, except to point out that the very high 'non-availability' of newspaper articles relating to controversial issues must be attributed to teachers' failure to collect such materials.

4.4.4. TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION CONCERNING USE OF OTHER LEARNING/TEACHING RESOURCES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

In the final part of the questionnaire section, teachers were invited to identify any additional resource(s) which they used in their religious education programmes. As in the case of the previous questionnaire section, only a minority (15.6%) of teachers responded to the invitation. Table 4.16 shows the distribution of responses received.

Table 4.16: Distribution of Teachers' Response Pattern to the Open-Ended Question Asking for the Identification of Additional Resources Used in Their Teaching

| Responses provided | Number of teachers | Percentage of teachers |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| No response given. | 324 | 84.4 |
| One response given. | 33 | 8.6 |
| Two responses given. | 14 | 3.6 |
| Three responses given. | 13 | 3.4 |
| Total | 384 | 100.0 |

The 100 responses received from teachers were carefully scrutinised in terms of the information contained in them. On the basis of this, it was possible to clarify the responses as follows.

- a. Responses mentioning specific texts or reading materials. The majority of responses (N=53; 53%) fell into this category. In 37 cases, reference was made to a particular text- usually these were standard reference books such as 'Ibn Jareer' and 'Ibn Katheer' which are well known and well established. In the remaining responses in this category, reference was made to particular kinds of texts, for example 'books on the interpretation of the Quran', without these being identified.
- b. Responses in which reference was made to 'sources' of materials, without their nature being indicated. Eighteen of the 100 responses were of this kind. Most commonly 'use of school library' or 'use of public library' were mentioned which suggests that teachers were thinking predominately of printed materials, especially reference books.
- c. Responses in which 'leaning experiences', rather than learning/teaching resources were mentioned. Seven responses were of this kind and included the following:

“Meeting with religious leaders.”
“Getting advice from religious leaders.”
“Attendance at religious seminar.”
“Attendance at public meetings in mosques.”

Essentially, these statements point to learning experiences, rather than ‘resources’ in the present sense. Thus, they represent elaboration that would appropriately have been given in the response to Section 2 of the teacher questionnaire.

The remaining responses (N=22) proved either unclassifiable due to ambiguity (even in the original Arabic formulation) or the merely repeated resources already covered by the rating items. In relation to the latter, references were made to ‘holy Quran broadcasts’ or similar.

In the overall sense, the open-ended part of this questionnaire section failed to identify any further teaching or learning resources beyond these already covered by the rating items.

4.4.5. CONCLUSION

This section concerned the teaching and learning resources used by teachers in their religious education work with students. Two categories of resources were explored:

- i. printed, textual material used to supplement textbooks;
- ii. audio - and visual materials, especially recordings, through which religious experience can be ‘imported’ into the classroom.

The results derived from the analysis of teachers’ responses may be summarised as follows:

- a. For the most part, the teaching of religious education appears to be strongly ‘textbook-bound’, in that it is centred on the textbook as the central resource. Some supplementation of textbook information is provided, but this tends to be largely confined to ‘reference books’ which amplify and/or extend the textbook information.
- b. The use of printed materials from newspapers or magazines, which could provide valuable stimulus and motivation, is very limited. It is doubtful whether teachers have recognised the potential educational value of such materials.
- c. The use of filmed or video-materials through which religious events can be introduced to students in a vicarious way, is equally limited. Although non-availability of relevant materials may in some instances explain their low use, in other cases the evidence points to the materials being available, but not used.
- d. ‘Controversial issues’ appear not to feature significantly in the resources available to, and used by, teachers. This applies to both printed materials and ‘media-based’ films and recordings.

In summary, it may be argued on the basis of the present findings that religious education in Saudi schools is highly textbook-bound and has yet to discover the potential value of other media, printed or technology-based. There can be no doubt that good ‘additional’ teaching materials exist, but teachers need help and encouragement to integrate them into their teaching programmes.

4.5. THE TREATMENT OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

4.5.1. INTRODUCTION

The focus in this section is on the extent to which controversial issues are dealt with by teachers in their religious education programmes. By 'controversial issues' we mean issues which, although not within the scope of normal theology-oriented religious education, can be and often are, illuminated through ideas derived from religious beliefs. One may think here of issues such as hunger and poverty in the world, violence in society, conflict between different religions, and the use of drugs and alcohol. For these and other issues it is possible to identify and define positions based on religious principles and viewpoints.

As for the previous section of the teacher questionnaire, for this section too a number of rating items were devised in order to establish whether (and if so, to what extent) teachers dealt with particular controversial issues. The issues covered in the items related to the following:

- i. Controversial issues concerned with world affairs and environmental matters.
- ii. Religious issues of a potentially controversial nature, such as fundamentalism in religion or conflict between religions.
- iii. Matters relating to the treatment and/or welfare of certain groups of people in society.

Altogether 12 rating items were written, to be rated by teachers on a 3-point-scale: 'substantial treatment' (=3) 'moderate treatment' (=2) 'no treatment' (=1).

The use of a more elaborate scale, for example, the 5-point-scales employed in previous questionnaire sections, was considered inappropriate in the case of 'controversial issues' since responses like 'always' would have little meaning in this context. This is because 'controversial issues' cannot form the main content of religious education courses.

The aspects covered by the rating items can be seen from the descriptors given in Table 4.17 in which the results of the factor-analytic validation are reported. In addition to the rating items, the questionnaire section also contained an open-ended question asking teachers to identify any additional controversial issues which they discussed in their religious education classes.

It was thought possible that non-coverage of certain controversial issues could occur if teachers regarded them as inappropriate for inclusion in their religious education programmes. For this reason, the rating table was extended to enquire into teachers' views about the appropriateness of the particular issues raised in the items. This was done by means of dichotomous 'Yes/No' responses.

4.5.2. VALIDATION OF THE CONSTRUCTS CONCERNED WITH THE COVERAGE OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Table 4.17 gives the results of the factor analysis of teachers' responses to the 12 rating items included in the questionnaire section dealing with controversial issues. The

results are based on the factor-analysis procedure previously described (principal component analysis, followed by Varimax rotation, choice of number of factors with eigenvalue ≥ 1). Three factors were obtained which together accounted for 75% of the total variance.

Table 4.17: The Loading of Extent of Coverage of Controversial Issues in Religious Education Programmes on Rotated Varimax Factor Analysis

| Item | Description | Loading on Factor | | |
|------|---|-------------------|----------|----------|
| | | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 |
| 1 | Hunger and poverty in the world. | | 0.72 | |
| 2 | Natural disasters and calamities. | | 0.69 | |
| 3 | Social welfare of the elderly. | | 0.80 | |
| 4 | The fate and welfare of orphans. | | 0.73 | |
| 5 | Spread in the use of drugs and alcohol. | 0.55 | | |
| 6 | Environmental issues. | | | 0.89 |
| 7 | Religious behaviour and morality. | 0.70 | | |
| 8 | Violence in Society. | 0.57 | | |
| 9 | The rights and wrongs of war. | | | 0.65 |
| 10 | Conflict between different religions. | 0.68 | | |
| 11 | Youth issues. | 0.84 | | |
| 12 | Fundamentalism in religion. | 0.81 | | |

Consideration of the items loading on the factors led to the following interpretations:

Factor 1: appears to be concerned with ‘issues and problems in contemporary society’ which are seen as ‘undesirable’ or ‘bad’. Items referring to the spread in the use of drugs and alcohol, issues of the behaviour of modern youth, fundamentalism in religion and religious conflicts all exemplify this particular construct. Religious behaviour and morality, likewise, is a ‘problem area’ if the item is interpreted as indicating or suggesting a deterioration of standards in behaviour and morality.

