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**Islamic Tradition and the Culture of Dialogue: a case
study of religious education at a Saudi University**

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ABSTRACT

As a result of the increasing interest of the Saudi government in developing its people by education, it has begun in its projects and vision statements to promote a culture of dialogue; hence educators are now expected to make dialogue a routine practice in their work, particularly in the religious education curricula at Saudi universities.

The present research makes both a theoretical and an empirical contribution to understanding the Saudi understanding of the concept of dialogue and in relation to one particular context through studying understandings of dialogue and its practices in an Islamic community. Theoretical understandings of dialogue include a consideration of the writings of Buber, Bakhtin, and Freire, and how understandings of dialogue are refracted differently when understood within the context of an ongoing tradition of inquiry, through the writings of MacIntyre and specifically Islamic traditions of inquiry, as investigated by Asad. Within the Islamic tradition, the significance of dialogue is analysed through the works of al-Ghazali.

This study also investigated the practices of dialogue in religious education courses at a university and their relation to Saudi educational policy, the aims of establishing a center for national dialogue, and the current understanding and present practices of dialogue within the Saudi community and between university teachers and their students.

The empirical research applied a case study methodology and took a sociocultural approach: data were collected via interviews, classroom observations and textual analysis. The findings indicate that, while Islam and the Saudi government are obviously interested in dialogue – with some restrictions – those concerned are unclear about the concept of dialogue and its practicing. This implies that the Saudi people need enough spaces to practice dialogue. The findings illustrate the value of higher education, its teachers, classrooms and activities which need to be improved in order to increase opportunities to practice dialogue.

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All praise is due to Allah alone, I praise him. I testify that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammed (PBUH) is his slave and messenger.

Allah Almighty says: {And they were not commanded except to worship *Allah*, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give zakah. And that is the correct religion.} (*The Qur'an* 98: 5). The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said: “The deeds are considered by the intentions, and a person will get the reward according to his intention.” So, I ask *Allah* to accept this thesis and reward me for all my efforts in completing this thesis. Also, I would like to thank Him Almighty for giving me the inspiration, patience, time, and strength in the way of achieving the PhD.

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Religious education has been situated within a more general account of assumptions about education in Saudi i.e., it is a textual knowledge that is privileged and the authority of the teacher cannot be challenged. In other words, with such an understanding of the purpose of religious education – as being primarily the transmission of knowledge – there is little need for students to engage in dialogue or the practices that are necessary for the exchange of different points of view. So, the move towards more open forms of teaching and learning that involve interaction between students, therefore, has far-reaching consequences for the education system generally as its purpose is changed or reformed.

Within Saudi Arabia, there have been to date no studies that critique the approach to education in different subject areas such as engineering, medicine or management sciences in universities, and science education, or mathematics in schools. Instead, the perceived issue of a lack of dialogue is seen as a distinctively ‘religious’ problem. Hence, the solution to this perceived lack of dialogue and openness is framed as requiring a change within religious education. Changing religious education is therefore considered a key driver in enabling Saudi society to become more open to different points of view, especially through the practice of dialogue.

Dialogue is a cultural and human concept which the Saudi government has focused on in the last decade. In promoting the development of people's capacity for dialogue, and how to converse with others internally and externally, the aim is to improve the practices of communication between citizens who may hold different social or religious views or different opinions on any subject, in order to learn from other perspectives or other consciousnesses (Swidler, 2012).

To achieve that vision, the first step the Saudi government took in 2003 was to establish a specific organisation with the responsibility for spreading the culture of dialogue (King

Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2012). This national organisation, located in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, seeks to provide an appropriate and supportive environment for dialogue in the public domain between individuals and groups (males and females), whilst maintaining the Islamic doctrine and national unity (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2012).

In Saudi society, the notion of dialogue as a means of communication between people is under-developed (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2005), hence the need to spread a culture of dialogue. This expansion has been driven by government and the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue and involves not only promoting a culture of dialogue within the community but also inviting other governmental organisations and institutions to engage in the same project, especially in education. This educational aspect is crucially important because it helps to educate future generations towards more open perspectives, and to give opportunities for practising dialogue.

While there are several accepted methods for spreading culture, education is considered to be a central and appropriate way to bring about changes within society. In this regard, Pieczka et al. (2010) contend that there are several models for engaging in dialogue, one of which is education. Education can also have a continuous impact and bring about deep improvements in students' capacities with regard to their culture of dialogue, and clearly teachers are important participants in this process (Bawazeer, 2010). In addition, universities might be seen as being in the best place to enable them to carry out their responsibilities to educate the public by engaging them in rational dialogical practices (MacIntyre, 1987).

Through that expansion, Islam, as a central component of Saudi society, dominates Saudi society and is held in high regard. As such, religious education is part and parcel of the education system. At the same time, all the concepts that the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue concentrates on are ones which are emphasised within Islam; for example, the concept of the dialogue itself, moderation, national unity and religious discourse (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2012). These terms have the

approval of the Holy *Qur'an* and the Sunna. Therefore, engaging religious education in the government's project of spreading the culture of dialogue is a pressing demand.

The entire educational system in Saudi Arabia is built on an Islamic vision, even its higher education system. In higher education in Saudi Arabia, the system is “a focus on the teaching of Islam, a centralised system of control and educational support, state funding (thus education is free at all levels in Saudi Arabia) and a general policy of gender segregation” (Smith and Abouammoh, 2013; p. 2). Given the importance of Islam, the educational system in Saudi Arabia needs to strike an educational balance in combining an Islamic vision and ethics in education (Al-Essa, 2009). According to Bawazeer (2010) this balance could be achieved through cultivating dialogue within the education system.

For adult and youth learning, a popular educational approach is educating through dialogue (Vella, 2004). In this, there is a synthesis of theories which translate into principles and practices that can be applied in concrete ways within the universities; many ideas for practice can also be implemented within the classroom in a Saudi university context through religious education. Hence, this thesis investigates how religious education in the Saudi university can play a role in promoting dialogue within the classroom.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Although spreading a culture of dialogue has been a government project since 2003 and although education has a crucial role to play in this project, in my experience through doing previous researches in this field, achievements so far need more efforts to reach the government ambitions, particularly for higher education. This study seeks to contribute to this field on the basis of three main elements: dialogue, higher education, and religious education in Saudi Arabia.

A broad survey of dialogical studies in Saudi Arabia found four trends. Firstly, the functional studies which have focused on how to implement dialogue, such as Alshowair

and Alsaghan's study (2011) that was titled "Rules and Principles of Effective Dialogue". Secondly, reports on public surveys that sought to discover the dialogue culture of the Saudi people, such as the report that have been published by King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue (2005). Thirdly, descriptive studies that just work in framing theoretically the dialogue in Islamic culture such as Algosi's study (2008) which concentrated on the dialogue in Islamic thought. Finally, personal perceptions about dialogue such as Altwaijri (1999) who wrote a book about the dialogue and its role for the coexistence of difference. However, this study attempts to build a cultural account of the concept within an Islamic country, and specifically, the Saudi context, by studying the dialogical theories as well as collecting and analysing the local perspectives of the study's participants.

While a number of important studies about dialogue in education have been conducted, their focus tends to be on the implementation of dialogue within the classrooms, such as Bawazeer (2010), and I think there is an expected weakness in the understanding of the concept of dialogue which can lead to some forms of disagreement. Moreover, most of these studies have sought to measure the acquisition of knowledge from the students rather than evaluating the extent to which they are capable in thinking, analysing or other abilities, such as speaking, listening, and respecting other points of view etc. Therefore, this study is an in-depth investigation of the culture of dialogue within the Islamic and Saudi community, not just in terms of dialogic practices and the mechanisms of its implementation but in terms of understanding the concept of dialogue, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective, drawing on the interactional practices of dialogue between teachers and students within classrooms.

Moreover, most of the dialogical studies in education in Saudi have concentrated on the curricula of primary school, intermediate schools, and high schools, while there is a lack of dialogical studies which investigate how to apply dialogue in the curricula in the higher education sector. There also appears to be a lack of studies regarding the university curriculum in general, both in terms of evaluative and developmental perspectives. This lack of development of the university curricula seems to also exist in the religious

education courses at University. Therefore, this study contributes to the field of university curriculum, not just in terms of improving the content of the courses, but also the educational and teaching aspects.

Religious education at university level is based on original ancient Islamic books or fundamental books in Islamic science, which were written and authored by various Islamic scholars and thinkers from different eras and different backgrounds. These books constitute a central point of reference within religious courses. However, such books were not written explicitly for formal educational purposes and have not been studied from a pedagogical point of view.

In addition to that, the common teaching method used is for teachers to read and interpret these books, a traditional method of ancient Islamic education. Although this may be acceptable in some cases, modern education aspires to focus more on exchanging views between teachers and students within the classrooms by practising dialogue, especially in higher education. Thus, this study can contribute to improving the culture of teaching religious education by promoting the use of dialogue instead of traditional teaching methods among academic scholars and teachers. This study also draws attention to diversity, as a new concept in teaching religion within the religious curriculum at Saudi universities, by highlighting the range of opinions that exist on different Islamic issues which need to be discussed and understood within the classroom, rather than just seeking to impart information from the teachers to the students.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The importance of this thesis is in its contribution to knowledge about the culture of dialogue, as a way of supporting future development in religious education and dialogue in higher education in Saudi Arabia. As such, the findings of this thesis address a broad constituency, with an intention to:

- Provide all university teachers and students with a wide understanding of the concept of dialogue and their perceptions of and attitudes towards the exchange of ideas. It also aims to identify factors that influence dialogical activities, along with factors that may enable - or hinder - the full integration of dialogue in the university courses of religious education. Furthermore, the research seeks to investigate the views of a broad range of respondents in relation to the practice of dialogue within the classroom.
- Present teachers' and students' views on the current situation in applying dialogue within religious education's classrooms and its influence on their teaching methods. This will enable the university's curriculum and textbooks' writers to make decisions based on engaging in dialogue within the higher education system rather than simply the individual efforts of teachers in applying dialogue.
- Provide the university administration with new information relating to issues which need to be considered in creating an appropriate environment for formal dialogue with regard to the religious educational curriculum, and informal dialogue in terms of students' activities in the university.
- Provide a basis for further in-depth studies on dialogue in higher education, in religious education, and in the Saudi context.
- Provide insights into curriculum design to the textbook writers, university teachers, and students about the mechanisms of facing the current and future challenges that will be faced by the Saudi community, especially the difficulties that pertain to religious or national issues.
- Create spaces for quality initiatives which could be sponsored by the Ministry of Education and the universities to support the project of dialogue in the field of education.

1.4 Research Aim, Objectives, and Questions

The main aim of this study is to ascertain how religious education can be developed within a Saudi University so that students are better able to practice dialogue. In pursuing the

main aim, the research has three objectives, which are identified in the following determinations:

- 1- to identify the theories of dialogue that can inform a rethinking of religious education in the Saudi University context.
- 2- to investigate empirically the current situation with regard the practice of dialogue within the Saudi University context.
- 3- to identify the practices that best promote dialogue within Saudi University spaces.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1- How do university teachers and students in a Saudi university understand and practice dialogue at the present time?
- 2- Having experienced a range of dialogue activities, how do the same university teachers and students evaluate these?
- 3- How might dialogue be further promoted in the Saudi university context within religious education?

1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters as follows:

- Chapter One provides an overview and introduction to the study, including the background to the study, the research problem and its significance, as well as the research aims and questions.
 - Chapter Two reviews the literature focusing on dialogue in Saudi Arabia as it relates to the research questions, which includes background information regarding the cultural and political system in Saudi Arabia, as well as its educational system, Higher Education policies, purposes of religious education,

and the educational textbooks and the dialogue activities practised within the classroom.

- Chapter Three reviews the theories relating to dialogue in general, and within the Islamic tradition in particular, in order to achieve the objectives of this study. This will initially include ideas about the difference between the *'I and It'* relationship and *'I and Thou'* relationship developed by Martin Buber. The concepts of 'monologue' and 'dialogue', in general, and the difference between them as discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin will then be outlined. In relation to education, specifically, the pedagogy of the oppressed and the 'banking' metaphor of teaching of Paulo Freire will then be considered. Having engaged with these well-known theories of dialogue the chapter then moves in a perhaps unexpected direction when it explores how understandings of dialogue are refracted differently when understood within the context of an ongoing tradition of enquiry. Here, the study draws upon the concept of tradition, as explored by the Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, and its influences on dialogue within the community, university, and specifically within Islamic traditions, which were specifically investigated by Talal Asad. Understanding dialogue within the context of an ongoing tradition of inquiry, it is argued, is crucial for understanding the dynamics involved in introducing changed practice within a Saudi religious education context. Finally, by way of illustration, this section will provide an overview of dialogical practices in an Islamic tradition, represented by the works and teachings of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al- Ghazali and will conclude with an overview of the role of dialogue in Islamic thinking.
- Chapter Four describes the methodology and research methods of this study, and includes: the aims of the thesis, the epistemological approach, the case study, data collection (semi-structured interviews, observation and documentation), researcher positionality, transcription and translation, and ethical issues.
- Chapter Five presents the data analysis and interpretation of understanding the concept of dialogue, which includes how the respondents understand the concept of dialogue and their perspectives on differences in understandings of dialogue. It also covers the understanding of dialogue within the Islamic community, which includes the limits of

dialogue in Islam, moderation, virtue and differences in Islam, and dialogue with others.

- Chapter Six presents the data analysis and its interpretation based on the Saudi context, which includes the importance of dialogue for the Saudi Government and good citizenship, as well as to find out if there are any limitations to dialogue in Saudi contexts. It also examines the status of dialogue in Saudi higher education policy and in the University and its environment, based on the collected data. Finally, it identifies the importance of dialogue in religious education at the university.
- Chapter Seven presents the data analysis and interpretation of the practices of dialogue in religious education at the university, in order to evaluate the current situation and to evaluate the possibility of practising dialogue in the University's activities, and in religious education and the 'Islamic Culture' course specifically. It also evaluates the purposes of religious education and the importance of the 'Islamic Culture' course, in terms of its objectives, textbooks, and assessments. It investigates the reality of dialogue practices within the classroom, and participants' impression after practising dialogue, and the perceived benefits of practising dialogue in teaching.
- Chapter Eight presents the conclusion and recommendations for action by the government and university departments in Saudi Arabia to improve the practice of research and recommendations for further scholarly research in this area.

CHAPTER 2: DIALOGUE IN SAUDI ARABIA

This chapter begins with contextualising Saudi Arabia, geographically and socially before then characterising the cultural situation within education with regard to this study. Understanding the present conditions of the Saudi context will afford insight into the Saudi culture, the government system, educational policy and the educational system. Consequently, this will enable a more precise understanding of the distinctive cultural dimensions to be faced in the promotion of practices of dialogue within the classroom of religious education as well as between academic teachers and students at the University.

2.1 Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is located in the Arabian Peninsula and situated between two continents: Asia and Africa, and is also near Europe. It has a land area of approximately a million square miles, which is nine times bigger than the size of the UK, as one of the largest states in Asia and one of the largest Arab countries. Its position is also strategically important, as it is bordered by the Gulf, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates on the east, Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait on the north, the Sultanate of Oman and Yemen on the south, and a very long frontier by the Red Sea on the west. It is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam and the location of the holiest mosques of Muslims (The Ministry of Culture & Information, 2016).

According to the General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia, in 1974 the population of the country was only around 7 million; however, due to the exceptionally high birth rate, together with immigration, the population has grown dramatically. By 1992 the population had reached 16.9 million, including the immigrants, and by 2000, it had increased to 20.8 million. The last census in 2015 showed an even more dramatic increase, with 31 million inhabitants, 56.5% of whom were male and only 43.5% female. In the last census, the estimated proportion of young people who were 29 years old or under, was 67%, which is about 13 million. (General Authority for Statistics, 2016). This obviously has relevance to the scale of the education system required and the importance of

educating this huge number of Saudi students at both the general education or higher education levels.