Factor 2: may be interpreted as relating to ‘concern about people in need and their welfare’. In the case of Items 3 and 4, the particular groups of people are clearly identified (the elderly and orphaned children). The other two items identify particular population groups only indirectly, through reference to the fate and disasters afflicting them.

Factor 3: can be interpreted only on a tentative basis since only two items loaded on it significantly. A possible construct that may be associated with them (Item 6- Environmental issues, and Item 9- the rights and wrongs of war) is ‘concern about actions/activities by man’. What mankind does to the environment (usually in a negative way) and what it does to itself through warfare are issues that can be linked to this construct.

The factor analysis thus gives rise to three plausible ‘scales’ concerning the coverage and treatment of controversial issues in religious education programmes. These scales were adopted for the broad analysis of teachers’ responses.

4.5.2.1. Reliability of the Scales Derived from the Factor Analysis

Table 4.18 gives the reliability values for the three rating scales derived from the factor analysis. It is seen that these are very high for the first two scales (in excess of 0.8). Even for the third scale, an alpha value of 0.63 was obtained, despite the fact that this scale consists of only two items. Thus, all three scales may be regarded as having sound internal consistency and, hence, validity.

Table 4.18: Cronbach-Alpha Scale Reliabilities for the ‘Controversial Issues in Religious Education’ Programmes

| Scale | Description | Items | Alpha Reliability |
|--------------|---|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Concerns about ‘bad’ aspects of contemporary society. | 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 | 0.88 |
| 2 | Concerns about people in need and their welfare. | 1, 2, 3, 4 | 0.85 |
| 3 | Concern about ‘bad’ actions/activities of man. | 6, 9 | 0.63 |

4.5.3. TEACHERS’ TREATMENT OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

In this subsection, the results of teachers’ responses to questionnaire Section 4 are reported and discussed. In the first part, a broad picture of the coverage of controversial issues is developed, based on the scales derived from the factor analysis. In the second part, the coverage of individual ‘controversial issues’ is considered. This is linked with a brief analysis of teachers’ views about the appropriateness of dealing with these issues in religious education courses. Finally, teachers’ responses to the open-ended questionnaire part are examined.

4.5.3.1. Coverage of Types of Controversial Issues in Religious Education Programmes - Analysis Based on Rating Scales

Table 4.19 shows teachers’ mean rating on the three scales yielded by factor analysis, and associated standard deviations. It has to be pointed out that the items in the present rating scales were rated by teachers on a three-point scale (indicated below Table 4.19), not on a five-point scale as was the case in preceding questionnaire sections. Thus, the numerical values of the mean ratings have a different meaning here from those previously encountered.

Table 4.19: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of the Three Scales Expressing ‘Controversial Issues in Religious Education Programmes’

| Scale | Description | Mean scale Rating* | Standard Deviation |
|--------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Concerns about ‘bad’ aspects of contemporary society. | 2.36 | 0.55 |
| 2 | Concerns about people in need and their welfare. | 1.91 | 0.54 |
| 3 | Concern about ‘bad’ actions/activities of man. | 1.56 | 0.55 |

*On a 3-point scale, ranging from 3 = extensive coverage via 2 = moderate coverage to 1 = no coverage in religious education programmes.

It is evident from Table 4.19 that ‘issues and problems in contemporary society’ receive fairly extensive coverage by teachers in their religious education programmes. The relatively high mean rating of 2.4 demonstrates this, although the standard deviation of 0.55 is fairly high for a three-point scale. This would indicate a substantial variation among teachers in the extent to which they discuss these issues. (In the strict sense, the calculation of standard deviations is not justified for response distributions extending over only three scale points. However, some meaning can be attached to standard deviations if they are regarded as crude ‘dispersion parameters’).

Teachers’ coverage of issues relating to people or population groups in need and their welfare is marginally below the ‘moderate’ level; the standard deviation value of about 0.5 again suggests that practice varies considerably, though.

For the third scale (concern about actions/activities of man), the mean rating lies about halfway between the ‘no coverage’ and ‘moderate coverage’ scale points. With a standard deviation value of over 0.5, it has to be concluded that substantial proportions of teachers do not address these issues.

The conclusion to be drawn from teachers’ mean ratings on the three rating scales dealing with controversial issues is that ‘societal issues’ receive the highest priority.

The general level of coverage of these issues appears reasonably satisfactory in that at least some teachers provide ‘substantial coverage’ of them. For other groups of controversial issues, the treatment is at a more moderate level, although some specific issues would appear to be ignored by at least some teachers. The next part of this discussion will shed some light on this.

4.5.3.2. Teachers’ Coverage of Selected Individual Controversial Issues

The frequency distributions of teachers’ responses to the individual rating items are summarised in Table 4.20. Also shown are mean ratings and teachers’ ratings of the appropriateness of the inclusion of the various issues in their religious education programmes.

Table 4.20: Percentised Distribution of Teachers’ ‘Extent of Coverage’ Ratings and their Percentage of Appropriateness of Inclusion of Different Controversial Issues in Religious Education Programmes (Including Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation)

| Item | Description | Extent of Coverage in Religious Education Programmes | | | Mean Rating | S.D. | *Teachers regarding inclusion as appropriate (per cent) |
|---|---|--|----------|------|-------------|------|---|
| | | Substantial | Moderate | None | | | |
| Scale 1: Concerns about ‘bad’ aspects of contemporary society. | | | | | | | |
| 5 | Spread in the use of drugs and alcohol. | 56.8 | 32.8 | 10.4 | 2.46 | 0.68 | 95 |
| 7 | Religious behaviour and morality. | 65.4 | 22.3 | 12.4 | 2.53 | 0.71 | 97 |
| 8 | Violence in society. | 24.1 | 52.1 | 23.8 | 2.00 | 0.69 | 83 |
| 10 | Conflict between different religions. | 57.0 | 29.9 | 13.1 | 2.44 | 0.72 | 97 |
| 11 | Youth issues. | 63.5 | 25.7 | 10.8 | 2.53 | 0.68 | 96 |
| 12 | Fundamentalism in religion. | 42.7 | 42.7 | 14.7 | 2.28 | 0.70 | 95 |
| Scale 2: Concerns about people in need and their welfare. | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Hunger and poverty in the world. | 14.6 | 63.3 | 22.1 | 1.92 | 0.61 | 89 |
| 2 | Natural disasters and calamities. | 19.4 | 59.6 | 21.1 | 1.98 | 0.63 | 91 |
| 3 | Social welfare of the elderly. | 12.5 | 50.0 | 37.5 | 1.75 | 0.67 | 80 |
| 4 | The fate and care of orphans. | 23.5 | 53.0 | 23.5 | 2.00 | 0.68 | 93 |
| Scale 3: Concern about ‘bad’ actions /activities of man. | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Environmental issues. | 5.2 | 32.4 | 62.4 | 1.42 | 0.59 | 68 |
| 9 | The rights and wrongs of wars. | 14.6 | 31.5 | 43.8 | 1.70 | 0.71 | 50 |

*Percentage of teachers regarding the inclusion of items in religious education programmes as appropriate.

Of the issues raised in the items in the ‘issues and problems in contemporary society’ scale, four clearly stand out in the sense that over 50% of the teachers provide ‘substantial coverage’ of them. These are, in order of decreasing priority:

“Religious behaviour and morality.”

“Youth issues.”

“Conflict between different religions.”

“Spread in the use of drugs and alcohol.”

Fundamentalism in religion also receives substantial attention by teachers (43%), but ‘violence in society’ is less intensively dealt with. It is interesting to note that the latter item also receives the lowest ‘appropriateness’ rating of all items in this scale, although the percentage of teachers not regarding it as appropriate is still low (17%).

In relation to items in the other scales, it is perhaps more appropriate to focus on the percentages of teachers not dealing with them at all. It is seen that ‘environmental issues’ and ‘the rights and wrongs of war’ top the list with 62% and 44% of teachers not discussing these issues – interestingly, the percentages of teachers considering these items to be unsuitable for inclusion in their programmes are of a similar magnitude.

‘Needs and welfare’ matters are generally thought to be appropriate for inclusion in religious education programmes, with about 90% of teachers or more holding this view. The figure for the ‘social welfare for the elderly’ item is somewhat lower, although it still reaches the 80% mark. A possible explanation for the lower priority accorded to the ‘caring for the elderly’ issues, compared with the orphan issues, is that

the former is seen to be less of a problem in Saudi Arabian society, at least at the present time.

Comparison of teachers' appropriateness ratings for, and their reported non-coverage of, issues in the 'need and welfare' category shows a consistent difference. Invariably, fewer teachers appear to raise and discuss the issues than regard them as appropriate for inclusion in religious education programmes. Why this should be so cannot be answered on the basis of the present information, but merits further investigation.

In summary, the teachers' coverage of the controversial issues in their religious education programmes was substantial, except for the controversial issues related to environmental matters (bad actions/activities by man) which have at least moderate coverage. The lower percentage of items concerned with 'environmental issues' suggests that many teachers do not regard environmental issues as falling within the scope of religious education. However, these results mirror teachers' wishes concerning the appropriateness of these particular issues for inclusion in religious education programmes. Thus, some attention should be paid to reinforce the religious education programmes by adding or encouraging the teachers to discuss an interesting controversial issue with students.

4.5.4. TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION CONCERNING THE COVERAGE OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The open-ended question in Section 4 of the teacher questionnaire invited teachers to identify any additional controversial issues raised and discussed by them.

As Table 4.21 shows, 90 (about 23.4%) teachers responded to the open-ended question. Between them, they mentioned 190 issues which they dealt with in their religious education programmes.

Table 4.21: Distribution of Teachers' Response Pattern to the Open-Ended Question Asking for the Identification of Additional Controversial Issues Items

| Responses provided | Number of teachers | Percentage of teachers |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| No response given. | 294 | 76.6 |
| One response given. | 36 | 9.4 |
| Two responses given. | 22 | 5.7 |
| Three responses given. | 18 | 4.7 |
| Four responses given. | 14 | 3.6 |
| Total | 384 | 100.0 |

Scrutiny of the answers received revealed a range of different topics which were covered by teachers. Although for the most part, these were not of a genuinely 'controversial' nature, they nevertheless indicated certain directions in which some teachers sought to establish relevance of their teaching to students' personal lives and behaviour.

The answers received could broadly be associated with three main categories:

- i. Answers in which reference was made to issues and matters concerning students' 'personal affairs' or which pointed to issues of religious morality.
- ii. Answers which mentioned topics related to general aspects of religion; in some respects, they were similar to category i. responses but made no reference to the students' own lives and education.

iii. Answers in which political matters were touched upon.

Of the 190 answers received, only 4 answers could not be accommodated within these three categories.

Answers to category i. were most numerous: altogether 88 answers (46%) would be associated with it. The majority of statements alluded to issues that, in terms of the British convention, could be described as falling in the realm of 'personal and social education'. Thus, mention was made of such points as:

“Choosing friends.”
“Relationship between home and school.”
“Relationships/concern for women.”
“Respect for women.”

In addition, some more general matters were referred to, for example:

“Helping other people.”
“The role of youth in society.”

Few, if any, of these statements gave an indication of what the 'problematic' or 'controversial' facets were that teachers associated with them. Thus, it would appear that teachers thought of them largely as general issues of students' personal and social development.

In a limited number of cases, 'problems encountered by youth' and 'how students could be helped to develop morality and moral behaviour' were alluded to. However, there was again little evidence that these topics would be treated as being controversial in nature. The likelihood is that, in dealing with them, the teacher is the only speaker and that he sees his main function to be that of a 'giver of advice'.

Category ii answers were also quite numerous: they accounted for 77 (41%) of the total number of answers received. These answers also frequently raised issues of morality and relationships, but did so in a way which did not link them directly to the students. Examples were:

“Morality, culture and Islamic tradition.”

“Good relationships among people according to Islamic tradition.”

“Dutifulness to parents.”

“Marriage and its importance.”

It could be argued, of course, that these topics too fall within the broad domain of ‘personal and social education’ like category i. topics, and that the absence of a direct link to the students is purely fortuitous. If so, it would not be inappropriate to combine the two categories. However, for the purpose of the presentation of the present data, the separation of the two categories was preferred.

Only 21 of the 190 statements, that is, just over (11%), were placed in category iii.

These statements included reference to such issues as:

“The concept of an Islamic state.”

“Positive law in society.”

“Multi-party systems in society.”

“Nationalism in the world etc.”

It is evident from these descriptions that category iii statements have a distinct ‘political’ undertone, even if they may be related to religious issues. Thus, they are different from the ‘personal and social education’ themes allotted to categories i. and ii.

On the basis of the answers received to the open-ended question in Section 4 of the teacher questionnaire, it may be concluded that at least some teachers address issues of ‘personal and social education’ in their religious education programmes. In doing so, they clearly seek to establish some degree of relevance of religious education to their students’ personal lives and circumstances.

To what extent this practice prevails cannot be judged from the present data. The response rate to the open-ended question (less than a quarter of the teachers responded) must be regarded as disappointing. Nevertheless, the answers that were actually received, help to shed some light on teachers’ interpretation of the wider functions of religious education, beyond the induction of students into the knowledge and conventions of the Islamic religion.

4.5.5. CONCLUSION

This part of the teacher questionnaire explored the extent to which controversial issues were dealt with by teachers in their religious education programmes. The teachers’ views about the pertinent inclusion of particular issues in religious education were also explored. Three types of controversial issues were explored; these are:

- i. Religious issues of a potentially controversial nature, such as fundamentalism in religion or conflict between religions.
- ii. Matters relating to the treatment and/or welfare of certain groups of people in society.
- iii. Controversial issues concerned with world affairs and environmental matters.