2.1.1 Culture and Government

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state; its rules are founded on those associated with the Holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. The first article of the system of government and the Shura Council (parliament) and regions provided for by the Majlis Ash-Shura (1992) website relates to the basic laws of government, in particular in Chapter One: General Principal, which states that 'the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic State. Its religion is Islam. Its constitution is Almighty God's Book, the Holy *Qur'an*, and the Sunna (the speech of the Prophet (Peace be Upon Him (PBUH))). As long as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains an Islamic state, all transactions, regulations, the constitution, and the laws, rights, and duties must be in accordance with the Islamic approach'.

Since the birth of the state, it has been evident that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been concentrating on a course of consultation in its policy of government, up to the present day. In fact, within the first section of the constitution, issued in 1926, the Saudi state is referred to as being an Islamic Consultative royal state (Dahlan, 1985). On the basis of that, the system of government and the Shura Council were promoted by the first king of the Kingdom, King Abdulaziz, who decided to establish a small committee, called the Consultation Council or Shura in 1928 (Majlis Ash-Shura, 2016). Accordingly, a royal decree was drawn up to form the Shura Council (Parliament) and regions' system in 1992, by King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz (Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques) (Majlis Ash-Shura, 2016).

In addition to these governmental institutions, religious institutions have also had a prominent role since the establishment of the first Saudi state in 1744 (Wagemakers et al., 2012), either through decision-making or in the formation of citizenship and the notion of active citizenship. Consequently, these institutions have been integrated over a long period

of time and, coupled with cultural reasons that relate to the location of the two Holy Mosques in Saudi Arabia, the vast majority of Saudis believe that this state of affairs is advantageous to them and so they work for its continuity.

Religious feeling and morals are central to Saudi culture. The Islamic religion covers all aspects of life in the community and education is an integral part, valued as both as an obligation and a religious right for both males and females, as Al-Salloom (1989, p. 37) explains:

Islam dictates that learning is an obligation for every Muslim, man or woman. This obligation, which gives education the status of a religious duty, is the cornerstone of education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is the foundation upon which the state builds its educational responsibilities, and in light of which, the citizen performs duties towards himself, his community, and his religion. The roots of education in Saudi Arabia therefore, go deep into the Islamic education which started in the mosque and led to the establishment of schools and universities around their pillars.

In an Islamic state, such as Saudi Arabia, religious belief and the Islamic creed dominate the prevailing conduct in all aspects of life, and, therefore, all educational issues in Saudi Arabia are interpreted with reference to Islam. The education system in this Islamic community has a very high status. In *the Qur'an*, God (*Allah*) promotes people to seek knowledge;

{God will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees.} (*The Qur'an*, 11: 58)

For Muslims, knowledge and its virtues are important and enshrined in Islam, and they are brought up with this understanding and are therefore keen to learn and teach. Hence, Islamic or religious education is compulsory for all students in the school and university. In addition, also, Islamic law, males and females are separated at all levels of education,

whether in school or in university buildings, and whether they are students or teaching staff.

2.1.2 The Educational System in Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, educational policies are drawn up by central government, and all curricula, syllabuses and textbooks are the same everywhere in the country. The Ministry of Education administers all public educational institutions and its functions can be divided into two: functional responsibilities for general education at all levels of schooling and supervisory responsibilities in higher education and universities throughout the country.

Higher education was established in 1949 by the College of Islamic Studies; higher education in Saudi Arabia developed from this point, and currently comprises twenty-four governmental universities and nine private universities. These universities have designed and provided a wide range of programmes representing different subjects for registered students, who spend on average five years obtaining a Bachelor degree, 3 years obtaining a Masters, and 4 years obtaining a Doctoral degree.

Each university is comprised of many colleges, and every college contains many departments. The heads of departments, colleges and vice-heads are appointed by the president of the university, while university presidents are appointed by royal decree from the King of Saudi Arabia. Vice-presidents of the universities and other members of the president's team are nominated by the president of the university, who needs approval from the Ministry of Education to appoint them. To be appointed as an academic member of staff, a CV has to be submitted to the appropriate department and after testing, interviewing and written examinations, they will be appointed according to their degree: those with a Bachelor degree will be appointed as teaching assistants while those with a Masters degree will be appointed as lecturers or assistant professors.

In Saudi Arabia, the higher education administrative system is highly centralised. Curricula are non-unified between the universities, but unified within one university.

Each department and its academic members is responsible for designing the educational modules, their syllabus and recommended reading list, with most educational modules based on one textbook. Academic staff and students have 15 weeks every term to study the textbook in full and then sit an exam based around this. The academic year comprises two terms plus a short intensive summer term of eight weeks. The assessment of each module is based on 40 marks for term activities, mostly comprising exams, and 60 marks for the final exam. Students are expected to prepare themselves by studying for these examinations from the textbooks and sample exam questions, which are devised by the module teacher, and these are expected to be from the identified and selected textbook that was agreed upon at the beginning of the term. Students must gain 60 out of 100 to pass the course, or they have to study the course again in the following semester.

2.1.3 Higher Education Policy in Saudi Arabia

Education can play a significant role in educating the public or students towards the common good; a common goal for many states across the world is to attain social cohesion through educational systems that promote moral individuals and good citizens. In terms of the dialogue, spreading the culture of dialogue has a priority for the Saudi Government and is a key priority for the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2014). Such priorities foreground the relationship between education and practices of dialogue, so as to educate people in ways of engaging with others through dialogue. Therefore, the educational curriculums, in general, and the university curricula, in particular, need to find ways to engage students in dialogue, both as students and as citizens. In the light of this, it is desirable that all graduate students, therefore, need to be qualified in the practice of dialogue so that they are equipped to engage in national and social activities within society.

Social dialogue can be seen as a national activity that requires citizens who are able to participate fully in dialogic activities. Each social dialogue includes national issues in which citizens need to understand those aspects that are considered to be the major challenges their society faces. This understanding is crucial if citizens are to deal

effectively with these issues and engage in discussions about improvements and ways forward, according to the concept of citizenship and the roles ascribed to citizens within Saudi Arabia.

Citizenship is a concept that can be defined as involving two relationships: one between individual citizens and the government, and the other between individual citizens themselves, in order to unite them within a society. It is difficult to generalise, however, since citizenship is intricately related to specific cultures, social needs and governmental regimes (Lister, 2003), as well as to religion. Citizenship in Saudi Arabia is to a great extent shaped by the link between religion and society, and far less so by political connections.

Whilst the notion of citizenship has developed from a passive to active conception in democratic countries, in Saudi Arabia it still tends to be more passive and to focus on the criteria of 'righteousness' and belonging. However, the notion of belonging is not inconsequential, and is intrinsically related to culture, language and active participation, as well as to the sense of equality and social justice that is generated by alleviating all forms of racism and discrimination (Tambini, 2001; Anderson and Taylor, 2005).

When citizens or stakeholders participate in dialogic activities or in certain public social institutions, their role can shift from passive to active; thus, the properties of active citizenship have to be clear. Active citizenship describes a relationship between citizens and the state, or between one person and another, that encourages civic participation, protection of morals and respect for the law at both a local and global level (Jochum et al., 2005). In Saudi Arabia, active citizenship describes the social relationships of individuals, as imposed on them by their multiple roles in society, such as the obligations of citizenship and the exercise of rights and duties, taking into account the national, religious, ethical and behavioural aspects of society (Morsi, 2009).

Many characteristics of active citizenship in Saudi Arabia could be linked to dialogic activities and to the wider Saudi society, including taking responsibility, religious moderation, Islamic tolerance and positive criticism (Al-Hindi and Dalasha, 1990).

Moreover, in order to achieve active citizenship, the obligations of each individual should also be clear, since many believe that obligations and responsibilities are the most prominent aspects of formulating good citizenship (Lister, 2003).

The rights of citizens should also be clear and protected by the government; because “without social rights, gross inequalities would undermine the equality of political and civil status inherent in the idea of citizenship” (Lister, 2003: p.17). There is no mention of political rights, but only social rights because, as has been intimated earlier, in Saudi Arabia, rights do not include a political element since the Saudi political system is an absolute monarchy in which the king is both head of state and head of government.

According to Saudi Arabia’s educational policy, the aims of general education and higher education are concentrated on improving different abilities of students relating to daily life, society and the nation, through various courses and types of training in schools and universities (Ministry of Education, 1995). Higher education aims to prepare workers for jobs and to produce citizens who are qualified and competent to perform their duties in the service of their country. Educationalists ensure the progress of their nation by offering training services and reorientation courses which enable students who are already at work to keep pace with new developments (Saleh, 1986). However, for cultural and political reasons, academic freedom in Saudi universities is limited (Alamri, 2012). Nevertheless, it can be said that engaging in dialogical activities in conjunction with the study of a university textbook may achieve the aims of the government’s present policy and give students a degree of academic freedom.

2.2 Dialogue and the National Dialogue Policy in Saudi Arabia

For over 13 years, the project of spreading the culture of dialogue amongst its people has been a national priority in Saudi Arabia and has attracted considerable support (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2014). The Saudi Arabian government has voiced great interest in supporting a culture of dialogue within its society. The establishment of the Centre for National Dialogue dedicated to the promulgation of

cultural dialogue among members of society, has raised the profile of dialogue, and has influenced its subsequent spread and promotion. Dialogue is expected to generate a positive effect on plans for development and reform, particularly as these plans have been negatively affected by terrorist activities. Thus, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has concentrated significant attention on directing measures to promote dialogue, such as through the establishment of the centre.

The aims outlined above are recognized in the policy of national dialogue in Saudi Arabia, in terms of the importance attached to its objectives and activities. In this regard, as already observed, while the Saudi government has increasingly focused on the importance of a dialogue, it led to the founding of the National Dialogue Centre in Riyadh, which aims to spread a culture of dialogue within Saudi society. The motivation behind establishing this centre was the desire to confront important national issues, such as the fight against terrorism and violence, concerns over national unity, reducing the intellectual and educational disparities between members of the community, and the overall protection of Saudi culture and identity (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2014).

Given these roles, the centre works to identify different national issues and then prepare national meetings at which these can be discussed. At this time, nine meetings have been convened, covering ten important topics (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2014):

National Unity, Relations and International Covenants, 2004.

Extremism and Moderation: a vision of a comprehensive methodology, 2004.

Women, their rights and duties, 2005.

Youth Issues: current status and future prospects of young people, 2006.

We and the Other: a national vision for dealing with global cultures, 2006.

Education and Ways of Development, 2007.

Areas of Labour and Employment: a dialogue between the community and work institutions, 2009.

Health Services: a dialogue between the community and health institutions, 2011.

The media: reality and ways of development, 2012.

Extremism and its effects on national unity, 2014.

These issues are the most important areas focused on by the centre. The meetings comprised people with different backgrounds, ranging from authorities and academics to members of the public. However, since the main purpose for establishing a national dialogue centre was to spread a culture of dialogue and spread the awareness of the local issues among the Saudi people, the Saudi government is not committed to implementing the dialogical conferences' outcomes, but it undertakes to support the centre in the way of achieving their targets.

Nonetheless, apart from an understanding of the national issues themselves, it could be that in discussing these national issues, a better understanding will also be gained with regard to the concept of active citizenship in Saudi Arabia, which could lead to closer involvement and more successful dialogue in future. A national dialogue may also improve the citizens' experience of freedom and increase their desire to participate in society. Hence, a capacity for national dialogue is linked with a more comprehensive concept of active citizenship; dialogue on national issues is one means through which this concept might be realised in practice.

While all of these factors may increase dialogue, there are certain obstacles that may limit the outcome, the most important being a lack of social research that identifies the main features of Saudi society, as well as the variation in terms of individual capacities, such as thinking and expressing ideas as individuals, which can be noted in everyday life. In short, the objective of promoting dialogue tends to concentrate on the consolidation of national unity, contributing to the presentation of 'the true image of Islam', tackling national

problems, promoting the concepts and characteristics of dialogue within society, encouraging the largest possible number of people to participate in decisions, and improving the style of decision-making or policy-making by involving the public. The above discussion demonstrates the essential challenge relating to the capacities of the participants, showing that improving the different abilities of people in analysis, thinking, responding, speaking, and language in dialogue may lead to good communication and greater interactions between the participants in the national dialogue conferences, and thereby improving the chances of success.

2.2.1 What is the Position of Dialogue in Saudi Arabia?

Dialogue is an approach that is implemented in some societies with the aim of improving different aspects of the community, such as a national sense of feeling and belonging, taking greater responsibility for and involvement with governance, or the improvement of social services. In this regard, a number of national issues relate to the improvement of social services and have the status of national affiliation, with participation being a shared responsibility between government, the private sector, public organizations, academic institutions and the public (US Department of Homeland Security, 2010). All of these considerations are factors in protecting a country and its living conditions, with the result that the bodies listed above are often principal partners in dialogues within societies.

It is clear that the aims and implementation of dialogic processes will vary from country to country and will be affected by economic, political and social factors, as well as the standard of living. In the US, for example, a significant national dialogue was launched to improve facilities in many areas of life, such as environmental protection and online safety (Beierle, 2002). In a similar vein, members of the public in the UK have been engaged in group discussions as part of the national dialogue for the exchange of ideas and perspectives relating to issues and problems about climate change, the environment and energy, in order to formulate policies for these (Fudge, 2011).

In the US, the creation of a national dialogue between US forms of religious worship and those abroad encourages the population to understand other ideologies in greater depth (This I Believe, 2014). Australia offers another example of this kind of national dialogue, aimed at reducing the gap between different religions in relation to Australian culture and its associated regulations (ECAJ, 2014). In many developing countries, solutions encouraging stability are also being sought for some political, economic, legal and regulatory problems through dialogue, such as is happening in Kenya (Annan, 2014) and Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka National Dialogue, 2014). In the Middle East, in countries like Lebanon, Palestine and Bahrain, national dialogue focuses on the need for stability, and involves creating dialogue between conflicting political parties (Bawazeer, 2010).

From this overview, it would appear that a key purpose of a dialogue is arguably not to impose opinions or to reach enforced conclusions, but rather to understand the perspectives of all members and to then promote the generation of acceptable ideas for responding to community issues and challenges within a specific tradition or culture. There are multiple elements that can, in principle, participate in such dialogue, and these can include the general public, members of government bodies, as well as a wide range of other organizations.

In comparison, the purposes of dialogue in Saudi Arabia appear quite different in a number of respects. The examples given above, focus on living conditions and public services or on political issues. In Saudi Arabia, whilst national and social issues are highly important, there is little or no public attention or discussion given to these aspects. What is common to all countries is that any dialogue between people within their nations and traditions is a method of organised engagement between a government or organisation and the public. According to Knecht et al. (1998), dialogue may search for ways to articulate community issues and their influences, based upon discussions with interested people about how to organize tasks of regional importance and exploring methods for solving problems. It is important to emphasize that as each country has different issues, the aims of the dialogue will necessarily be different.

As a ‘mono-cultural society’ with one religion, one language and a monarchical government, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is very different from other developed countries, in that it experiences no overt political opposition. The question that has to be asked, therefore, is why national dialogue is even necessary in Saudi Arabia, given that it is a mono-cultural society with one religion, one language, and one monarchical government?

2.2.2 Why is National Dialogue Necessary in Saudi Arabia?

Social dialogue requires communication between at least two parties, groups, or categories, belonging to and living within a given nation, regarding the possible ways in which national problems might be addressed (Bawazeer, 2010). This communication channel can also be used to put forward new ideas to assist people in the peaceful and democratic development of their country, while simultaneously avoiding any kind of bigotry, inertia or hostility, regardless of the intellectual or social affiliation of the participants.

To understand the relevance and aims of dialogue in the seemingly mono-cultural nation that is Saudi Arabia, one need look no further than the pluralism that exists between religious scholars resulting from diverse understandings of Islamic regulations and the various possible methods of implementing them. Another form of pluralism that attracts less attention is to be found in different groups of thinkers, from the conservative ‘ulama’ group – pragmatic, reformist and conservative – and the liberal reformers who oppose them (Wagemakers et al., 2012).

Many important issues in Saudi society connected with its religion require dialogue before actions can be taken, in order to reach political, religious and social consensus over their wider applicability. Thus dialogue is an important public tool for debating local issues pertaining to the role of Islam in public life, identity and modernity (Kraidy, 2009).