The data obtained from the teacher questionnaire were subjected to the factor analysis technique to examine the validity of the rating items. Alpha reliability was used to examine the scale reliability, and data distribution was employed to find the extent of coverage and whether the inclusion of the listed controversial issues was appropriate. The results obtained from the analyses may be summarised as follows:

- a. Teachers placed the issues of a potentially controversial nature in the category of highest priority, while issues related to world affairs and environmental matters were considered a lower priority. The coverage of issues related to the treatment and/or welfare of certain groups of people in society was in the middle degree. A possible explanation for this is that in Saudi societies the welfare of the elderly is the responsibility of the 'extended family' and is thus seen to be less a societal responsibility than in Western countries.
- b. Teachers' responses to the open-ended part were low; less than a quarter of the teachers responded and most of them did not express genuine controversial issues. However, some issues identified were related directly to students' personal life and their life circumstances. Such responses seem to be focused more on attitude development rather than on genuinely controversial issues. This suggests that the teachers read too much into particular rating items.

Generally, teachers regard the inclusion of 'controversial issues' as an entirely appropriate part of the religious education programme. This indicates that teachers recognise the desirability of relating religion and religious messages to events in their pupils' everyday life and in the society in which they grow up.

4.6. TEACHERS' VIEWS OF FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

4.6.1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that what teachers teach and how they teach it is often greatly affected not only by the conditions within a school, but also by 'outside' influences. Among these influences are, for example, the requirements of an official curriculum and the demands of an examination system and/or the expectations of higher education institutions. Likewise, prevailing 'philosophies' about how to teach can also influence teachers' actions and activities.

In Britain (especially England and Wales), for example, the tradition of external examinations is known to have a significant effect on both the content and conduct of subject course offered at school level. Similarly, the National Curriculum requirements now in operation exert considerable influence on teachers' conduct of their professional work.

Given this premise, it was thought desirable in the initial design of the teacher questionnaire to explore the factors that Saudi teachers of religious education felt influenced the design and conduct of their teaching.

As in other questionnaire sections, teachers were asked (a) to respond to a number of rating items specifying some major potential influences on teaching and (b) to identify any additional factors of influence. Altogether eight rating items were given. These were concerned with the following types of influence:

- i. Influences exerted through formal guidelines and regulations laid down by the Saudi educational authorities, including the official religious education textbooks.
- ii. Influences emanating from within the school, in the form of, for example, 'internal' teaching programmes, advice from headteachers and requests from students.
- iii. Influences related to external activities or events not directly connected with education, for example, religious feasts or public/political events.

The nature of the eight rating items can be seen from the descriptors in Table 4. 22.

For the rating of the items, a four-point scale was used with the scale points 'high' (=4), 'moderate' (=3), 'low' (=2) and 'none' (=1). In addition, teachers were asked to indicate whether the particular kind of influence specified in an item applied to them.

4.6.2. VALIDATION OF THE CONSTRUCTS RELATING TO THE ITEMS DEALING WITH FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHERS' CONDUCT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Teachers' responses to the eight rating items were factor-analysed, using principal component analysis followed by Varimax rotation. A two-factor solution resulted, with the two factors accounting for 56% of the total variance. Table 4.22 presents the Varimax loadings of the items on the two factors, with only major loadings being listed.

Table 4.22: The Loading of Factors Influencing Teachers' Conduct of Religious Education Programmes on Rotated Varimax Factor Analysis

| Item | Description | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|------|--|----------|----------|
| 1 | Sequence and order of topics set out in the official textbooks used by students. | | 0.59 |
| 2 | Teaching programme for religious education worked out in my school. | 0.36* | 0.39* |
| 3 | Topics for discussion suggested by students. | 0.81 | |
| 4 | Current or recent events in public or political life. | 0.81 | |
| 5 | The incidence of phases, holidays and festivals in the religious calendar. | 0.75 | |
| 6 | Guidelines and requirements laid down in the religious education curriculum. | | 0.81 |
| 7 | General guidelines and regulations imposed by educational authorities. | | 0.83 |
| 8 | Suggestions from colleagues in the school, including the head teacher. | 0.65 | |

* See text note

It is seen that seven of the eight items load unambiguously on the one or other factor. Those appearing in factor 1 (Items 3, 4, 5, and 8) all appear to refer to influences that lie outside the realm of formal, authority-based requirements and regulations: they are influences which teachers would be able to accept or ignore, if they so wished.

In contrast, the items loading strongly on factor 2 (Items 1, 6, and 7) all refer to authorities or 'authoritative sources': the official textbook, and the guidelines laid down by the educational authorities or in the official curriculum. These influences are clearly those that teachers *have* to observe and adhere to. Consequently, they are of a different nature than those appearing in factor 1.

Item 2 ('Teaching programmes worked out in my school') does not fit readily into the pattern of the two factors. In a three-factor solution, it loads with Item 1 on a separate factor - this suggests that the teaching schemes produced within a school are essentially strategies for translating the textbook into actual teaching/learning activities. Hence, the assignment of Item 2 to factor 2 makes more sense than its assignment to factor 1.

Although the factor analysis gave rise to two distinct factors, it was decided not to treat the items within a factor as representing ‘scale’. The reason for this was that the main interest was to establish the extent to which each possible source of influence affected teachers’ work. Thus, an item-by-item discussion of teachers’ responses was seen as the appropriate approach to the data analysis in this case.

4.6.3. TEACHERS’ RATINGS OF INFLUENCES UPON THEIR TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Table 4.23 presents the distribution of teachers’ responses to the various items expressing influences on their teaching, together with mean ratings and standard deviations relating to these distributions. In addition, teachers’ judgement of the applicability to them of each possible influence is also given. It should be noted that, for the sake of ready interpretation of the influences, the items have been given in Table 4.23 in the order of decreasing extent of influence, as judged by the value of the mean ratings.

Table 4.23: Percentised Distribution of the Teachers’ Ratings of Influences upon Their Teaching of Religious Education Programmes together with Applicability to Them Rating (Including Mean Rating and Standard Deviation)

| Item | Description | Extent of Influence | | | | Mean Rating | S.D. | Applicability Rating |
|------|--|---------------------|----------|------|------|-------------|------|----------------------|
| | | High | Moderate | Low | None | | | |
| 2 | Teaching programme for religious education worked out in my school. | 60.3 | 25.3 | 10.0 | 4.4 | 3.41 | 0.84 | 97 |
| 1 | Sequence and order of topics set out in the official textbooks used by students. | 47.9 | 44.0 | 5.8 | 2.2 | 3.38 | 0.70 | 98 |
| 6 | Guidelines and requirements laid down in the religious education curriculum. | 33.4 | 47.0 | 14.4 | 5.1 | 3.09 | 0.82 | 98 |
| 4 | Current or recent events in public or political life. | 38.6 | 37.3 | 15.1 | 9.0 | 3.06 | 0.95 | 90 |
| 3 | Topics for discussion suggested by students. | 31.3 | 44.5 | 14.3 | 9.9 | 2.97 | 0.92 | 92 |
| 7 | General guidelines and regulations imposed by educational authorities. | 31.4 | 41.2 | 19.2 | 8.2 | 2.96 | 0.91 | 98 |
| 5 | The incidence of phases, holidays and festivals in the religious calendar. | 26.0 | 40.7 | 17.5 | 15.8 | 2.77 | 1.01 | 81 |
| 8 | Suggestions from colleagues in the school, including the head teacher. | 21.8 | 46.0 | 19.2 | 13.0 | 2.77 | 0.94 | 93 |

Even a superficial glance at the ‘applicability to me’ ratings shows that practically all the sources of influence on teaching suggested in the rating items are endorsed by teachers as applying to them. Indeed, four of the items (Items 1, 2, 6 and 7) are acknowledged by nearly all teachers as applying to them. Interestingly, these items are those that were found to load strongly on the ‘authority’ factor (factor 2) identified during the factor analysis.

The next group of influences, acknowledged by close to 90% of the teachers as being applicable to them, comprises three of the four items from factor 1 of the factor analysis. These are those that do not express, or refer to, an official or authoritative source of influence and comprise ‘topics suggested by students’, ‘current or recent events in public and political life’ and suggestions from colleagues in these school’. Only Item 5 (The incidence of phases and holidays and festivals in the religious calendar) is seen as an influence that -in term of applicability- falls below that of the other influences. But even here 81% of the teachers regard is as relevant.

Turning now to the mean ratings and the response distributions, it is evident that Items 2 and 1 are viewed by teachers as expressing the strongest influences on their teaching. As already noted above, these two items are strongly related to each other (as there was found a three-factor solution during the factor analysis of the teachers’ responses), in that they refer to the textbook and teaching programme based on it. The high mean rating on these items suggests, once again, that teachers’ religious education programmes are strongly ‘textbook-bound’.

For the next group of items (items 6, 4, 3, and 7), mean ratings close to 3 are found,

corresponding to the 'moderate influence' scale point. These items comprise 'guidelines and requirements laid down in the religious education curriculum' as well as 'current/recent events in public and political life' and 'topics for discussion suggested by students'. The latter are to be welcomed since it would suggest that teachers are, at least to some extent, 'sensitive' and responsive to their students' interests.

The last two items in the list (Items 5- 'Phases and holidays/festivals in the religious education calendar' and item 8- 'suggestions from colleagues in the school') would appear to be those that are least influential on teachers' religious education programmes, when judged on the basis of the mean ratings. Nevertheless, the percentage of teachers reporting 'moderate' or 'high' influence even for these items is still above 65%.

Comparison of 'applicability' ratings and figures for the 'extent of influence = none' ratings shows slight inconsistencies. For example, for the two items concerning official guidelines (Items 6 and 7), a marked difference is seen to exist between these two data, with the 'none' responses being higher than the 'applicable' ratings. The same is true for the 'suggestions from colleagues' item. However, these inconsistencies are not serious.

In the overall sense, all the various sources of influence on teaching identified in the rating items would appear to have at least a moderate effect on teachers' conduct of their religious education programmes. The strong position in this of the official textbook is, once again, in evidence.

4.6.4. TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTION CONCERNING FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The open-ended part of Section 5 of the teacher questionnaire gave teachers the opportunity of identifying any influences on the design and delivery of their religious education programmes which, in their view, were not covered by the items in the rating table.

Teachers' responses to this part were disappointing, as they had been to the other open-ended parts of the questionnaire. As Table 4.24 indicates, only 56 of the 384 teachers, representing 15%, provided answers. The total number of suggestions received amounted to 89.

Table 4.24: Distribution of Teachers' Response Pattern to the Open-Ended Question Asking for the Identification of Additional Factors Influencing Their Teaching

| Responses provided | Number of teachers | Percentage of teachers |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| No response given. | 328 | 85.4 |
| One response given. | 34 | 8.9 |
| Two responses given. | 11 | 2.9 |
| Three responses given. | 11 | 2.9 |
| Total | 384 | 100.0 |

Careful scrutiny of the responses received allowed them to be placed into three broad categories as follows:

1. The first category comprised responses that, in one way or another, related to the teachers' school organisation or to the religious education programmes themselves.

On the school organisation side, two particular themes stood out:

- a. *Timetabling constraints*: teachers expressed the view that the time allocated to

religious education was insufficient for all topics to be covered. Thus, time was seen as the deciding factor which determined whether a topic was taught. In turn, time shortage affected the ability of teachers to explore all aspects of the material as required. The following comments were typical: “Increase the teaching hours to allow us to implement the programme” and “increase the time allocated to each lesson”.

- b. **Teachers’ workload:** several teachers pointed out that they felt already overburdened, with 24 teaching hours per week. This restricted the time they had available for preparing their religious education lessons. As one teacher put it: “The education authority should reduce the numbers of teaching hours and allow us more time for the preparation of teaching materials.”

As far as teachers’ comments about the religious education programmes were concerned, these too brought the time aspect to the fore, but usually in terms of the length of the programme and its time requirements: “Religious education requires more time than other subjects” was one comment from a teacher. Teachers also thought it important to teach religious education at the beginning of the day, rather than at the end when students are tired: “The subject matter (of religious education) is very heavy.”

It was also suggested that religious education programmes could be structurally simplified by ‘merging’ some or all of the branches that are currently pursued in it separately (Islamic law, Islamic tradition, theology, Quran studies, and the Interpretation of Quran). It was stated that the co-existence of these branches added significantly to the content of the course as a whole, with the consequence that insufficient time was available to cover all the specified subject matter. As was

suggested: “Either more time should be allocated, or the quantity of information should be reduced.”

Altogether 33 of the 89 open-ended statements received, this is, 37%, related to one or another of the foregoing points.

2. The second category of responses related to aspects of teachers’ personality and other characteristics. The need to have ‘good relationships between teachers and students’ was referred to, as was the importance that ‘teachers should have effective and helpful personalities’. A further assertion was that ‘the personality of the teachers has a direct effect on his students; if students respect the teacher, they pay more attention to him’.

It is difficult to interpret these and similar statements as expressing ‘influences upon the design and conduct of religious education programmes’, except if it is assumed that the absence in the teachers of the foregoing qualities acts as a constraint to good and effective teaching. These statements, it should be mentioned, were not isolated: 24% of the total responses fell into this category.

3. The third category of responses (19 in all; 21%) pointed to factors related to students’ home background and environment. Family influence on students was referred to by several respondents as an ‘essential element which can enhance or deteriorate students’ attitudes towards religious education’. The importance of good communication between school and family was also mentioned, as was the desirability that life outside the school should be considered by the teachers in their religious education programmes.

As for statements in the second category, the present statement can hardly be construed as expressing genuine influences on teachers' conduct of their religious education programmes. This is not to say that the points mentioned are not important - they do matter in any educational context.

In summary, we may claim that the issues raised by teachers in the responses assigned to category 1 above, point to constraints in religious education programmes that were not covered by the rating items. Essentially, these are time constraints in the broad sense, resulting either from insufficient teaching time being available to teachers to cover all the prescribed study materials, or from 'overfull' syllabuses and textbooks.

4.6.5. CONCLUSION

This part of the teacher questionnaire examined the factors which influence the design and conduct in teaching the religious education programmes in Saudi secondary schools. Three types of factors which may influence the teaching were explored. These were:

- i. Influences of formal regulations laid down by educational authorities.
- ii. Influences related to the school itself, such as teaching programmes and the headteacher's advice.
- iii. Influences not directly connected with education namely, outside events and other influences.

The results obtained from teachers' answers can be summarised as follows:

- a. For most of the factors, the influence relating to school instruction was equal to

that from the educational authority. Both these influences were in fact associated, because the educational authorities define the school instruction. Thus, the teachers find themselves bounded both by the educational authorities and the school instructions. These results support the result found in Section 3 of this chapter, which was that the teaching is strongly textbook-bound.