An example of a local issue is the rights of women in the realm of work and their rights as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters. Terrorism and extremism are other areas where

public dialogue has taken place in order to be clear that Islam is against such concepts and to show its negative impacts on societies. In this sense, the function of dialogue in Saudi Arabia relates intimately to religious understanding, the field of its application, and to its effect on wider social culture.

While there may be other reasons why the government of Saudi Arabia is interested in encouraging the idea of a dialogue amongst its population, arguably the main reason is to engender a dialogue in relation to culture, with a sense of this having value in improving religious understanding and national unity (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2014). Dialogue is believed to be an effective means to preserve national unity and to address violence, blasphemy and terrorism, all of which have affected the stability and security of the country (Mahfooth, 2004).

In addition to this, dialogue is seen as potentially helping to improve the capacity of the populace to deal with differences in culture and civilisations around the world, giving them the ability to interact with modernity and globalisation effectively without prejudicing internal national social structure and culture. With this in mind, dialogue in Saudi Arabia is about encouraging people to engage in practices of dialogue as part of their daily life, providing them with a way of thinking and a clearer method of expression (Public Relations and Information Department, 2005). In this way, dialogue is also seen as making a contribution to raising people's qualifications for entering into active involvement, good relations and interactions that, in turn, serve to build a more confident identity (Stewart and Zediker, 2000).

Developing dialogue and critical thinking ability encourages discussion between people in society regarding the challenges and possibilities facing the community. This is needed by any society that faces a variety of challenges (Spano, 2001), so as to create new language and concepts in social discourse, as well as new mental and social habits, and modes of living in the country. Consequently, dialogue is perceived as being a primary qualification for generations who will be able to protect the unity of their country and

adapt to others, for the sake of achieving national, intellectual and cultural harmony (Public Relations and Information Department, 2005).

In addition, a culture of dialogue is an important one in developing the relatively new idea of active citizenship in Saudi Arabia, replacing the earlier more passive conception of citizenship as described above. Crick (2000) notes that one of the most common features of many past societies was that they comprised leaders and followers. In the UK in the 1970s, concerns were raised about 'political illiteracy' with critics arguing that the education system did not support the forming of political concepts and active citizenship (Huddleston, 2006). From this perspective, a new concept of 'citizenship' sought to produce active rather than passive citizens, in a process that MacDonald (2003) defines as a set of dynamic practices, including political, civil, legal, cultural and educational behaviours, which have formed over time as a result of social movements and political and intellectual forces.

Through knowledge regarding the style of governance and policy-making in Saudi Arabia, social dialogue may become more important for citizens' engagement in policymaking. In general, 'policy' is a concept that includes rules, national challenges, and problematic and practical domains, and for this reason the definitions of 'policy' vary according to the specific sphere (Haddad, 1995). Wise (1994: p.1) defines policy as "merely a number of rules tied in to a domain managed object." Understanding this definition, involves acceptance that policy is a "closed preserve of the formal government apparatus of policy making" (Ozga, 2000: p.42). However, according to Braun et al. (2010), policy is something that seeks to explain and convey theory as a practical process.

Policy-making can also be linked to evidence-based policymaking (EBP), a method by which policymakers or researchers and teachers in academic fields are able to continually develop policies. However, the improvement of policy requires decisions that reflect these evidence-based criteria and lead to proper forms of development. Sutcliffe and Court (2014) addressed this view, stating that the purpose of EBP is to supply evidence that enables appropriate and rational policy decisions to be made. In their definition:

EBP is a discourse or set of methods which informs the processes by which policies are formulated, rather than aiming to affect the eventual goals of the policy. It advocates a more rational, rigorous and systematic approach and moves beyond traditional notions of research to adopt a broader understanding. In most discussions, the approach has also come to incorporate evidence-based practices. (Sutcliffe and Court, 2014: p.1).

The main feature in making better decisions or policies is arguably the participation of people in building social lives and services through dialogue. This view is echoed by the Economic Policy Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2015) in Belfast, who view dialogue as an essential component of good policy-making. Members of a government, organizations and institutions, and the citizens or stakeholders are the most important participants in successful policy-making. Indeed, it has been argued that citizens are better able to identify their own social and service needs, which can enable policy-making to turn from top-down to bottom-up, with the participation of stakeholders (Economic Policy Unit, 2015).

In Saudi Arabia, top-down policy-making is the usual mode, and derives from two bodies associated with the head of government. The first body is a board of experts directly connected to the Prime Minister. The second is the Shura Council (parliament) whose members are not elected but appointed by the King. The Shura and consultation is entirely dependent on dialogue, which is a means of circulation and communication between people. They have full responsibility for the discussion of certain issues, with the freedom to criticise constructively or to introduce a beneficial proposal between differing viewpoints.

As a result of this, dialogue is acknowledged as having an important role in the Shura Council, determining some of the most important objectives of the state, pertaining to different political, economic, military, social or other fields. The council deals with these issues legally and critically. However, because of the inherent differences in the population at large, it is also important to create other opportunities for dialogue outside

the domain of the Shura: a space for intellectual exchange and cultural cooperation between members of the broader community who might henceforth contribute to this dialogue. This, it is believed, will lead to the development of and an increase in people's interaction in the community, thus building a more coherent society (Abo-Argob, 1993).

Moreover, it can be argued that all communities encounter some form of social, psychological, or educational difficulties, which could be exacerbated if not agreed upon, and which therefore requires the selection of a successful method for analysis and resolution, which dialogue provides. Abdurrahman (1998) suggests that people who feel depressed or who have limited social skills might be characterised as having excessive sensitivity and poor ability in verbal and non-verbal expression. Such individuals also have less ability to form successful relationships with others, have less social standing amongst their friends, and tend to be less cooperative and communicative. In the case of such psychological and social problems, it would be theoretically simple for a violation to occur within the fabric of the nation, making it easier for negative culture and morals to develop, ultimately either directly or indirectly attacking community members. Hence, dialogue has grown in significance in order to maintain the unity of the nation between citizens and the convergence of their ideas, creating a peaceful intellectual connection, which goes beyond the limitations of the differences between them.

The Saudi government and community have become aware of the potential implications of the challenges being encountered, particularly with regard to extremist ideologies. This has encouraged the government to form various groups for intellectual dialogue. Initial indicators suggest that a degree of success is being achieved, as a consequence of the establishment of advisory committees (ICPVTR, 2010). In addition, these committees have suggested that engaging students in training courses in intellectual dialogue at different stages of their education has both a direct and indirect influence. This is because education can support a culture of dialogue and how to think in a more accommodating and appropriate way, developing a spirit of co-operation and teamwork, including activities that lead to the exchange of ideas and opinions (Wazan, 1993). Furthermore, having declared an obligation on individuals within society to engage in dialogic

activities, the Saudi Arabian government has in turn offered support towards creating more social or educational projects and activities to spread and promote such a culture of dialogue. This can be clearly observed in, for example, the establishment of a Saudi national centre, which is dedicated to the promulgation of cultural dialogue among members of society.

2.3 Dialogue in Higher Education

Given the current prominence of dialogue in Saudi Arabia, it could be argued that the principal components that will ensure the success of dialogic activities are the citizens who participate in them: opportunities are needed to enable them to engage in dialogue and exchange perspectives and ideas about the issues and topics under discussion. It is therefore important to look at ways through which the ability to engage in dialogue might be improved, by which I mean the ability to accept and respect several standpoints and to examine the different ideas through interaction with others.

Education has, I believe, a crucial role to play in promoting a culture of dialogue. Schools and universities can offer opportunities for practising dialogue, giving the students a chance to speak up and speak out about what is on their minds, increasing their motivation to interact with others and exchange ideas and conversations beyond the limits of the classroom (Abdul Hameed, 2000). Initiatives already undertaken suggest that students who engage in practices of dialogue will in turn develop more open-ended forms of thinking (Nicholas and Bertram, 2001). The role of dialogue in the exchange of knowledge has gradually become more important, implying a new relationship between teachers and students in a social and cooperative environment (Grudens-Schuck, 2003; Haggis, 2006). There is now a need to investigate, empirically and systematically, the effects of dialogical activities and what these changed relationships between teachers and students might look like. This study aims to do just that.

2.3.1 Dialogue Capacities

Language is the most fundamental variable in dialogue. As Arabic is the formal and first language of Saudi Arabia, those who participate in dialogical practices must be well versed in this language (Moauad, 2003). In addition, Brown (2001), from a classroom perspective, comprehensively listed the language skills necessary for successful dialogue, and argued that this requires fluency, phonological clarity, thinking strategies and being able to produce meaningful responses.

Al-Saied (1998) suggests another set of features required in dialogue, including analysis, inference, understanding, memorisation and perception. Others divide language skills into two groups: the process of language decoding into meaningful units and the process of attributing meaning, in the move from an abstraction to something that is both clear and understood (Peterson, 1991; Brown, 2001). Dialogue also requires clarification of the meanings and pronunciations of the terms used.

In addition to cognitive, pronunciation and speech skills, the capacity to take part in dialogue also includes behavioural expression and ethics. For example, Al-Saied (1998) argues that behaviour and ethics rely on two main processes: gaining information and developing the necessary ethical capacities so as to issue in actions that are orientated to attaining the 'good'. He, therefore, emphasises that the virtuous behaviour of each person is expressed by his/her own behaviour individually, based on their level of knowledge, as well as their embodying moral rules and capacities, which results in their decisions being good or not. It is clear that dialogue is underpinned by ethics and morals, in addition to the other elements identified above.

Based on the aspects of dialogue such as the various practices described above, a list of capacities has been drawn up which are thought to promote successful and effective dialogue. Rosenbaum (2005) identifies listening and speaking as key aspects. In terms of listening, he suggests the following sub-elements: dialogue participants need to be patient, aware of meaning in language, be able to indicate and organise words and listen for

structures such as stories, reasons and goals, rather than merely listening for facts, for example. Rosenbaum (2005) also underlines the importance of silence as a means to both understand and absorb the feelings of the speaker, as well as to connect the elements of the spoken sequence without interruption. In speaking, the asking of questions is most important, ensuring that the understanding of the message is clear, although other speaking capacities include different spheres relating to conflict, criticism and emotional control.

The possession of these capacities and knowledge of how to translate them into practice successfully is necessary for participating in the field of dialogue. In this regard, there is potential connection with the work of MacIntyre in so far as opportunities for the exercise of dialogical capacities are necessary for the collective pursuit of common goods. Education, with these terms, far exceeds a limited concern with acquiring skills for the work place: the role of education is to provide spaces for a much broader set of educational practices (MacAllister, 2018). Promoting a culture of dialogue through education in general and religious education in particular would encourage students to present their respective opinions and promote diversity and pluralism through respect for and the acceptance of different points of view. These points will be considered in more detail in the next chapter (section 3.3).

2.3.2 Purposes of Religious Education and Dialogue

A particular understanding of the role of dialogue in religious education depends upon both the conception of dialogical practice and its relationship to the purposes of a specifically religious education. This section discusses first an approach to understanding the purposes of education and then outlines the connection with religious education, followed by a discussion of the role of dialogue in such an education.

Biesta (2010) argues that socialisation, qualification and subjectification are the principal purposes of ‘good’ education in many contexts. Socialisation is a key purpose since education is oriented to preparing students to be good citizens who possess what are taken to be the essential skills and capacities for their living and working, as well as for their

society at a given time (Biesta, 2010). Socialisation, according to Biesta (2010) encompasses the many ways that education transmits a community's customs, norms, values, and its cultural, religious, and professional traditions. In a traditional culture, such as that of Saudi Arabia, education takes on an essential function in the continuation of culture and traditions; here, a key role is to introduce individuals to existing ways of doing and being in the society.

Likewise, one of the fundamental purposes of education in general, and of schools and universities in particular is to qualify children, young people and adults to successfully carry out specific tasks. Such institutions concentrate on providing students with the knowledge, life skills and practices that are valued in a given culture. The role of qualification is regarded as an especially significant purpose of formal education when it is state-funded. However, the role that education plays is not limited to the preparation of students for the workforce and their contribution to economic development; whilst cultural literacy is necessary, students are also prepared for respecting the common good (MacIntyre, 1987) and good citizenship (Biesta, 2010) as significant ideals.

Subjectification is the third purpose of education, for Biesta (2010). While the purposes of qualification and socialisation concentrate on placing individuals in society's cultural, traditional and professional systems, subjectification focuses on the student as a unique person (Biesta, 2010). In this regard, subjectification is concerned with the distinctive pathways through which students come into being as individuals and find their own unique ways to become active and responsible, not merely passive or as the object of others' actions. This emphasizes the crucial role that education has in general, and its importance in improving students' capacities, their ability to be active and constructive members of society, and their prospects of finding their own unique way forward.

Biesta's (2010) framework for understanding the purposes of education is helpful in analyzing educational assumptions in Saudi Arabia. With regard to qualification, for example, it is clear that students are primarily equipped with the knowledge they need and the capacity to memorize it for the purposes of passing examinations. The purposes of the

Saudi educational policy (Ministry of Education, 1995) emphasize improving students' qualifications to become more efficient skilled employees who can contribute to the growth and development of their country; at the same time, education has a role in promoting a more tolerant and open society which has not been stressed to the same extent, except recently (Al-Essa, 2009). Consequently, one might expect today's students to be less well qualified to do anything that promotes mutual understanding and acknowledges the value of different points of view. Thus practices associated with dialogue, where students encounter views that may diverge from their own, have not been high on the educational agenda.

More recently, however, greater interest has perhaps been expressed in Saudi Arabia in aims that more closely resemble the subjectification function of education, in so far as this promotes the development of students' abilities, such as critical thinking, analytical thinking, gaining knowledge, and playing a positive role in methodological research to contribute to worldwide scientific progress in various fields (Ministry of Education, 1995). Moreover, socialisation now has a significant role in Saudi educational policy in relation to perceived social needs and life skills. However, the main educational purpose, which is the most important aspect of socialisation, is oriented in Saudi to the continuity of Islamic traditions and its practices (Ministry of Education, 1995). Here, a fundamental fault-line can be discerned in regard to the purpose of education. Whether, on the one hand, this continuity of tradition consists in educational purposes (in terms of socialisation and qualification) that are oriented to the *preservation* of existing knowledge through memorization, repetition, etc. or, on the other hand, whether this continuity of tradition involves new ways of taking up, engaging with, and responding to issues as these present themselves, in ways that could not have been anticipated before. The latter response opens up opportunities in Saudi education for practices such as dialogue, so as to give students more space for engaging with different points of view and for creating new responses to contemporary issues. As we will see, such practices of dialogue in Islamic education are far from new – and were a feature of, for example, Al-Ghazali's approach.

Religious education dominates the educational system in Saudi, with religious content present at all educational stages (pre-school, primary school, intermediate school, high school, higher education). Thus, for example, nearly one-third of primary school sessions per week are based on the subject of religious education (House, 2012), and religion courses are also compulsory for all university students (Duthel, 2015), regardless of their academic specialism (Ministry of Education, 1995).

Hence, the educational policy of Saudi Arabia has foregrounded the place of religion in designing the current policy and educational system. This policy, based on that vision, integrates a religious imperative into all stages. Thus the ultimate objectives of education in Saudi Arabia are explicitly described in the following terms:

To have the student understand Islam in a correct and comprehensive manner. To plant and spread the Islamic creed, and to furnish the student with the values, teaching, and ideals of Islam. To equip him with various skills and knowledge, and to develop his conduct in constructive directions. To develop the society economically, socially, and culturally, and to prepare the individual to become a useful member in the building of his community (Ministry of Education, 1995, p. 5).

This statement shows that, whilst the first two purposes of education, (in terms of socialization and qualification) are acknowledged in the Saudi context, these are set in an overall religious framing. This religious framing of education is, moreover, specifically aligned with fundamentally Islamic principles including the belief in Allah as God, in Islam as the Saudi religion, and in the message of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), and the complete Islamic characterization of the universe, humanity, and life itself (Ministry of Education, 1995: p.2). Such a framing, however, raises a question as to the place of dialogue in Saudi education, and, related to this, the place of subjectification, given the clearly described religious and educational purpose.