- b. The other factor which does not relate directly to the educational authority, but to outside influences or environmental factors (such as current events and holidays), was found to be the weakest influence in religious education programmes. In general, all the factors identified in rating items strongly affect the teaching methods of religious education programmes.
- c. With regard to the open-ended part, few teachers took the opportunity to add further influences, less than quarter of the teachers' sample, but those who did, appeared to follow the general trend, being mostly concerned with the internal administration of the school curriculum. The shortage of time allocated to religious education programmes was seen as one of the most important factors that influence the teaching of religious education programmes. The restricted time affects the teachers' capability to cover a huge amount of information and this of course affects the quality of teaching and the conduct of religious education.

In summary, it may be argued, in the light of the results obtained from this section, that the teachers of religious education are strongly influenced by the school instructions. The instructions about the use of the school textbook are laid down by the educational authority and the teachers must follow these written regulations, which means that the teachers are strongly textbook-bound.

4.7. TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE USE AND THE NATURE OF STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS

4.7.1. INTRODUCTION

It was suspected from the outset of the present investigation that the official textbooks for religious education, released or sanctioned by the Saudi education Ministry, would have a major influence on the nature and conduct of religious education teaching in Saudi secondary schools. For this reason, the concluding section of the teacher questionnaire was so designed that it yielded information on:

- i. teachers' perceptions of the way(s) in which textbooks were used by their students; and
- ii. teachers' views on the 'quality' of the textbooks, in terms of appeal and interest to their students; as part of this, teachers' suggestions about ways in which the textbooks could be improved were also invited.

The first of the forgoing aspects was explored by means of six simple rating items which invited teachers to indicate the extent to which textbooks were used by students for different educational purposes. The aspects covered by the rating items are apparent from the description in Table 4.25.

For the purpose of rating the items, a four-point rating scale was adopted: 'high' (=4), 'moderate' (=3), 'low' (=2) and 'none' (=1).

Aspects listed under ii. were explored by means of open-ended questions. The first of these asked for features to be identified that made religious education textbooks appealing and interesting to the students. The second asked for suggestions about ways in which textbook content and presentation, respectively, could be improved.

4.7.2. ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' VIEWS CONCERNING THE USE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS BY STUDENTS.

The results of teachers' responses to the six rating items are given in Table 4.25. This shows a) the distribution of responses and b) values of mean ratings and associated standard deviations.

Table 4.25: Distribution of Teachers' Extent of Use Rating of Religious Education Textbooks by Students (Including Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation)

| Item | Description | Extent of Use (per cent) | | | | Mean Rating | Standard Deviation |
|------|--|--------------------------|----------|------|------|-------------|--------------------|
| | | High | Moderate | Low | None | | |
| 1 | As primary learning material, used in class. | 62.3 | 28.3 | 8.0 | 1.3 | 3.51 | 0.701 |
| 2 | For background reading in support of their study of religious education. | 26.8 | 42.7 | 25.1 | 5.4 | 2.90 | 0.854 |
| 3 | For revision purposes, especially for examinations and tests. | 76.5 | 19.4 | 2.2 | 1.9 | 3.70 | 0.604 |
| 4 | As a basis for their homework assignments. | 59.2 | 30.0 | 8.6 | 2.1 | 3.46 | 0.742 |
| 5 | To be applied as a guide for additional references in religious education. | 14.8 | 28.8 | 38.2 | 18.3 | 2.40 | 0.951 |
| 6 | As general reading material. | 9.2 | 24.6 | 40.3 | 25.9 | 2.17 | 0.920 |

It is immediately evident from the data in the table that the items divided into two broad groups, in terms of their mean ratings. These are

- i. Items 1, 3 and 4, for which high mean ratings were obtained (paralleled by high percentised responses in the 'high' extent of use category);

- ii. Items 2, 5 and 6, for which mean ratings and responses in the ‘high’ ratings category were distinctly lower.

An independent factor analysis of teachers’ responses (not reported here in detail) produced the same separation of the items.

The common aspects of Items 1, 3 and 4 is that they all relate to a formal use of textbooks, as primary learning material, as a basis for homework assignments and for revision purposes in the context of examinations and/or tests. The high ratings on these items, compared with the other items, confirms and emphasises the central function of the textbooks in the teaching of religious education in Saudi secondary schools. They also corroborate the conclusion drawn in previous sections of this chapter that religious education in Saudi secondary schools is strongly ‘textbook bound’ and that not many teachers manage to detach themselves from what could perhaps be called ‘the tyranny of the textbook’.

Looking in detail now at the responses to the other rating items, it appears that - according to the teachers - textbooks are not extensively used either as general reading or as a starting point for additional studies of religious education topics (Items 6 and 5 relate to these two aspects). Only Item 2 (which refers to ‘background reading in support of students’ study of religious education’) receives a mean rating close to the ‘moderate’ use scale point, but this could well be interpreted as signifying that teachers expect students to use their textbooks for the purpose of *general* revision (as opposed to revision for examinations and tests).

4.7.3. ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS USED BY THEIR STUDENTS

As for other open-ended parts of the questionnaire, only a minority of teachers responded to the open-ended question in this questionnaire part. However, in the present case, about 40% of the teachers gave a response which is approximately double the response rate to other open-ended questions. This is gratifying in that the present answers may, hence, be regarded as more representative than answers in previous sections.

Table 4.26 summarises teachers' response pattern to the open-ended question. The answers received were carefully scrutinised and categorised, using the following procedure:

1. Answers given in a random sample of fifty completed questionnaires were initially scrutinised for the purpose of identifying provisional categories into which the answers could be logically placed.
2. The categories thus provisionally identified were further tested against an additional sample of teachers' answers and, where necessary, adjusted.
3. The analysis was repeated for each category of answers, in order to identify appropriate subcategories reflecting different aspects of answer within each category.
4. Thereafter, all teachers' responses were analysed according to the categorisation system developed through stages 1 to 3.

5. Finally, the distribution of responses across categories and subcategories was evaluated quantitatively.

This procedure was adopted since it would have been impracticable to arrive at a categorisation system on the basis of scrutinising all answers received.

Table 4.26: Response Pattern Concerning Appealing and Interesting Features in Religious Education Textbooks and Ways of Improving the Religious Education Textbook

| | Appealing and interesting features in religious education textbooks | | Ways of Improving the Religious Education Textbook | | | |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | | Content | | Presentation | |
| Responses provided | Number of teachers | Percentage of teachers | Number of teachers | Percentage of teachers | Number of teachers | Percentage of teachers |
| No responses given. | 220 | 57.3 | 228 | 59.4 | 283 | 73.7 |
| One responses given. | 84 | 21.9 | 89 | 23.2 | 72 | 18.8 |
| Two responses given. | 40 | 10.4 | 35 | 9.1 | 29 | 7.6 |
| Three responses given. | 29 | 7.6 | 21 | 5.5 | - | - |
| Four responses given. | 11 | 2.9 | 11 | 2.9 | - | - |
| Total | 384 | 100.0 | 384 | 100.0 | 384 | 100.0 |

The results are presented and discussed in three subsections dealing, respectively, with:

- i. teachers' views concerning features that render religious education textbooks appealing and interesting to students;
- ii. suggestions for the improvement of religious education textbooks in relation to their content;
- iii. suggestions for the improvement of religious education textbooks in relation to their presentation.