Gaining Islamic knowledge, then, has a significant role in religious education in the Saudi educational system. Therefore, memorizing large parts of the Qu'ran and Hadith, its

interpretation and the translation of such knowledge of Islamic tradition into the practice of everyday life is at the core of the religious education curriculum. However, in recent years concern has been expressed that an exclusive focus upon the knowledge and memorization of a text as the main purpose of religious education can lead to neglecting other educational practices, i.e. those that become desirable if the purpose of religious education is to include acknowledging difference and engaging with different points of view, and opportunities for subjectification. A broader understanding of purpose in relation to religious education, in other words, may lead to the promotion of other elements in religious education – such as the practice of dialogue together with opportunities for individuals to develop their own distinctive response to the matters in hand. This call for a broader understanding of educational purpose has also come from an acknowledgement that the younger generation of Saudis perceptibly lacks a number of capacities that are especially valued by the private sector (Duthel, 2015), and these include the aforementioned dialogical practices.

Of course, change to the qualification purpose of religious education also entails re-thinking the socialisation dimension, in so far as success in attaining knowledge about Islam and its faith and tradition is associated with becoming a good person and a righteous Muslim, without which one cannot become a good citizen in Islamic society. Broadening the purpose of religious education, as appeared in the Saudi educational policy (Ministry of Education, 1995) therefore has far-reaching implications for the constituents of its practice. In short, this entails re-thinking the educational rationale for religious education. How might this be approached?

I'Anson and Jasper (2017) have proposed an educational heuristic which identifies three key elements – one critical, one experimental and one ethical – for the practice of religious education in higher education and schools. Each element is conceived as mutually constitutive and interdependent (I'Anson and Jasper, 2017). They are characterized as follows: first, the critical element, aims to situate knowledge in the discursive and material conditions of its production. This problematizes particular claims in relation to knowledge where the claim "restrict[s] or limit[s] possibilities of insight, comparison and considered

practice" (I'Anson and Jasper, 2017, p. 145). Second, the experimental element opens up inquiry to empirical investigation, so as to explore the socio-material effects that "comprise relations between entities and practices" (I'Anson and Jasper, 2017, p. 143). Finally, the ethical element is concerned with the complex relational implications of knowledge in religious education "in thinking through the implications of educational practice" (I'Anson and Jasper, 2017; p. 143).

Such an approach could broaden our understanding of educational purpose which is both open to difference and can acknowledge the distinctiveness of a tradition-specific approach to religious education. A move to a more dialogical approach opens up the possibility of an ethical approach that is concerned with acknowledging different points of view. Once different points of view are entertained, it then becomes possible for a more critical kind of dialogue to emerge. Only on such a basis can a more experimental approach be taken (as a consequence of such practices of dialogue) as people are encouraged to try out empirically different understandings and ways of relating.

In Saudi Arabia, the prevailing purpose of the religious education is fulfilled by instructing people about specific knowledge. Such an understanding of religious education does not by definition promote dialogue, since acknowledging different points of view outside the tradition is not part of its declared purpose. However, it would be wrong to suggest that it is a simple matter of either/or: i.e., dialogue in a new or 'modern' approach *or* direct instruction in a traditional faith-based (confessional) approach. Such a bifurcation, although initially helpful for identifying differences in educational purpose and practice premised upon the possibility of neutrality, begins to break down once a more nuanced understanding of tradition is explored.

Philosophical understandings of tradition, such as MacIntyre's (1988), show that though traditions have their own styles of debate it is sometimes possible for members of one tradition to learn from a different tradition in a way that will enrich and enliven their own tradition. An investigation of, for example, a traditional thinker such as al-Ghazzali shows

that dialogue with difference can be a fundamental aspect of a tradition-centered understanding of education (see below, p. 70).

Dialogue within and between traditions, therefore, may play a role in religious education, whether such an education is conceived along traditional, or more recent secularist or 'neutral' lines. The way in which dialogue is refracted in different traditions and differing approaches to religious education, will, however, differ. Whilst religion can be a central and powerful source of virtue and good in human life, some have drawn upon extremist language to use religious discourse as a warrant for violent actions. This may in part be due to major cultural shifts and upheavals that have in turn impacted upon religion's discursive traditions. As Doorn-Harder (2007, p.110) has cogently argued:

This reality places an enormous responsibility on religious leaders, teachers of religion, and all those who care about their own religion and about the condition of our world. People can become militants for violence or 'militants' for peace. Patterns of peace and tolerance, hatred and violence do not emerge overnight, but are instilled over time and formed according to set and ingrained patterns.

For this reason, it is desirable that all students be taught that people have different viewpoints and hold other legitimate opinions than their own. In general, it can be said that dialogue in religious education can contribute to teaching this and research in a Western context (Council of Europe, 2008) supports such claims. This becomes clear when students see that diverse viewpoints "can contribute to a broader consensus in a society on the solutions of social problems" (Council of Europe, 2008. p. 23). Attempts can be made to teach this virtue of accepting other points of view in the classroom, regardless of which religions or philosophies are the particular focus of concern. This kind of learning is an important step to:

- respecting other positions (even in disagreement) rather than privileging one's own opinion;

- not regarding religion and culture as monolithic but rather as determined by a multiplicity of factors in daily practice and hence changeable, and
- combating the ideological abuse of religion and its mobilization for political conflict (Weisse, 2011, p. 122).

Thus, the aim of promoting dialogue in religious education is to develop better interpersonal relations, openness and respect of difference. This creates opportunities for educationists and stakeholders to contribute actively to open up dialogical spaces that may raise the awareness of students and their capacity to acknowledge and entertain difference.

For classroom activities, the project, Religion, Education, Dialogue, and Conflict (REDCo) in Europe in 2009 confirmed "the great relevance of dialogue at classroom level" (Weisse, 2011, p.121), as long as the following principles are adhered to:

- (1) Encouragement of peaceful coexistence: education policy development and implementation need to focus on the transformation of abstract (passive) tolerance into practical (active) tolerance.
- (2) Promotion of diversity management: Citizenship education tends to focus on homogeneity, but to turn from passive to active tolerance requires valuing religious diversity at school as well as at university level.
- (3) Including both religious and non-religious world views: School is a place where all students' right to freedom of religion or belief must be respected. Religion is important to some students, but their beliefs must not be allowed to become an obstacle to their academic progress.
- (4) Professional competence: No changes can be made without educating the professionals to become competent in handling a multiplicity of standpoints. Such education would be needed both during initial training and in the teachers' continuing professional development.

More specifically, it is important to know whether students and teachers are ready to engage in dialogue in the classroom.

One of the findings of the REDco project mentioned above pertained to students and their readiness for dialogue, which Jackson (2011) summarizes as follows:

- Students wish for peaceful coexistence across differences, and believe this to be possible.
- For students, peaceful coexistence depends on knowledge about each other's religions and worldviews and the sharing of common interests, as well as doing things together.
- Students who learn about religious diversity in school are more willing to have conversations about religions/beliefs with students of other backgrounds than those who do not.
- Students wish to avoid conflict: some of the religiously committed students feel vulnerable.
- Students want learning to take place in a safe classroom environment where there are agreed procedures for expression and discussion.
- Most students would like the state-funded school to be a place for learning about different religions/worldviews, rather than for instruction in a particular religion/worldview. (pp. 107-108)

REDCO is an expression of Western educational values and these differ from a tradition-constituted approach to religious education, where certain key principles are acknowledged as binding, and everyone is aware of the development of this tradition of inquiry over time. Hence, whilst the REDCO project and its exploration of dialogue in religious education can teach us something, we cannot deny that, on account of its tradition, the purposes of education in Saudi are different. In other words, while the two

different purposes of education and the values and practices associated with REDCO can be reciprocally translated, they will be refracted differently in the tradition-oriented approach of a Saudi context, in certain identifiable ways. For example, the practice of dialogue in a traditional context is not free-floating but takes place in certain limits and shared commitments.

It is now recognized in Saudi Arabia's educational policy that an approach that focuses largely on the acquisition of correct knowledge has limitations (Ministry of Education, 1995) and so, even in a traditional context that is still committed to certain principles, the importance of understanding different points of view and accepting differences, in general, are now seen as desirable educational outcomes. The implications of this policy change are far-reaching and impact upon both the purposes of religious education and its practice, presenting new opportunities for forms of dialogue within a tradition-constituted approach to education. This can be seen through some studies which show that Islamic traditions of education in general, and the Saudi educational context in particular, offer many possibilities for practicing dialogue.

Islamic education can find great value in dialogue, and Almagamsi (2007) has outlined several of its benefits for learning. He sees dialogue as a useful way of overcoming extremism and resolving the conflicts arising from disagreement in favour of virtue, moderation and good citizenship. In his view, dialogue between teachers and students is the best teaching method that teachers of religious education can use to develop social relationships between students, develop their skills and help improve their logical thinking.

Practically, Almagamsi (2007), in his book *The Etiquette of Dialogue and its Applications in Islamic Education*, suggests a number of educational activities for engaging teachers and students of Islamic education in dialogue. One of his suggestions is to hold regular seminars. In them, he recommends the use of dialogical activities by academic teachers which allow undergraduates classes to practice dialogue. He finds that such activities increase the desire of students to engage in dialogue. He also suggests that these activities

should not be confined to educational establishments but should be part of public life too, in places such as mosques, literary clubs, and private, literary and weekly discussion groups.

Ibrahim (1994), in addition, conducted a study in Egypt, where most of the population are Muslims, to measure the effectiveness of using seminars and discussion in improving students' awareness of some of the philosophical problems in school textbooks. The researcher used an experimental study to compare the students who were taught by seminar and discussion and the students who had been taught by the traditional method.

His findings were that the seminar and discussion methods added an element of enjoyment to the class and provided an opportunity for students to present their own philosophical views by using comparison and discussion. By contrast, the traditional method (presentation, lecturing, and speech), which discouraged debate, dialogue and commentary, was not conducive to participation, interaction or enjoyment. In addition, both groups were given an "awareness test" to see how much knowledge they had retained and how much awareness they had of the issues that had been discussed. The seminar and discussion group outperformed the other group. This led Ibrahim (1994) to suggest that participatory classroom methods such as dialogue need to be adopted and teaching methods applied that depend on discussion and dialogue, especially in high school, in order to develop students' awareness of both topical and philosophical issues and problems.

While in this study the students showed an ability and readiness to engage in discussion and dialogue in the classroom, another study investigated whether teachers of Islamic education were equally ready. Bawazeer's study (2010) looked at the various practicable roles for teachers of Islamic education that could be applied to developing the abilities of high school students to participate in national dialogue. The study concluded that teachers of Islamic education in high schools were already able to perform their duties and roles in developing national dialogue abilities. Moreover, the study showed the importance of having high school teachers of Islamic education who were qualified in teaching and

educational methods. One of the interesting findings from this study is that there was a clear correlation between a teacher's own educational attainment and their readiness to draw upon dialogic activities in the classroom.

The studies mentioned so far, together with their recommendations, have been confined to the importance of dialogue in religious education in the school classroom. In universities, opportunities for dialogue are far greater. According to Doorn-Harder (2007, p.111) opportunities for dialogue arise:

in campus-wide events such as an annual symposium on peace and justice. Students organize practical initiatives of inter- or intra-religious encounters such as small groups where students of different traditions eat together and discuss human concerns from their respective points of view. To challenge their worldview, students read newspapers.

As noted above, an educational context where students share one religion, use the same language, and learn from a single textbook makes it hard to promote dialogue. This would suggest that, in order to create or increase opportunities for dialogue, it is desirable that either the topics or the issues that are addressed in the textbook should be diverse, and/or should be introduced into the classroom in other ways.

2.3.3 Dialogue and University Textbook

As has been discussed, Saudi Arabian education relies principally on the course textbooks selected centrally, which contain the whole bank of knowledge and syllabus necessary for students to successfully accomplish the learning aims. This is in contrast to universities in many other countries where, typically, a course team will decide on the module outline, its aims, learning approaches and methods, subjects, resources and methods of course assessment (Morgan and Houghton, 2011).

In Saudi Arabia, the university textbook is often the principal source of information for a university syllabus and is seen as an essential element of teaching. Therefore, both

teachers and students are required to use it, making it one of the main tools for introducing knowledge and the assessment of abilities. A general overview of some module syllabuses and outlines used in Saudi universities reveals that most recommended reading lists consist of one book, the textbook, which will often have the particular function of drawing students' attention to current issues in society and ways to address them (Amankwa et al., 2011).

Given its importance, the university textbook, according to a number of authors (Boyer, 1996; Lea, 1998; Rhodes, 2001; Lea, 2004; and Ahmad and Alwan; 2013) must be more responsive to modern demands and the needs of employers in fulfilling its university functions. Rhodes (2001), for example, identifies many such functions: creating new knowledge, finding ways to apply knowledge, supporting research, encouraging inquiry and study, preparing citizens, training workers for demanding jobs, and enabling individuals to understand the world. An awareness of these functions helps to inform the design of suitable university curricula, but in writing these, students' knowledge and experience must also be considered: their previous familiarity with writing and reading, and also, in this case, of speaking; the need to attract students' attention; ease of use in preparing course reading lists, lecture notes and course materials; space for discussing some of the less obvious terms and simplicity of expression are all elements that have been identified as significant (Lea, 2004).

In addition, students are encouraged to be interested in dialogue because it is recognised that the knowledge in university textbooks is itself built upon the assumption of certain processes associated with dialogue (Lea, 1998). However, the main challenge remains how dialogue is to be stimulated in higher education. Boyer (1996) suggests that dialogue will be promoted when a university textbook offers topics that are more directly relevant to society, thereby connecting students and teachers in the classroom to the most important civic, social and ethical problems.

At Assiut University, Ahmad and Alwan (2013) suggest that a university textbook should:

1. Motivate students to think by adding open-ended questions.

2. Provide many opportunities for thinking, brainstorming and discussion.
3. Be commensurate with the level of students in terms of their language, style, presentation and abilities.
4. Design diverse activities.
5. Guide students to other sources of available knowledge.
6. Transfer the theoretical to the practical.
7. Connect students to surrounding and community issues.
8. Encourage students to learn from teamwork.

It may also be important to understand students' needs when designing a textbook. This is a principal element in designing and improving textbooks and requires the students to be part of the process. Wirth and Dexter (2013) emphasise the importance of conducting a "knowledge survey", as this benefits students by giving them the opportunity to evaluate both themselves and the course material. The outcomes of such a survey can help to design improved versions of the textbook. This involvement of students in constructing educational textbooks changes their role from being passive to active. It has been recognised that involving the people who are affected by a policy, such as the students in this case, has a positive impact (Bullock, 2001).

Another idea that may motivate students to engage in active dialogue is to integrate them in the project of designing the university's curriculum, which is called 'student participation in curriculum design' (Bovill and Bulley, 2009). There are, however, a number of provisos surrounding the idea of this level of student participation, and it is not clear what the criteria for participation should be, as regards the students' background in higher education (Shor, 1992; Reynolds et al., 2004). Thus, it is not clear if there are always advantages in letting students participate in this way or not.

Furthermore, in order to improve dialogic practices among students, dialogue should be encouraged every time a university textbook deals with topics that are directly relevant to society. These topics connect the students and teachers in any classroom to the most important civic, social and ethical problems (Boyer, 1996). Given the importance of the textbook in Saudi universities, it may be better to review and evaluate the educational textbook as an element of policy, since this may lead to positive changes and amendments, particularly in the field of education (ODI, 2004).

Braun et al. (2010) also suggest that educational policies contain a range of frames, constitutions and amendments regarding the practices of the education field and that these tend to be groups of texts. In this way, a university textbook that is viewed as an element in educational policy can be improved and changed, with the syllabus amended as a framework, with the constitution as its content and the thinking exercises and realistic ideas as practical components. For this reason, the university textbook could be presented in a better form if it is continually under analysis and evaluation, as well as, improving it in order to achieve the target of promoting dialogue among students.

It can be difficult to make rapid changes or amendments in the educational field, perhaps because this field is affected by so many different aspects of the community. Economic, political, social and professional influences all shape many of the changes in educational policy. Haddad (1995, p.23) divides these influences into two main groups:

Internally, the educational system is an intricate network of institutions interlocking horizontally and vertically. A policy decision in any one component can have strong repercussions throughout the system. Externally, education seems to be everyone's business and nearly everyone feels qualified to have an opinion about it. Policy making, therefore, involves balancing a number of contradictory demands and soliciting support, or at least tolerance, from the many different segments of society which have an interest in education.

Before starting to design a university textbook, academics and course designers should give due consideration to several important points. These points are concentrated on

student knowledge and experience, prior experiences of writing and reading and also, in this instance, of speaking (Lea, 2004). Moreover, the university textbooks require being a place where the needs of the students are met, to attract their attention by providing course reading lists, lecture notes and course materials. It is also preferable for the textbooks to be written simply and to provide many spaces for discussion of some of the controversial issues or ambiguous terms (Lea, 2004). Furthermore, a textbook could also be linked to online resources and discussion forums, which are among the most popular techniques in teaching these days. However, a textbook *on its own* cannot improve students' dialogic practices. The teacher's methodology, activities and educational aids, coupled with educational technology, are also necessary to achieve this aim (Morgan and Houghton, 2011). Figure 1 summarises the criteria for preparation of educational textbooks that have been mentioned above.

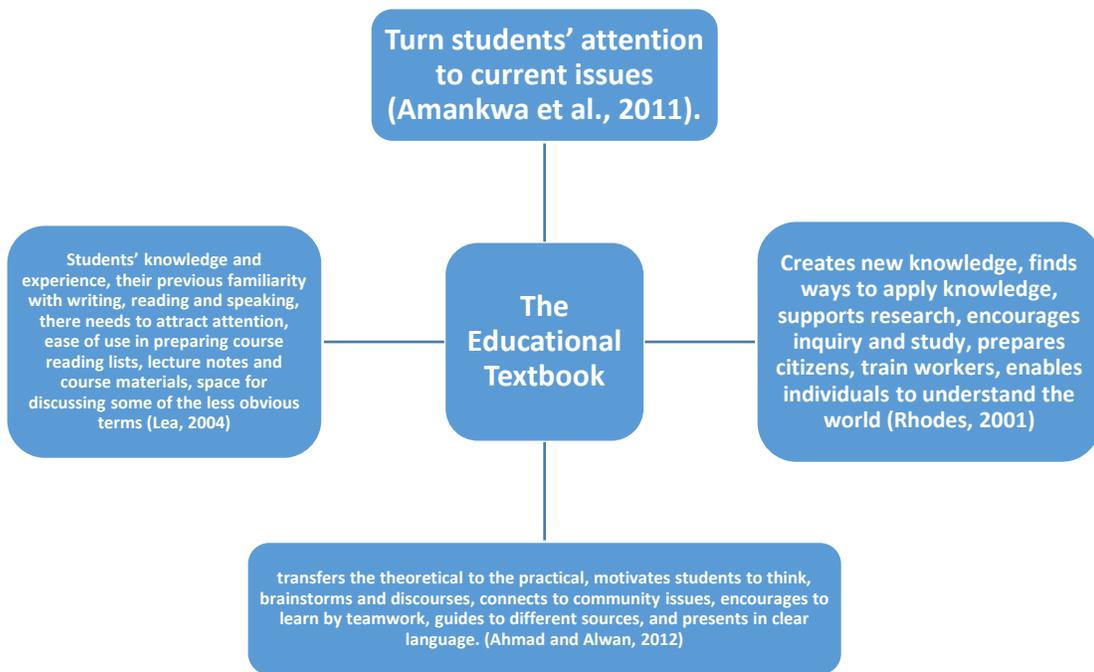


Figure 1: Criteria for Preparation of Educational Textbooks'.

2.3.4 Dialogue within the Classroom

As identified above, classroom activities are an essential part of developing dialogic practices and therefore, exercises to improve them are a priority. In this regard, Johnson (2013, p.3) argues that some teachers “have become so involved with delivering the curricula that we have failed to acknowledge how we deliver the curricula” (Johnson, 2013, p. 3). Dialogue in the classroom should become a more frequent feature, because it “allows students to reflect on their own thinking, to detail their own understanding, to listen to each other’s ideas and to ask questions for clarification” (Dufresne et al., 1996, p. 6). Group work or cooperative learning can also contribute to encouraging dialogue within the classroom and generally encouraging students to engage more actively in learning (Ruel and Bastiaans, 2003), through speaking and articulating ideas, asking critical questions and thinking in depth when it comes to answering them (Watkins, 2014).

In addition, classroom communication helps to ensure that every student is exposed to a range of ideas, by making these ideas the focal points of questions and enabling students to explore them through dialogue (Dufresne et al., 1996). By offering syllabuses that have been designed to develop their dialogic practices and related capacities (Nemec et al., 1992), education encompasses the overall development of each student. University teachers “can dramatically influence the extent and quality of learning for all students” (Maathuis, 2014, p. 1), opening spheres of thinking, analysing and criticising through asking questions and through the practice of dialogue.

Asking questions is therefore an important way that teachers can promote dialogue in the classroom. Schihalejev (2009) analysed a group of questions that had been provided by teachers and observed the students’ contributions and their interactions. In analysing his observations, he divided questions into three groups:

The first group, ‘closed questions’, required memorised facts to be recalled. There is a clear border between right and wrong answers... The second group, ‘half-open questions’, focused on understanding the material and could have more than one right answer, but still there is a border between right and wrong answers... The third group, open questions, consisted of questions where a listener cannot say if the answer is correct or not. Instead, students reflected upon their opinions, preferences, or cited examples from their lives. (Schihalejev, 2009; p. 282)

Schihalejev (2009) found out that when teachers asked closed questions or half-open questions “the readiness to cooperate and the interest of pupils increased... or expected memorisation or finding the right answer from worksheets.” (p. 282). On the other hand, when open questions were asked, that required student's opinion or preferences, he found that students were puzzled and seemed 'switched off' and he “did not find any response from students, they either refused to answer or said that they do not have any opinion... that information they have is too superficial and they need to know more.” (p. 282)

The methods of asking questions from the teachers to their students are one of the educational strategies which enrich the dialogue and increase the opportunity for debate.

Based on Schihalejev's (2009) results, it seems that using open questions is more applicable for promoting dialogue within the classrooms. The reason for that, as the study showed, is that open questions are more appropriate for thinking and giving opinions than closed questions. Although the students faced some difficulties in dealing with this kind of question, it can be said that could be because the students were school students, whereas here the focus is upon university students who may be more capable in dealing with open questions.

Traditionally, the transfer of knowledge and experiences from generation to generation has been one of the most important aims of schooling. Within such a paradigm, the focus of teachers tends to be oriented primarily towards knowledge, which students accept and memorise, as opposed to a focus on promoting broader educational practices within classrooms. However, a lack of opportunities for practising dialogue together with weakness in knowledge as to how to conduct dialogue and classroom communication, has influenced the relationship between teacher and student, leading to some students rejecting the teaching being offered to them. This has resulted in some students not being able to fully deal with the information provided, instead avoiding or resisting it, and not being actively involved in the classroom (Richmond, 1990). In this situation, the threat of punishment has been the only method that teachers can use to encourage students to be more active in class and to alter their behaviour. According to Maathuis (2014, p.1) this process:

...has focused much of its protection and education work on physical and psychological punishment in and around schools. Singling out punishment issues from its context of effective teaching and classroom management may have resulted in less impact than expected.

In the wake of a succession of developments in education studies in recent decades, teaching methods and the subsequent learning achievements of students have improved considerably, with teachers also becoming more aware of how to provide effective teaching and classroom management (Maathuis, 2014). As a result, dialogue has become

a more frequent feature in the classroom, as it can have a deep impact in convincing students of the significance of new knowledge.

Many teaching methodologies are applied in the classroom in order to stimulate dialogue. Discussion groups or cooperative learning and dialogue strategies are core aspects of this methodology, leading to interaction and dialogue with peers and producing the quickest, longest-lasting and most transferable learning outcomes (Long et al., 2007). The dialogue strategy is also a successful technique for fostering the involvement of teaching with communication, enabling students to gain access to truth, intellectual development and social exploration, through the use of their personal skills (Stables, 2003). Teaching aids also contribute to increasing dialogue in the classroom. Teachers can introduce new forms of knowledge by means of these aids, and they can also encourage students to play a more active and positive role.

The concept of communicative dialogue in the classroom has improved with the development of technology, with computers and the internet supporting a variety of approaches to learning. At the present time, e-learning is often perceived to be the future of the world of learning, with the internet becoming a more widely appropriate and significant method. This will encourage governments, for example that of Saudi Arabia, to link the universities of their own countries with those overseas, in order to learn new concepts through online discussion. Livingstone and Bober, in 2004, in the project "UK Children Go Online (UKCGO)", found that only one in five of the teachers had used the internet, while one in five had never even heard of it. However, the knowledge of the internet, especially in Saudi Arabia, has grown considerably since their study was conducted and the opportunity for IT use will no doubt continue to increase dramatically over the next few years (Al-hantoushi and Al-abdullateef, 2014).

As a result of this kind of learning, a number of new and interesting methods are emerging, which could be part of teaching approaches in the university's classrooms, such as the growing popularity of online chat and emailing. Toyoda and Harrison (2002) argue that communicative dialogue through the use of technologies is a promising tool for the

improvement of speaking skills, which may then indirectly improve student abilities. According to some, a physical classroom might not even be necessary in the future and that all teaching methodologies will change as a result of the emergence of new ideas for study and research in the educational field (Al-Asmari and Rabb Khan, 2014). As an example of this, some seminars can already be provided through virtual classrooms which “can be conducted on the Internet and participants from all over world can attend them. Though this is currently usable, it can be improved in many dimensions (Jadhav, 2011, p. 69).

Whilst all the above teaching methods are potentially effective ways of facilitating the engagement between teachers and students, leading to the acquisition of both knowledge and educational capacities, in practice different religious and national issues seem to be of particular importance among people of different countries. Different contexts will, therefore, tend to refract dialogical practice differently according to these differing priorities. If dialogue is to be promoted within Saudi higher education it would appear that new teaching methods need to be implemented in universities, to encourage the discussion of the particular contemporary community issues that have been included in the course syllabus. According to Bawazeer (2010), Saudi teachers are both qualified and prepared to implement different methods in order to improve the capacities for national dialogue in Saudi Arabia.

2.4 Conclusion:

In summary, the survey of literature in this chapter has found that students’ interest and belief in the value of dialogue, and capacities to engage in its practice, can be promoted in a number of ways. Even where the use of a university textbook is a predominant learning tool, there are a variety of different pedagogical strategies that can be used in conjunction, to facilitate dialogue. These include relating the topics of the book to social, religious and national issues and therefore making it a contemporary social part of the classroom; requiring multiple teaching methods; providing significant aspects of

intellectual and educational development; involving students in its making, and being designed with a full understanding of student needs, levels of thinking and abilities. Thus, while education can improve the capacities of students to practice dialogue, it can also improve their sense of citizenship.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the concept of dialogue as it has been developed by a variety of theorists, before focusing upon how it has been refracted within a specific religious tradition and certain educational circumstances. Through this chapter, I attempt to combine the theories of dialogue in general and in education with the concept of tradition, notably religious tradition and the practice of dialogue within the Islamic tradition.

In view of the extensive literature on the concept of dialogue, this survey has necessarily been selective. I begin by outlining a number of leading theorists whose major contributions to this field are acknowledged, analysing Buber's (1947 and 1970) and Bakhtin's (1984) influential theories of dialogue. While Buber focuses upon the relational dimensions of dialogical exchange, Bakhtin draws out the discursive implications of openness to dialogue. I go on to consider how this has been taken up by Freire (1970), who applies its practice to a specific educational scene.

MacIntyre's (1988) distinctive contribution to thinking about the significance of dialogue is then considered. He also explores dialogical practice within the context of a tradition. Here the focus is on his understanding of traditions of inquiry as constituted through extended dialogue across time, while insisting that the formation of 'educated publics' (MacIntyre, 1987) requires the study of canonical texts at a university. In this connection, MacIntyre deconstructs conventional understandings of a tradition as something which is closed, bounded and necessarily conservative within his understanding of dialogue in a tradition as a dynamic process that connects fundamental texts with new and unanticipated conditions.

I then turn to the writings of Talal Asad (1986), who has taken up the notion of dialogue within a tradition in specific relation to Islam. The implications of the concept of tradition as developed by MacIntyre have been explored in relation to Islam by Asad, who offers

both empirical and theoretical justification for understanding dialogue in these terms. Having outlined Asad's contribution, which includes a commitment to engaging empirical dimensions, this brings us to think about dialogue as developed within Islamic traditions, specifically in relation to the thinking of Al-Ghazali. All these theories are used to inform an analysis of the concept of dialogue in Muslim society in general and Saudi society in particular. In this chapter, I introduce these principles and describe the various ways in which they contribute to the analysis of the empirical research findings. Figure 2 shows the relations between these theories and their connection to dialogical thinking in Islam.



Figure 2: Dialogical Thinking in Islam.

3.2 Understanding the Concept of Dialogue

Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin developed and interpreted what many regard as two of the most influential theories of dialogue. To begin with, Martin Buber is a philosopher with a pivotal position in theorizing on dialogue as a necessity of human relationships which has earned him the accolade, “*the philosopher of dialogue*” (Murphy, 1988: p. 11). According to Buber, dialogue is an activity that involves entering into a relationship so as to discover new ways of understanding, an interchange of insights between the

participants, which requires the nurture of such states of mind as appreciation, trust, affection and respect (Burbules, 1990).

Buber (1970, p. 67) believes that “relation is reciprocity” and he emphasizes dialogue as a principal means of promoting relationships between people. He explains that these reciprocal connections are created through exchanging roles between the dialogue’s participants when one of them turns to ‘another as another’ and communicates by verbal language or body language (1970). This very clearly implies that dialogue “in the beginning is relation” (1970: p. 69) and, moreover, human beings would be incapable of understanding themselves without interchange with others, since “all real living is encounter” (Buber, 1970: p. 62). Thus, the centre of human existence lies in the relations that come from a mutual understanding of the dialogic process. This kind of dialogue refers not to all kinds of communication, but to the kind which is obtained primarily through human relationships which are holistic, direct and mutually open.

Buber characterizes two different kinds of relational possibility between people through his theory of ‘*I and Thou*’ and ‘*I and It*’ (Buber, 1958: p. 53). Whereas ‘*I and Thou*’ is described as “a relationship of openness, directness, mutuality, and presence”, ‘*I and It*’ is the inverse of this; as such, it is “the typical subject-object relationship, in which one knows and uses other persons or things without allowing them to exist for themselves in their uniqueness” (Buber, 1965, p. xiv). How then does Buber differentiate between these two types of relationship?

In the ‘*I and It*’ polarity, “I” relates to “It” as an object to be mastered; consequently one person’s relationship to another as ‘*I and It*’ exploits the other and uses ‘It’ to further that person’s own ends (Shim, 2008). In contrast, in the ‘*I and Thou*’ type of relation, “I” faces the totality of “Thou” (Shim, 2008). In this way, a reciprocal dialogue between people includes a number of fundamental qualities and characteristics such as responsibility, frankness, presentness, exclusiveness and directness (Buber, 1958). This means that a person relates to others as human-to-human equals when he/she participates in an ‘*I and Thou*’ relationship. In this regard, a ‘real meeting’ invites one person to

encounter another as a 'Thou', who has the total right to have his/her dignity and well-being acknowledged, whereas, in an '*I and It*' scenario, the individual deals with the other as he would with an object to be used.

Another point that distinguishes the two forms of relationality is that while "I" takes "it" as an object in the '*I and It*' mode, the former cannot respond to the latter, whereas in the '*I and Thou*' relation each can respond to the other without any rules (Walters, 2003). With this in mind, the '*I and It*' relation perhaps has more in common with a monologue, as the individual lives a solitary life in the absence of meaningful exchange, whereas the '*I and Thou*' relation holds open the possibility of the kind of dialogue in which each person is open to significant exchange with others in their community (Buber, 1947). This concluding point draws attention to parallels between Buber's and Bakhtin's thought in relation to dialogue. Whereas for Buber there exists, as we have seen, a fundamental divide between forms of relationality premised either upon '*I and It*' or '*I and Thou*', for Bakhtin a fundamental point of divergence is posited between communication that is either monologic or characterized by heterogeneity and dialogue. In the following section, by way of background to this study, Bakhtin's highly influential theory of dialogue is outlined.