4.7.3.1. Teachers' Views Concerning Textbook Features that Make Them Appealing to Students

Of the 295 responses received, about 90% fell into one or other of the following categories:

- a. textbook features concerning their content,
- b. textbook features concerning their appearance and presentation.

The remaining 10% of responses were vague - often in the form of single-word statements - and could, hence, not be classified.

The majority of teachers' responses (nearly 200) related to aspects of 'textbook content' issues. Two main aspects were commented upon, namely:

1. Coverage in religious education textbooks of issues relating to contemporary life and to Islamic affairs.
2. Coverage in the textbooks of issues and topics that students can recognise as being relevant to them personally.

The following are some (translated) quotations from teachers' answers, to illustrate these two points.

“Presentation and discussion of current issues related to our life.”

“Textbooks have to take account of the reality of students' lives and their concerns.”

“The textbook should relate to the real lives of students.”

“The textbooks have to be related to students' lives and their problems.”

As will be seen, teachers referred to similar issues when focusing on ways of improving the content of the existing textbooks, emphasising that -in their view- the inclusion of such materials is educationally highly desirable as a means of motivating students and maintaining their interest in religious education.

About 70 of the comments related to issues of presentation. The majority of them raised aspects of language and ‘transparency of messages’. As can be surmised from the following quotations, many teachers appear to regard the language used in the textbooks as complex and rather difficult for their students to comprehend in a meaningful way. Again, this issue was also touched upon in responses to the open-ended question about how the textbooks might be improved.

“The textbook should be written using simple language.”

“The style and structure of textbook has to be clear and easy to understand.”

“Text books have to be summarised.”

“Some books should be summarised rather than give the students huge amounts of materials of poor quality.”

An additional useful and appealing textbook feature mentioned by a sizeable minority of teachers, was the inclusion of clear summaries at the end of sections or chapters. This was coupled with the observation that the current textbooks contained huge amounts of information about almost every issue covered in them. It was, hence, difficult for students to decide what, of this information, was important to learn and what was perhaps less important. Although teachers saw this feature as being valuable for their students, it is not inconceivable that they themselves would welcome it: it

would give them too a clear idea about the important and the not so important aspects to teach.

4.7.3.2. Teachers' Views on Ways of Improving the Content and Presentation of Religious Education Textbooks

In the second open-ended questions of Section 6 of the questionnaire, teachers were invited to make suggestions about the ways in which their students' religious education textbooks could be improved. As already indicated in Table 4.26, a total of 378 responses was received. Of these, about two thirds focused on content issues, whilst the remaining one third was concerned with issues of presentation and lay-out.

a. Issues of Content

These could be divided into two broad categories, namely:

- i. Suggestions for the inclusion of new materials and/or the modification of current textbook content.
- ii. Suggestions pointing towards the adoption of features that would enhance the quality of textbooks as learning materials.

In relation to the first of these categories, the majority of comments referred to what may be called 'aspects of relevance' of the textbook content to students' personal life and to contemporary religious and social/societal problems.

Concerning the first, some 50 responses suggested in one way or another that religious education textbooks should treat seriously the problems faced by contemporary youth, especially secondary school students. This, it was thought, would have a positive

impact on students' attitudes towards religious education. It was recognised that the problems had to be expressed in ways in which students could understand them (and possible solutions).

Current religious education textbooks were thought to be poor in addressing 'youth issues' and were said to contain many topics 'beyond the students' abilities'. Thus, some reform was advocated, at least implicitly.

In relation to social/societal matters, a further 50 responses touched upon these. The consensus was that, currently, social and societal issues were totally lacking from the current textbooks and a plea was made that these issues should be included. If this were done, teachers felt that the consideration of such issues would highlight both the problems of Islamic society and the main ways for people to involve themselves in societal affairs according to Islamic rules and conventions. Teachers also proposed that religious education textbooks should contain proper detail about present Muslim problems and should reflect the reality and needs of current Muslim society, at least generally.

It should be mentioned that a number of responses which hinted at 'content' aspects were difficult to interpret in terms of what suggestions, if any, they contained. For example, comments to the effect that 'religious education textbooks should concentrate on Islamic thought' or that they 'should contain topics related to Islamic morality' were obviously well meant, but failed to give clear-cut suggestions for the improvement of textbooks. At best, they could be interpreted as stating general positions about what textbooks should contain.

Suggestions for the improvement of textbook content in order to enhance their effectiveness as learning materials were contained in nearly 100 responses. They covered four aspects, in order of frequency of mentions:

- i. The addition of examples to make materials presented in textbooks more meaningful and, hence, easier to understand (referred to by 38 teachers).
- ii. The elimination of repetitions in the textbooks - usually, where the same material(s) were discussed or taken up in several sections or chapters. This point was mentioned by 24 of the teachers.
- iii. The inclusion in the textbooks of references to other readings/study materials which could be consulted by students for further elaboration and/or for explanations of the textbook material. The numbers of teachers suggesting this was 22.
- iv. The inclusion of questions and exercises to provide students with a focus for the revision of materials and for practising for tests and examinations. This was suggested in 13 responses.

Suggestions in categories i. and iii. may be understood in the context of the view expressed by quite a few teachers that the current textbooks are rather abstract and that they use language which students find difficult to understand and translate into - to them - meaningful messages. Thus, it can be said that this underlies the present suggestions for improvement: a genuine concern about the shortcomings of contemporary religious education textbooks used in Saudi secondary schools.

b. Issues of 'Presentation'

Comments about how the presentation of the current textbook can be improved were less numerous than those relating to the content. Not all of them contained clear-cut recommendations or suggestions of the type hoped for. For example, statements like

***“Textbooks must be attractive”; or
“Authors should publish textbooks which include useful
information and attractive materials which can
stimulate discussion between teachers and students”***

have little value in the context of this enquiry.

Nevertheless, a range of useful answers was received and these related broadly to one or another of the following issues:

- i. Use, in the production of the textbooks, of modern printing technology in order to enhance their attractiveness to the students. The sentiment is expressed in the following quotations:

***“Textbooks should be published using modern technology
to make them attractive to students”; and
“Include coloured pictures in the text to attract students’
attention”.***

was found in many of the teachers' comments. Reference was also made to other visual materials, for example, charts, drawings and sketches, which could usefully be incorporated in the textbooks to make them 'user-friendly' and appealing.

A further aspect mentioned was the desirability to use improved patterns of laying out the text, using appropriate headings and avoiding 'over-full' pages.

Just under half of the comments received about presentational matters were concerned with the foregoing aspects.

- ii. Simplification and rationalisation of the text in the textbooks and improvement in the organisation and sequencing of subject matter covered.

Most of the comments on this issue were of a general nature and did not identify in exact terms what changes teachers were advocating. One theme that re-emerged in these comments was that much of the material in current textbooks was too complex and abstract for it to be readily understandable to students. There was also a distinct feeling that a reduction in the amount of material in the books would have a positive effect on students' learning.

As regards the organisation and sequencing of material in the textbook, a number of teachers pointed out that, currently, the order in which topics are presented in textbook is not always logical. Details were, however, not given.

An interesting suggestion coming from several teachers was that each topic in the textbooks should first be introduced by an 'overview' to orient the student towards the content of the topics, followed by a more comprehensive treatment of the subject. It could be argued that there exists ample theoretical, as well as research-based, support for this suggestion: it corresponds to Ausubel's and Robinson, 1969 'advance organiser' notion the purpose of which is to establish in students' minds an initial framework to which subsequent ideas can be anchored. However, there is always the danger that students do not read beyond the overview.