According to Bakhtin (1984, p. 293) "life by its very nature is dialogic" and in recent years there has been increased interest in the chance in Bakhtin's ideas of combining the sciences of human behaviour in general with the focus upon dialogue as a particular behaviour. This encouraged Shotter and Billig (1998), for example, to investigate how Bakhtin's ideas concerning interactions between people might be linked with new insights in psychology.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a polymath, variously described as philosopher, theorist, linguist, literary figure and writer, who was fascinated with human relationships. He has been referred to as "one of the leading thinkers of the twentieth century." (Bakhtin, 1981, p. xv). Bakhtin's ideas have been highly influential in the construction of a variety of theories in literary studies (Patterson, 1988), politics and sociology (Gardiner, 1992),

and in the human sciences more generally (Bell & Gardiner, 1998). While Bakhtin theorized about multiple aspects of human life and produced many concepts and resources, for my purposes I will focus on his notions of monologue and dialogue and how these might be understood and applied in the context of religious dialogue.

Bakhtin argued that discursive relationships between people are linked with linguistics, phonetics and semantics and that it is important to try to understand the whole context of any dialogue process and the factors which affect it. He believed that these factors are the irreducible social and historical events relating to human beings, together with their ideology, culture and cognitive understanding of the meanings of words in the process of communication (Sidorkin, 1996; Shotter, 2008; Kwon, 2013). Bakhtin did not focus simply on these discursive separate interactions between the person and others within the community, but, from a psychological and philosophical perspective, he believed that individuals, their convictions and internal consciousness, have to be taken into account when talking about the dialogical principle.

Bakhtin distinguished between monologue, which, as the term suggests, denotes a one-way movement lacking mutuality, and dialogue, based on language and discourse, as well as epistemology, ethics, and ontology; this was one of Bakhtin's key contributions in this field. Monologue, in Bakhtin's view, is "one thing to be in relation to a dead thing, to voiceless material that can be moulded and formed as one wishes"; it is altogether "another thing to be active in relation to someone else's living, autonomous consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1984 p. 285).

In distinguishing between 'monologue,' and 'dialogue', Bakhtin argues that monologue has a clear impact on the consciousness of self because in such activity "another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness." (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). In his view, whatever the relations and interactions between people, all human consciousness and human life seeks rather to be dialogical in form: "the single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human existence is the open-ended dialogue" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). Bakhtin (1984) strongly emphasized the advantages of

dialogue over monologue, in so far as dialogue is a human activity which allows people to participate together in asking questions, concentrating and responding. Through this operation of taking part in dialogue, the individual, according to Bakhtin (1984), needs to be wholly implicated with others by his/her body language, feelings, soul and his/her whole life.

Bakhtin maintains that dialogue and human interaction are able to develop consciousness both individually and collectively, as me “becomes myself only while revealing myself for another, self-consciousness is determined by a relationship toward another consciousness” (toward a thou) (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 287). This can be linked to Buber’s (1970) characterization of forms of self-consciousness that are indexed as *'I and It'*, as distinct from more open forms of exchange with another characterized as *'I and Thou'*. Bakhtin also closely connects a person and their being in this life only through interaction and communication: “The very being of man (both external and internal) is the deepest communion. To be means to communicate” (Bakhtin, 1984. p. 287).

At the same time, Bakhtin also connects the individual not just with other individuals, but with society, in the light of the social components and in the context of social thinking, knowledge and language, which stimulate people to caring about their being in the frame of society, maintaining it and its accepted boundaries (Bakhtin, 1984). In linking the individual with others, this philosophy also opens out to other concepts, potentially incorporating some kind of psychological or spiritual dimension of people as well. How did Bakhtin develop the conceptual framework of monologue and dialogue in this way? In order to understand the word “consciousness”, he distinguishes between the “soul” and the “spirit” of human beings, seeking the spiritual dimension in dialogue and communication and in its relationship to monologue and dialogue, because he believes that “my self-reflection, insofar as it is mine, is incapable of engendering a soul; all it can engender is a spurious and dejected subjectivity...” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 101. This may mean that only when one person participates with another’s consciousness in dialogue can he/she be capable of engendering a soul.

Therefore, for Bakhtin, the self-consciousness of a person cannot be built without interacting with the consciousness of others. In reference to dialogue and different kinds of consciousness and their consequences, Bakhtin wrote:

It should be pointed out that the single and unified consciousness is by no means an inevitable consequence of the concept of a unified truth. It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that, in principle, cannot be fitted within the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature full of event potential ... and is born at that point of contact among various consciousnesses. The monologic way of perceiving cognition and truth is only one of the possible ways. It arises only where consciousness is placed above existence. (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 81).

In contrast, Bakhtin determines a concept of truth in which the knowledge and truth of one person cannot be varied without interaction with another. He says that the truth “is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110).

In other words, the forming of the individual requires multi-voiced activity and a plurality of consciousnesses. However, the transition of the person from self-consciousness to acknowledging such multi-consciousness is not easy. On the contrary, conflicts will arise as a result of the interaction between monologism, as representative of the self, and dialogism as representative of the interaction within the group. In this connection, Bakhtin writes:

“Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change

anything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to another's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in any force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world and represented persons" (1984, p. 292-293).

This background to the principles of monologue and dialogue suggests us that dialogue for Bakhtin results from a self-consciousness that requires to be merged with others within the frame of community, which starts as a linguistic process and extends far enough to become a wider social process. This extension helps to provide the diversity, freedom and free interaction of dialogue that converts it from a strident interchange of voices to an exchange of useful enlightenment (Sidorkin, 1996; Shotter, 2008; Kwon, 2013).

This understanding of dialogue as conceived by Buber and Bakhtin brings out some close similarities and complementary features between them. Indeed, Nina claims that there is "an astonishing similarity of opinions and formulaic renditions between Mikhail Bakhtin and Martin Buber" (Nina, 1984: p. 13). The point where they are most in agreement, it is highlighted, lies in the way that people participate together in natural dialogue as an essential condition of human existence. In other words, they exemplify that we can discover or recover our truth, consciousness and reality as human beings with no thought of using others or dealing with them as subjects only through continued relationships of deep dialogue with them.

I believe also in the idea of dialogue as applied to education, in so far as it approaches Buber and Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogue. Today, dialogue is highly desirable as a practice in classrooms, families, communities, workplaces, and other settings. These interchanging perspectives through dialogue help people to resolve difficult issues, reconcile their conflicts and face their challenges by exchanging experiences, consciousness, ideas and knowledge. Thus, interaction and the exchange of perspectives in dialogue can be a means of exchanging and sharing knowledge with others. In this, according to Wegerif (2010, p. 134):

Bakhtin points out that learning from dialogues is always a kind of augmentation. When we really learn from someone else we learn to see the world through a different pair of eyes. It is seldom the case that what we learn means that we have to reject our initial view and replace it completely with a new one. Dialogic learning more often means adding to our range of possible ways of seeing the world.

At the same time, Buber claims that “The relation in education is one of pure dialogue” (Buber, 1947:125). Education, as opposed to training, requires dialogue in teaching and learning in order to encourage students how to be open to changing conditions, accuracy of perception and all that is unknown and undisclosed (Murphy, 1988: p. 122). Consequently, Buber strongly approves of modern education which gives priority to ‘objective knowledge’, whereas, he criticizes classical teaching methods that teach values as ‘absolutes’ (Avnon, 1998:43, p. 98). The implication here is that ‘objective knowledge’, in Buber’s sense, can offer a space for students for thinking and having dialogue, whereas a focus upon ‘absolute knowledge’ does not. This because ‘objective knowledge’ is outcome of consensus whereas ‘absolute knowledge’ is not questionable.

Thus, as a way of transforming students' roles from passive to active, interested and participative ones, and from being subjective to being objective, dialogue seems to be a highly recommended approach to teaching. In consequence teachers are required to shift radically from classic teaching which based on one-way direction of teaching (from the teacher to the students) to new methods of teaching, since the former posits teachers as big storehouses from which ‘empty’ learners are filled (Locke, 1997: p. 10). Forbi, in this regard, identifies further basic disadvantages of the traditional method, as follows:

Traditional education, which takes the form of lecture or transfer of pre-certified knowledge, insulates learners from being personally involved in the educational process because teaching is always presented in the third person. As such learners are detached, passive and irresponsible in the learning process (2004: p. 175).

The above recalls the work of Paulo Freire (1970), a Brazilian philosopher and educator, who fought for critical pedagogy (Barmania, 2011). The book “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” is his best-known work and considered a foundation of critical pedagogy (Barmania, 2011). Freire, like Bakhtin, stresses the superiority of dialogic education to the traditional monologic method (Vella, 2008). Freire shares with Buber the view that the relationship between teachers and students should be equal for the sake of two-way communication; teachers should deal with students as objects, “Thou”, not as subjects “It” (Freire, 1970).

Freire’s theory provided a fierce attack against classical teaching methods. He describes teaching without the exchange of information and the role of talking in exchanges by conceiving education as ‘banking’ (Freire, 1970: p. 58). If teachers assume the role of depositors, the students assume the role of receivers. So, they will not do anything, except memorize and repeat what they have been fed (Freire, 1970). In this regard:

The teacher teaches and the students are taught; the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; the teacher thinks and the students are thought about; the teacher talks and the students listen meekly; the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined; the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher; the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it; the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (Freire, 1970: p. 58-59).

This long quotation is a comprehensive and explicit explanation of the oppressive teaching method in Brazilian education when Freire began writing. Students taught in this way lost dynamism in their thinking, absorbed passively and gained only a ‘static content’ which was empty of any analysis or critical thinking (Freire, 1970: p. 71). This is why the

'banking' method was rejected by Freire, to be replaced by a dialogical approach which would allow students to engage with teachers and others in the class and participate together in interchanging roles in an active educational environment.

Educational methods in Saudi are not far from what Freire describes in his own country. Buber, Bakhtin and Freire stress the urgent need for reform in educational practice, particularly in the relationship between teachers and students. In this view, the relation of teacher-student and student-teacher is encouraged through the use of dialogue, so as to share roles and to promote mutual interaction. Therefore, in the classroom, as elsewhere, a distinction needs to be made between "*I and It*" and "*I and Thou*" relationships, typified by monologic and dialogic discourse respectively. A monologic teacher typically deals with students as "It" rather than "Thou", mostly focusing on how to transmit information and how to control the class firmly.

The above analysis clearly indicates that the teaching approach must change from a lecture format in teaching to dialogue and open communication between teachers and students, because the dialogue approach in education contributes to improving students' consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984), builds and promotes (undistorted) relationships between teachers and students (Buber, 1958) and motivates the students' critical consciousness of different life situations (Freire, 1970).*

* On the other hand, Freire (1970) provided a possible future result of using the dialogue approach which is that teaching by dialogue might lead the oppressed students themselves to take action in order to change the world and the conditions which have been oppressing them.

Although his work does not focus on Saudi education, it can be said that conditions for Freire shared the same monologic educational approach, treating education as banking and that Brazil had a similar 'mono-culture' which tended to encourage uni-directional communication and to discourage dualistic intercommunication. This underlines the value of the present study in encouraging dialogue in education, including religious education. For the purpose of this study, such concepts should be understood with reference to ideas specific to a distinct culture and tradition and a particular social context.

3.3 Alasdair MacIntyre

Alasdair MacIntyre is a Scottish philosopher known for his contributions to moral philosophy and the history of philosophy and theology (Knight, 1998). He believes that moral and religious values and traditions are not objectively true: traditions and values evolve and change over time and are historically structured. However, traditions that are 'in good working order' ought always to seek to be as rational as possible (MacIntyre, 1988).

As previously mentioned, the Saudi people have a specific culture and a specific relationship to their religion that could be considered in many respects mono-cultural. However, in today's ever more global and digital world, important questions are increasingly confronting educators in Saudi universities about what might be learned from other traditions and cultures. MacIntyre's concept of traditions (2009) is fruitful for understanding the tradition of the people of a community over time such as those of the Saudi people more recently (but not in the remoter past, as Al-Ghazali exemplifies). These people have become more conservative, preferring internal or traditional dialogue to dialogue with external voices. In this respect, MacIntyre's (2009) has usefully shown how universities should encourage dialogue and conflict between and within different traditions of thinking.

MacIntyre (1987) focuses on the concept of the educated public which requires the study of common texts by large numbers of university students. Here I think it can be said that

on the one hand the Saudi system with its shared text meets one of the conditions necessary for an educated public but crucially, students are not, on the other hand, encouraged to think critically about this text. They are mostly expected merely to know it and memorize it. Nor are they encouraged to read other texts, for, as MacIntyre says, texts need to be read against each other if they are not to be misread.

In this regard, we should ask how MacIntyre defines the concept of tradition, its impact on community exchanges, and what the role of dialogue is in understanding a tradition and its influence through time. Although the concept of tradition in MacIntyre's writings "suffers from an ambiguity" (Devine, 2013, p. 108), this in part derives from the relatively complex characterization that he gives it. MacIntyre (1988, p.12) states that:

A tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined

This may involve the existence of disagreements,

...in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted." (p. 12)

Such disagreements can lead to the creation of some kind of imbalance in the social fabric and traditions. Imbalances can either be the occasion for internal reform, or call into question the continuance of the tradition itself:

Such internal debates may on occasion destroy what had been the basis of common fundamental agreement, so that either a tradition divides into two or more warring components, whose adherents are transformed into external critics of each other's positions, or else the tradition loses all coherence and fails to survive. It can also happen that two traditions, hitherto independent

and even antagonistic, can come to recognize certain possibilities of fundamental agreement and reconstitute themselves as a single, more complex debate (p. 12).

From MacIntyre's view of traditions, it would appear that he puts considerable emphasis on the imperative of dialogue and discussion between community members. MacIntyre's understanding of tradition needs to be distinguished from what Freire (1970) would characterise as a 'banking model' in which a fixed deposit is transferred from one generation to the next. A 'tradition in good working order', according to MacIntyre (1988) involves a far more dynamic conception of tradition in which there is a continuous dialogue through time so as to reconceive the tradition in the light of new challenges. This is also necessary if the tradition is to remain relevant to people's lives so that they can engage with its resources in the conduct of their lives in a personal, (*I and Thou*) type relationship. This is not to suggest that the relationship between dialogue and tradition is easy or unproblematic. As the case of Al-Ghazali will show, there are significant tensions for a tradition when confronted with widespread heterogeneity and competing principles. However, what MacIntyre's analysis in terms of tradition affords, is some insight into the kinds of issues and implications for dialogical practice that a tradition will face in these circumstances, especially with regard to tensions between conservatives and progressives.

However, the dialogue and discussion that could be practiced between those who want to maintain the tradition and those who want to redefine the tradition may require an improvement in people's understandings of what it means to engage in critical interrogation regarding their tradition. Therefore, MacIntyre stresses the necessity of education for any successful and rational public debate about traditions and, for that matter, the public good.

Here, MacIntyre brings out the role of the university in maintaining public debate and dialogue; see his lecture entitled "The Idea of an Educated Public" (MacIntyre, 1987). In this, MacIntyre analyses the educational system in Scotland at the time of the Enlightenment. He argues that students learned how to debate matters concerning the

public good while at university. Reading and debating texts from different traditions of thinking was important. While in Enlightenment Scotland there was an 'educated public' able to engage in informed debate about theological matters and the public good, MacIntyre considers this to be no longer the case. Contemporary societies and universities in the West lack a shared set of canonical texts and have no common cultural tradition. Without a common tradition, rational public debate about the common good is no longer possible. Consequently, the results of any public discussion are likely to be insignificant (Hammond, 2006). This state of affairs encourages MacIntyre to rethink the role of the university in shaping the practices of public discourse and discussion (Hammond, 2006).