4.7.4. CONCLUSION

This section explored teachers' perceptions of the way(s) in which textbooks were used by students, and their views of the textbooks, in terms of appeal and interest to their students. Their suggestions about ways in which the textbooks could be improved were also invited.

The main findings obtained from teachers' responses may be summarised as follows:

- a. It is evident from teachers' responses that their students put the use of religious education textbooks as primary learning materials first, particularly for examinations and homework assignments. The religious education textbooks seem to be less used by students for general reading and/or as an additional reference materials in religious education. These results confirmed that the religious education programme is bounded by the textbooks.

- b. The teachers' responses to the open-ended part were not as expected; less than half of them answered this part. However, it was evident that the inclusion of contemporary life and personal life of students' issues were considered to be the main features which make the religious education textbooks appealing and interesting to students. In addition to that, the nature of topics and the ways of presenting them in the textbooks were seen as the important features which attract students' attention towards the religious education textbook. The logical sequence of subject and the language used in the textbooks also have significant effects on the students' understanding. These results suggest that the textbook material must be coherent to be interesting and appealing for the students.

In summary, topics concerning contemporary life and youth problems, which have positive impact on students' attitude, were not covered in the current religious education textbooks, nor were social and societal issues. Thus, the inclusion of such topics would improve the situation of the religious education programmes. Accordingly, major revisions of the current religious education textbooks are needed. The revision should focus on the content and presentation and examples, which, as teachers suggested, would make the topics understandable by students. The information should be presented in digestible chunks and complicated topics must be presented more simply and meaningfully. Audio and visual aid materials should be suggested, with examples of their use in different curricular contexts made available. Finally, the content and presentation should be enhanced, adding some essential materials and eliminating the repetition of some topics. Examples and exercises should be added as these were thought to be of potential benefit.

4.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter reported on the results from the teacher questionnaire which was designed to obtain views about different aspects of the religious education programme in Saudi secondary schools. The teachers' perceptions about the aims and objectives of religious education programmes was explored in the first section. The second and third sections were concerned with the teaching methods, learning activities and type of resources used by teachers in religious education programmes. Section 4 explored the nature and the extent of controversial issues, and section 5 explored the factors which influence the design and conduct of religious education teaching. The final section

explored the teachers' views about the use of the religious education textbook by their students and their suggestions for its improvement.

The findings show that the most important aims were those of commitment to the Islamic religion and its laws. The teachers thought that such aims dealing with 'detailed knowledge of the Quran and other important Islamic laws' and 'A commitment to the pursuit of religious activities, e.g., regular worship and adherence to the laws of Islam', would help the students to understand the Islamic activities and lead them to commit themselves to the exact ways of Islamic instruction. This is true for the next aims which related to 'the students' involvement in religious and spiritual matters'. Secondary were the aims related to 'Appreciation of the role of religion in society and live events' and 'Personal responses to religion and religious experiences'. These aims were less important than those which referred to Islamic religion and its laws.

Generally, most of the identified aims were of varying degrees of importance. Some aims such as 'A sensitivity towards the 'non-rational' aspects of experience, e.g., beauty, wonder, awe, etc.', were regarded as relatively unimportant. However, aims associated with religious practices, for example, prayer, fasting, etc, were thought to be important because of their relevance to students' daily life and because these aims intend to develop quality and knowledge about various matters of religious education. In addition, these aims will help to instil strong motivation in the students to follow Islamic instruction in their daily life. The education authority should review these aims as suitable to the current situation of the society and students.

The next two sections were related to the teaching methods/instructional approaches

and use of resources in religious education courses. The purpose of these two sections was to identify the most frequent learning activities/teaching strategies used by teachers, and to explore the extent of teachers' use of different types of teaching resources and reference material in their religious education programmes.

The findings show that the teaching methods that teachers most frequently used were predominantly formal, old-fashioned and boring. Use of outside resources and expertise was limited, as was student involvement. There were thus no appealing and challenging teaching methods to make the lessons more interesting for the students. So, suggestions for support of the religious education programme naturally centre on engaging teaching methods to encourage students' interest.

Teachers' use of resources was very limited, and none of the identified items was extensively used. The textbook was the most common resource, with little supplementary reading materials, and use of filmed or video-material was also limited. Although the teachers have some access to such materials, they do not introduce them. The reason may be unavailability of suitable materials, lack of training in using and producing teaching aids or the limitation of allocated time. Thus, they concentrate on the formal textbook, which is inadequate, complicated, and irrelevant to the students' general lives. There were no additional teaching methods or resources identified by teachers in the open-ended part.

The extent to which teachers dealt with controversial issues was explored in Section 4 of the teacher questionnaire. Most of the identified issues were considered appropriate to include in religious education programmes. The most frequent controversial issue

covered by teachers, and therefore highest in teacher priority, was how to treat problems in contemporary society, that is, 'issues and problems in contemporary society'. The rarest were issues related to people or populations in need and their welfare and actions/activities by man, respectively. The reasons for this are probably that, the welfare state in Saudi is still strong and teachers may feel that for Saudi pupils, societal problems have more relevance than world issues. Most of the controversial issues identified in the open-ended part could be described as those which either extended or refined ideas implicit in particular rating items. Many teachers expressed issues which deal with common-sense matters such as those related to personal and social education, which seem to focus more on attitude development than on genuinely controversial issues.

The teachers' views of factors which influence their teaching of religious education programmes was explored in the fifth section of the questionnaire. The majority of teachers considered most of the rated factors to have strong influence on their teaching programmes, but factors such as the incidence of phases, holidays, and suggestions from colleagues in the school have a low degree of influence in their programmes. The influence from school instruction and that relating to the educational authority were most influential in religious education teaching.

Teachers' responses in the open-ended part tended to be less than expected, as most of their complaints were based on administrative problems related to the curriculum content and the presentation of the textbooks. It seems that the way religion is taught is a direct result of lack of time, too much in the syllabus, and the lack of relevant age-appropriate materials.

The final section covered teachers' views of the ways in which textbooks were used by students and suggestions for improvement. The findings show that the textbooks were used as primary materials by students, particularly for examinations and homework assignments. The other uses of the textbooks were found to be limited. This result confirms the central function of the textbooks in the teaching of religious education. In general, these results strengthen the view that the religious education programme is strongly textbook-bound.

The results show that the features which make religious education textbooks appealing and interesting to the students are the nature of the topics included in the textbooks. The coverage of topics centred on relevance to the students' lives and the society in which they lived, and were viewed as essential materials to increase students' interest in their religious education programmes. The content must be presented more clearly with the main ideas prominent, for instance, as an attractive story; the text should be easy to understand with simplified language and summaries of the huge amount of information. The presentation was criticised, particularly sequencing and organisation. Suggestions for improvement of the textbooks included modern ways of organising the topics and logical sequences to subjects, coherency, and an attractive presentation.

In summary, there are many points of weakness in religious education programmes in Saudi secondary schools: rigidity of teaching method, lack of resources, inadequate, complicated textbooks and lack of educational aids. All these points of weakness are recognised by the teachers and the need for improvement of the current situation in religious education is urgent.