MacIntyre asks who in society nowadays counts as enlightened, defining this in ways that resonate with Bakhtin's distinction between monologism and dialogism, above:

To be enlightened is to be able to think for oneself; but it is a familiar truth that one can only think for oneself if one does not think by oneself... It is only through the discipline of having one's claims tested in ongoing debate, in the light of standards on the rational justification of which, and on the rational justification afforded by which, the participants in debate are able to agree, that the reasoning of any particular individual is rescued from the vagaries of passion and interest (MacIntyre, 1987, p. 24).

MacIntyre therefore supplements Bakhtin's analysis through situating such dialogical exchange within a broader cultural and social frame that extends through time, constituting a particular tradition of rational justification. MacIntyre presents in this lecture Kant's view of thinking as "an activity the end-product of which requires rational justification; it is an activity in which we exhibit our power of objectivity" (MacIntyre, 1997, p. 16).

Regarding public education, MacIntyre states that modern educational systems have two purposes; "to fit the young person for some particular role and occupation in the social system and to enable him or her to think for him or herself" (1997, p. 17). However, for MacIntyre, the achievement of both these purposes is deemed impossible, since they

conflict with each other. In view of this, MacIntyre is not optimistic that modern educational systems with such purposes can in fact promote enlightenment (MacAllister, 2016). MacIntyre thinks that contemporary Western countries such as Scotland lack any shared set of standards for rational debate. He also thinks that the influence of the market economy today makes it very hard to think about the common good (MacAllister, 2016). This was not so in Enlightenment Scotland, where universities provided the conditions for producing an educated public. They did so by the crucial provision of weekly seminars where moral philosophy was studied. These academic activities allowed professors and students to engage together in the discussion of different public issues and moral philosophy texts (MacIntyre, 1987), which was important in creating active discussion among students to join the educated public.

Two conditions were made for those who would benefit from this discussion: for students to be analytical and active readers of the texts and for the university environment to promote rational and systematic practices which stimulated students to freely produce responsive ideas and opinions (MacIntyre, 1987). Hence when the students graduated and went to work they were more able to think independently.

In this respect, MacIntyre claims that at that time a third of all Scottish schoolmasters had previously studied in a Scottish university and learned this approach to education. Moreover, these schoolmasters played their part in connecting the universities and the public by transferring what they had learned to the nation's schoolchildren. Thus, the Scottish seminars in moral philosophy gave "a sense of direction" to the "whole educational curriculum and not merely that in universities" (MacIntyre, 1987, p. 23). MacAllister (2016, p. 527) sums up what MacIntyre says about an educated public; that it must have:

- 1) sufficiently large numbers of persons ... educated at university; 2) universities and wider public institutions both [providing]e regular spaces for rational debate about 3) both common texts and the common good.

MacIntyre (1988), moreover, adds some important thoughts to the concept of tradition in his book *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* He believes that the concepts of rationality, competitiveness and justice produced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment and modernity in Scottish universities and the Scottish community do not conflict with one another, but rather, must be understood in the context of traditions which combine practical rationality and a conception of justice (MacIntyre, 1988). As D'Andrea (2006; p. 76) puts it, MacIntyre believes that:

We should steer a middle path between the conservatism of Edmund Burke, who exalts tradition over and against rationality, and the liberalism/radicalism of a Concordat and other Enlightenment figures, who exalt abstract rationality over and against tradition.

Thus, in Scotland's universities, MacIntyre describes the legal system and church as being built on many pillars, summed up by MacAllister (2016, p. 528) as involving:

a recognition of the need for an epistemology to supplement scientific and metaphysical inquiry; a belief that justice rests on more than the right of individuals to pursue their own passions and interests; and a belief that reason ought to be master of the passions. In the realm of theology, Calvinism starts from the premise that all enquiries, no matter how secular, ultimately hinge upon understanding the will of God.

These pillars, in MacIntyre's (1988) view, were not an obstacle to students reading and questioning texts from different traditions of inquiry. They emphasise the need to facilitate rational engagement between alien traditions of rationality and justice (MacIntyre, 1988). At the time of the Enlightenment, the pillars of the Scottish tradition did not prevent students from accommodating a variety of traditions. Ultimately, according to MacIntyre, an educated public existed in Scotland because its universities were able to support students in thinking critically about their own traditions of reason and justice, as well as other people's (MacAllister, 2016).

MacIntyre notes that while universities in Enlightenment Scotland created ways and means to embrace rational disputation within and between many traditions of rationality and justice, liberal, contemporary universities today are generally unable to create similar spaces (MacAllister, 2016). This is why he draws attention to the need for current universities to take responsibility for educating students to deal with conflict and accept disagreement (MacIntyre, 1990). With regard to university staff, their role is to encourage students to think critically about their own traditions of inquiry as well as rival points of view. But why do we need to value conflict between different thinkers and moral traditions in the university? MacIntyre (1990, p. 231) answers that it is to ‘both exhibit what is mistaken in that rival standpoint in the light of the understanding afforded by one’s own point of view and in order to test out and retest the central theses advanced from one’s own point of view against the strongest possible objections to them’. MacIntyre’s idea that universities ought to support students in reading and critically questioning canonical texts from their own tradition and culture as well as those of others is an interesting one and fundamental in the context of the present study.

Having considered the relationships between tradition, rationality and justice as set out in MacIntyre’s writings, we can see that there are several important aspects which reflect on Western societies in the concept of tradition as set out in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988). The most important question for the present study is how far this definition of tradition can be understood in Islamic societies as well as Christian ones, and in particular how it can help critical thought about today’s university education in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi universities certainly share a canonical text that is read at university and that informs public debate in the country, but, as we shall see, what Saudi universities do not tend to promote is rational questioning and debate about the religious texts that underpin the Saudi tradition. Nor do they systematically encourage students to read or question texts from other traditions of inquiry, either.

3.4 Talal Asad

What, then, are the current perceptions of the concept of tradition amongst the Muslim community, especially with regard to Saudi society? As a community, all Muslims believe that the fundamental sources guiding their whole life and their social life are based on the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*. Since this is the case, the question arises as to where the diversities within Muslim community lie, if they have followed the same religious sources in their life. This question will be addressed in the following section.

Understanding the concept of “tradition” can be a useful gateway toward answering the question posed above. While MacIntyre draws on the concept of tradition within western culture, Talal Asad (1986), in his paper "The Idea of An Anthropology of Islam," attempts to understand the notion of "traditions" in an Islamic context. Introducing the debate around the "Anthropology of Islam". He argues that although several orientalist scholars have explained the anthropology of Islam, there is no adequate or obvious meaning of an anthropological or ethnographic framework in Islam (1986). Asad believes that, in fact, anthropology cannot be separated from Islam itself because all Muslim believers think that Islam integrates coherently in each part of the religious and social aspects of their lives. It follows therefore, according to Asad (1986, p. p. 14):

If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*.

Islam, in Asad's (1986) view, is a coherent structure composed of faith, morals, customs and values that enable Islam not just to have a local impact, but a universal one. Asad suggests that the best approach to understanding the anthropology of Islam is to study Islam as a “tradition”. Hence, understanding this theoretical dimension of the anthropology of Islam requires rethinking the formulation of traditional and Islamic concepts and accepting the principle of the concept of a "discursive tradition" (Asad, 1986).

Asad (1986: p.14), here, identifies the meaning of tradition, which is in line with MacIntyre's (1981) definition, stating that tradition "consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history". In this definition Asad classifies these discourses into three periods of time: in the past, when the inherited practice became the exact scale for the knowledge and proper practice; in the present, as regards how these practices can be addressed within the social system and linked with formal and informal institutions; and in the future, in the possibility of securing, amending or abandoning this practice (MacIntyre, 1981).

The past and future practices of Islam relate to the holy texts from the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, and the Islamic discourse relates to Muslims' debates in interpreting and assimilating these practices and beliefs. The difference is that the holy texts are constant while Islamic discourse is flexible and animated, according to the present tradition of common practices. Study of past Islamic discourse does not need to mean repeating the traditional practices in the present, but to study the past to find out its relation to present practices (Asad, 1986). Thus, the discursive tradition of Islam "is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present" (1986: p. 14).

Asad's analysis is that while Islamic societies aspire to coherence by releasing the traditions from any inherent restrictions, the practices in Islamic societies might not be homogenous, but vary depending on the differences of the time and place of the Islamic discourse, as well as differences in the social, economic, historical, and political conditions of each society (1986). In his view, if anthropologists want to understand the anthropology of Islam they need to not just take into account all those conditions and the aim of coherence, but, also, "anthropologists interested in Islam need to rethink their object of study, and the concept of tradition will help in this task" (1986: p. 17). Thus, Asad employs the thinking of MacIntyre and suggests that the Islamic tradition ought to be regarded as historically situated as well as concerned with current practice.

3.5 Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazali

Having identified the concept of Islamic tradition, as a framing through which dialogue might be understood, it then becomes possible to explore critically its contribution to thinking about dialogue. In connection with re-thinking dialogical practice in Saudi universities, a tradition-informed analysis will initially, at least, seek to identify resources within the on-going Islamic tradition that might be drawn upon in relation to such practice. One thinker who has exercised enormous influence within Islamic discursive traditions is that of Al-Ghazali, and dialogue is a key thematic within his writings.

Al-Ghazali in the late age is considered one of the most popular thinkers among Muslim Sunni scholars. The importance of his vision is that he constituted a new school in Islamic thought that concentrated on the practices of Islamic theory. For the past nine centuries, Al-Ghazali's ideas have influenced Islamic intellectual output because they combine Islamic law (*Shari'a*), history, and education.

Al-Ghazali began seeking knowledge in early childhood, becoming a teacher who moved between various large and small schools until he was called to be a professor in the university in Baghdad. Until the end of the eleventh century he dedicated his life to teaching and educating. Despite reaching this position, al-Ghazali underwent a "spiritual crisis" in that period (Lemcio and Williams, 2015, p. 184), which had a significant impact on his subsequent thought and life. Some of the intellectual conflicts appeared subsequently in his writings. One of the most famous of these is *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)*. Written in the late 11th century, in this book he addressed and challenged all the contradictions he identified in the thoughts of philosophers of the time such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Farabi (Alpharabius) about God (*Allah*) and the universe, as well as faith and theology (MacIntyre, 2009, Lemcio and Williams, 2015).

At the beginning of 12th century Al-Ghazali suddenly decided to abandon teaching. He found himself unable to give speeches: "God shrivelled my tongue until I was prevented

from giving instruction. So I used to force myself to teach on a particular day for the benefit of my various pupils, but my tongue would not utter a single word” (Bowker, 1978, p.193). Instead, he set out to discover what was beyond the knowledge which had initially led him to the stage of certainty, in search of spiritual stability (Lemcio and Williams, 2015).

While Al-Ghazali relinquished his position in teaching, he did not leave the field of education but instead began a life of contemplation and writing. In this phase of isolation, the first text he wrote was to become famous. *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm Al-dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)*, a product of the long years spent in teaching (Lemcio and Williams, 2015), paying attention to issues of education, ethics, mysticism, jurisprudence and faith, supporting "the very materials used by his predecessors, such as verses of the *Qur’an*; prophetic reports (*AHadith*); philosophical, legal, and theological discourses; and the narratives of mystics." (Moosa, 2005, p. 38). This book holds great appeal to a large segment of Muslims (Lemcio and Williams, 2015), but has also faced a variety of criticisms, mainly directed at the mystical element which is prominent in this book (Al-Shami, 1993).

At the end of this period of isolation, al-Ghazali wrote "*al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*" (Deliverance from Error), which reflects the maturity and spiritual stability that he achieved. The primary motivation for al-Ghazali in writing this book, as stated in its introduction, is to show the correct path to God (*Allah*), based on the intellectual and spiritual conflicts he had faced. Indeed, the main question for al-Ghazali was how to avoid doubt right up to the final choices of truth, certainty, and final ratification (MacIntyre, 2009, Lemcio and Williams, 2015). He concluded that the correct path did not reside in theology, nor in philosophy, neither in educational doctrine; rather,

the solution to his existential and intellectual quandaries was to cease searching for solutions that could be reached intellectually, but to seek solutions by actually "tasting" what God is like through mystical experience. In this abandonment of the purely mental struggle of what can be grasped by

the mind for the fuller experience of truth that can be absorbed by the whole person lies the crux of al-Ghazali's life, and in many important respects the crux of Islam (Lemcio and Williams, 2015, p. 185).

The two books discussed above are considered as al-Ghazali's most important works, because they relate to the different intellectual and spiritual stages of his life, reflecting his journey from spiritual conflict to isolation and finally to mysticism and spiritual stability, prompting scholars to call al-Ghazali 'an enigmatic and agonistic figure' (Moosa, 2005, p. 35). Nonetheless, he left a non-totalitarian legacy of knowledge and intellect, which some see as representing a key intellectual and scientific leap in the Islamic intellectual tradition (Moosa, 2005). Therefore, there are powerful reasons for engaging with his thinking in relation to traditions of thinking and the encounter with heterogeneous knowledge traditions.

With regard to the ambiguity of al-Ghazali's thought, Moosa (2005), in reviewing Ibn Rushd's opinion about al-Ghazali, discusses as an example a famous debate between the two thinkers. After the debate, al-Ghazali described the discussions that he had with Ibn Rushd as constructive, while Ibn Rushd described them as offensive (Moosa, 2005). Ibn Rushd's main criticism of al-Ghazali was that he was a man of many parts who was non-traditional in his thought and was diverse and volatile "who pretended to be an Asharī when he was with theologians of that stripe, a mystic with the ṣūfīs, and a philosopher with philosophers" (Moosa, 2005: 39).

Al-Ghazali did not see intellect and thought as limited or restricted, and that is what made him such a prolific generator of ideas that have opened up the consideration of multiple concepts throughout the centuries into the modern era (Moosa, 2005). The openness of al-Ghazali's thinking was bounded by the principal sources (*Qur'an* and *Sunnah*), while other philosophers believe that there is no boundary at all (MacIntyre, 2009; Lemcio and Williams, 2015). So, what is the difference here? What was al-Ghazali doing? Within that boundary of a tradition of thinking, al-Ghazali used the method of opening enquiries and questions "and sought to provide answers to his dilemmas and challenges as to what kind

of Muslim subjectivity was required in order to create a new knowledge for his time” (Moosa, 2005: p. 39). What we can say is that the difference was that his approach opened the spaces of debate, resulting in a ‘critical tension brought about by dialogical thinking’ (Moosa, 2005, p. 34).

From the previous discussion, a question is raised about al-Ghazali’s thought: what resources does this particular thinker offer? According to Moosa (2005, p. 39) he “was a frontier thinker” offering unique concepts that opened up the possibility of diversity of thought and multiple narratives: “*dihlīz*”, as an interspace (Moosa, 2005), a Persian word Arabized and meaning “that space between the door and the house.” (Moosa, 2005, p. 48). al-Ghazali uses this word in "*al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*" (*Deliverance from Error*) in a very well-known phrase among Muslim scholars, which is: “‘And whatever precedes it is like a threshold for the seeker of God [*Wa mā qabla dhālika ka al-dihlīz li al-sālik ilayhi*]” (Moosa, 2005, p. 48). Used in the context of explaining the relationship between the Muslim mystic and his God (*Allah*), it is also used to explain that there are a variety of ways of meeting in a single space in order to reach to God (*Allah*). It is also used in other ways, as a ‘spatial metaphor [that] signifies a multitude of meanings’ (Moosa, 2005, p. 48). So what are these indications and metaphors and how might the concept of “*dihlīz*” be resourceful in thinking about dialogue?

Moosa (2005) provides an in-depth interpretation of the word "*dihlīz*" showing its relevance to al-Ghazali's thought in general and dialogical thinking in particular. Firstly, Moosa (2005) explains that this concept could be considered as a reflection of al-Ghazali's thought, in the sense that intellectual dialogues must combine both fundamentals and constants. In this description, Moosa likens al-Ghazali's mind (using a geographical metaphor) to one that borders "between sovereign territories and criminalizes improper crossing without authorization. But it also compels one to choose. A person invariably falls on one side of the border" (Moosa, 2005, p. 47). However, at the same time, he is a person “prepared to straddle a no-man’s-land” (Moosa, 2005, p. 47), in order that a convergence and meeting might become possible in a common area. It appears, then, that while there is a border, there is also the strong possibility of finding a meeting point, a

middle space at the threshold, if only one undertakes the (discursive and existential) work necessary to attain this.

Using an architectural metaphor, Moosa (2005) conceives the location of that threshold as having entrances, doors, and being surrounded by rooms. In Moosa's (2005, p. 48) words:

it is the critical intermediate space between outside and inside, between exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*). It is also the space that one has to traverse in order to enter or exit, which is the real function of a threshold area.

Furthermore, one of the main purposes of that space is to allow the house residents to see from inside to outside properly, and prevent the people outside from seeing the inside of the house from outside easily and directly.

Another function of the *dihlīz* is that it is a space in which people who come in from outside can be received by the residents and given a warm welcome (Moosa, 2005). In this case, the threshold is not "a border that serves as a territorial demarcation between sovereign territories and criminalizes improper crossing" (Moosa, 2005: p. 48). At the same time, it is a space in which authorization can be sought to access appropriately with high tact and in a disciplined manner, the people living in the house or passing in the street (Moosa, 2005). It is also a space which can be both private for the residents and public for strangers, as well "fram[ing] all other spaces" (Moosa, 2005, p. 49).

For the purpose of this section, it can be said that the concept of "*dihlīz*" has become "a new locus of epistemic and political enunciation" (Moosa, 2005, p. 49). According to Moosa (2009), the concept of *dihlīz*, based on al-Ghazali's thought, can be summarised in three points: a space of starting and finishing ideas; a locus of the enunciation and creation of texts; and a place of drawing the standards of the liminal. Moreover, "it lends itself to non-totalitarian modes of being and thought." (Moosa, 2005, p. 49).

Through the previous discussion, whilst Moosa (2005) notes that the *dihlīz* is itself a spatial metaphor, deriving from the vestibule for entrance to a building, it does not, as

mobilised within Ghazali's philosophy, engage the socio-material dimensions of learning. For these dimensions of change it is necessary to look elsewhere, to more recent writings within socio-material traditions of thinking that engage the empirical with the philosophical. Al-Ghazali here may represent the empirical side in which he was an example of how to engage in dialogues within the specific traditions at that time. Therefore, from studying al-Ghazali's thought, it appears that there are three main axes:

1. defining and drawing the boundaries of the dialogue which respect the constants and fundamentals as well as the branches and issues of debate; and
2. moderation or the middle between different opinions, as the *dihlīz*, which is in the middle space of the entrance of the house; and
3. ethics and morals in dealing with entry and exit, and, on the other side, the facilitating contact between those who are outside of the house and the residents or between the residents and the people outside.

Thus, these three points: borders, moderation and morality, may be reflected in an approach to dialogical thinking and be considered as the criteria for successful dialogical interaction in dialogical activities in Islam.

3.6 Dialogical Thinking in Islam

Dialogical interactions between people are framed by different traditions operating within the cultural contexts which the dialogue embraces. This can explain why the culture of dialogue can be understood differently from one society to another. The main question here is how is 'tradition' to be understood in Muslim and Arab culture? In Arabic, there is no exact equivalent translation of the term 'tradition' itself. The nearest equivalent is religion (*dīn*), paralleling the western category of 'religion' (Moosa, 2005), which can bring with it very conservative understandings of creed. Thus, appeal to 'tradition', within some Islamic contexts, might unwittingly align discourse with approaches that severely limit dialogical possibilities.

In Saudi Arabia, the community is, in many respects, a ‘mono-cultural society’ in which the whole population follows the same Islamic religion, uses one language, has one government and one religious institution. At the same time, the country has had a prominent role in international affairs from the establishment of the first Saudi state in 1744 up to the present, where it is well known as an Islamic and Arabic state (Wagemakers et al., 2012). Moreover, the location of the country is where the revelation was sent down to the Muslims' messenger, Muhammad (PBUH), and the location of the two holy mosques for all Muslims throughout the world. Thus, dialogue, in a country like Saudi Arabia, is framed by the religion of Islam; Saudi society is inextricably linked to the rules of Islam and its citizens are likely to be accepting of those rules, and more satisfied about its sources: the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. These considerations may lead us to understand that the culture of dialogue in this context will be somewhat different from that in many other countries.

Dialogue, for Muslims, concentrates on innate dispositions, social interactions, interfaith connections and respect for diversity. In Islam, one of the goals of engaging in dialogue is simply to help resolve conflicts between groups, but this is not its only goal. Dialogue is a major part of Islamic culture, so Muslims look upon dialogue as a human interaction, one of the natural habits of everyday life. Thus, interaction is required between different groups, whether the groups are similar or different in faiths and ideologies, in order to improve relationships among people (Kurucan and Erol, 2012).

Asad (1986) draws attention to some of the defining features of discursive traditions that come under the umbrella of Islam. A critical factor informing all such conversations is the foundational importance attached, as we have seen, to both the Qu'ran and *Sunnah* (*Sayings of the Prophet* (PBUH)). In the section that follows, an illustration is given as to how these texts have been interpreted by scholars in relation to dialogical principles and practice.

Qur'an verses and *Sunnah* statements support a number of the principles identified above, in relation to dialogue. For example, in *the Qur'an*, Allah the Exalted says;

{O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is Knowing and Acquainted.} (49:13)

This verse is a kind of invitation to all people of the world to be united. This can be detected through the phrase "know one another" and has been explained by Altwaijri (1999) who said that the meaning of "know one another" (acquaintance) in this verse will extend to include cooperation, conjunction, coexistence, and all forms of positive joint humanitarian work, and this is the greatest objective of dialogue.

Furthermore, Islam describes and defines some ideological terminology and thus believing in Islam makes people less inclined to think in axioms; for example, most philosophical conversations revolve around theology and existential concepts, which in Islam are propounded in the *Qur'an* (Holy Book) and *Sunnah* (speech of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH). When valuable answers come from these sources, many of the queries and vague concepts will become clear within a dialogical process - which may contribute to reducing conflict and increasing the likelihood of mutual understanding. With this in mind, while the Prophet of Islam is Muhammad (PBUH), the Islamic faith invites Muslims to believe in other Prophets such as Jesus and Moses. Hence, Muslims are required to interact with other religions and the best approach for doing so is through dialogue (Kurucan and Erol, 2012).

In *the Qur'an*, also, *Allah* the Exalted says;

{Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you – that we will not worship except God and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of God.} (3: 63)

This is another invitation from the *Qur'an*, albeit a slightly different one. In the previous verse, the invitation was for all people to be closer to each other and to be more acquainted with and connected to one another generally. However, in this verse the invitation is for

Muslims to open channels of dialogue with people of the Scripture, and in all *Qur'anic* interpretation (Altwaijri, 1999), the people of the Scripture are the Jews and Christians. Thus, it is a kind of motivation for Muslims to have good relationships and dialogue, as well as to be open to people from other religions, while keeping their Muslim identity and their beliefs. In *the Qur'an*, Allah the Exalted says;

{But if they turn away, then say, “Bear witness that we are Muslims [submitting to Him].} (3: 63)

From those verses, it would seem that Islam calls upon Muslims to engage and communicate with the larger global community, with the religious community at the second level, and, consequently and naturally, within the small community that follows the same religion, which is Islam. At the same time, as mentioned in the previous verses, Islam has framed those calls to engagement, openness, and dialogue with no separation between Muslims, their ideologies, faith and culture. That may explain why Islamic dialogue is surrounded by certain boundaries and restrictions.

In Islam, for dialogical activity to achieve its objectives, many points need to be considered and it is essential for these to be known and respected by interlocutors. As Bawazeer (2010) emphasises, these are ‘assets’ that comprise the principles, rules, and regulations that control the interlocutors and inform the operation of a given dialogue. Furthermore, they assist listeners and beneficiaries engaging in a dialogue in making decisions regarding the closeness of these interlocutors to the correct way of thinking, depending on religion, culture, and ethics. When these assets are not respected, the dialogue will have no benefit and will not achieve the desired outcome, subsequently leading to controversy, the inverse of successful dialogue. Hence, it is important to identify some of the assets of dialogue in Islamic culture.

Comparing this with Al-Ghazali’s thoughts on dialogical thinking, it can be noted that there are some boundaries that need to be taken into account when undertaking dialogic activities in Islam. There are two essential principles for a successful dialogue in Islamic culture: respect for the constants of Islam and observance of Islamic ethics, in general,

and dialogic ethics in particular. These two principles are similar, to some extent, to those main axioms detected by Moosa (2005) in the concept of '*dihlīz*' in Al-Ghazali's thought.

In terms of respecting the constants of Islam in dialogue, it is necessary to consider religious constants and the principles of the Islamic faith, which might, in this instance, render some topics as inappropriate for discussion. If that happens, it is thought that the discussion will help turn dialogue into conflict and the resulting debate will be sterile (Zamzami, 2002). The greatest constant for all Muslims and in Islamic faith is God (*Allah*). In this constant, all believers in Islam must believe in God (*Allah*), He is the only one, and there is no God except He, and

When the pronoun "He" is used to refer to God, of course it carries no gender connotations. God is beyond such classification and the question is one of linguistic usage which is both limited and arbitrary (Hathout, 1995, p. 3).

And when reference is made to God (*Allah*), there is no doubt that God (*Allah*) is one God for all, Jews, Christian, and Muslims. MacIntyre (2009, p. 55) has interpreted who is the God in the scripture:

what scripture says about God is to be interpreted as well as understanding the conclusions of those sciences. About God we know that he is and what he is not. We know that he is because he revealed himself to the prophets and especially to Moses and because we have a proof that God exists, that he is one, and that he is not a body. The God whose existence is demonstrated is the prime mover of the physical universe as described by Aristotle. Yet, although we know that God exists, we can form no conception of his attributes. It is not just that our conception of them is inadequate, but that the very nature of God, rightly understood, is incompatible with his having attributes. So that whenever we do ascribe attributes to God—and we are authorized by biblical revelation to use certain attributive expressions in speaking of God—we are to understand what we say only as a set of denials,

denials that God is limited in the way that we are limited, in respect of his power, goodness, knowledge, and the like.

In Islam, the interpretation of God (*Allah*) is not at all different to what has been interpreted in the scripture. Hathout (1995, p. 3), replying to atheists' argument about God (*Allah*), explains that He is the creator of all of the creations in the universes;

If He is the Ultimate Creator, it follows that nothing could be "more" than Him in any respect, or else He would be "less" than something, He would have limits, and this would be incompatible with being the Ultimate One or the Primary Cause that philosophy refers to. His dimensions in all His attributes can be expressed in terms of infinity. Of course, we cannot comprehend what infinity really means, but we should acknowledge that this is only natural since we are finite, and the finite cannot comprehend the infinite ... God is therefore infinite. He therefore can comprehend us although we, by our finitude, cannot comprehend Him, and we know about Him by knowing His signs and manifestations through His creation. And since infinity cannot be divided by two or three or more (a mathematical fact), it follows that there cannot be God for Jews, another for Christians, another for Muslims, another for Hindus and yet another for the Godless, etc. God is One! It is this Oneness of God that is at the root of the Islamic faith and the belief of Muslims.

Thus, in MacIntyre (2009) and Hathout's (1995) accounts, God is one and has no body, His great attributes are infinite and unlimited and cannot be known except through clear and explicit revelation to the prophets: Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad and other prophets (peace be upon all of them). It is also clear that there are two important things about God (*Allah*): His attributes can be described only by revelation, and the details of belief, legislation, and religion are conveyed to us by prophecy and through revelation.

However, any discussion about God (*Allah*) without any clear and explicit evidence from the *Qur'an* or *Sunnah* (revelation) could lead to disagreement and conflicts, which may

explain why conflicts exist between people, especially between Muslims, when they have to discuss that point. Lemcio and Williams (2015, pp. 182-183) describe the case of Ahmad ibn Hanbal who was punished for his resistance to the radical movements which sought to undermine the authority of the *Qur'an* and how the discussion about constants can lead to disagreement and dissension:

Such groups of conservative thinkers often looked back to the ninth century scholar Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), whose resistance to more radical developments had earned him a whipping and imprisonment. The main group opposing him [...] they championed the use of reason in the interpreting the *Qur'an* and drawing out the possibilities implicit in its teachings. Thus, with regard to the anthropomorphisms, such as God's hand being outstretched or his being seated on his throne, they insisted that these could not be taken literally because they risked similarity between God and human beings and must therefore be interpreted metaphorically: God's "hand" was his grace, and his "being seated" on his throne denoted his supreme power. More than this, they inferred from their definition of the absolute oneness of God that the *Qur'an* could not be eternal because it would then be a second eternal entity alongside God. This made the Scripture less of an absolute authority for theological minds to contend with or for rulers to have to obey. In fact, the caliph of the day made it official policy that anyone seeking public office must affirm the createdness of the *Qur'an*. It was Ibn Hanbal's disagreement with this principle that earned him his punishments.

It is really important to provide this story here. It shows how dialogue can become sedition and lead to division within the society. In fact, any verses in the *Qur'an* about God (*Allah*) should not be interpreted through speculation but by reference to the *Qur'an* itself or the *Sunnah*. Thus, Hathout (1995, pp. 41-42) states that the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* are the main sources of the *Shari'a* in Islam and:

The *Qur'an* deals with a full range of issues ranging from the establishment of the creed ... The Sunna sometimes explains the *Qur'an*, illustrates it, details some generalities and complements it in some areas.

Consequently, it is not allowed for anyone to interpret any verse of the *Qur'an* or the *Sunnah* about the creed, especially regarding God (*Allah*) or divulging anything about God (*Allah*), except that which is mentioned clearly and directly in both the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, "because this is something beyond the ability of ordinary people, and it could lead them into confusion and dispute" (Lencio and Williams, 2015, p. 184). Moreover, the engagement of the participants in dialogue with regard to creed, without enough knowledge of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, will lead to a situation in which:

[The people's] complaints and doubts will multiply, making it difficult for a human to control them. For it is not for everyone that [the acquisition] of divine wisdom is facilitated (Avicenna, 2009, p. 366).

This kind of multiplication of doubts and intellectual activity can create divisions between the interlocutors and the Muslim community. This division could lead to the establishment of extremist groups, one group on the right side and the second group on the left, and here, ethics will be the other essential principle, besides respect for the constants of Islam.

The topic of moderation in dialogue is one of the most active areas of ethics and morality in Islam. In *the Qur'an*, *Allah* the Exalted confirmed that the Muslim Nation is a moderate nation;

{And thus We have made you a median community.} (2: 143)

In this verse, *Allah* the Exalted explains that the Islamic nation is a nation of moderation. Religious scholars who study the *Qur'an* have suggested several interpretations of the words "median community". Hanapi (2014, p. 54) summarises these interpretations as follows:

it is clear that the term *wasata* (the middle between two extremes) means the chosen, the best, being fair, humble, moderate, *istiqamah* (to go straight into the right direction, acting rightly, allowing no deviation), follow the teachings of Islam, not extreme to either end in matters pertaining worldly or the after-life, spiritual or corporeal but should be balanced between the two ends.

In other words, what is essential is not to be at one end and reject the other, but rather, to be in the middle between two opinions in dialogue. MacIntyre (2009) and Hanapi (2014) describe this location as "a norm between two extremes" (p. 56), or "a position between two extremes" (p. 54). Islam is not the only religion to emphasise moderation. MacIntyre (2009, p.56) makes a connection between moderation and virtue as a path on which people can walk in the middle between two extremes;

In general ben Maimon follows Aristotle in conceiving of a moral virtue as a norm between two extremes, as, for example, liberality is the mean between extravagance and stinginess, and courage the mean between rashness and cowardliness. Aristotle had nonetheless emphasized that with regard to some traits we are required to move toward one extreme and away from the other, and ben Maimon makes the same point, especially with regard to the putting off of pride and the cultivation of humility.

Thus, moderation, in Islam, is not just an ethical principle but can be a producer of virtues. Moderation can help instil noble values such as honesty, loyalty, generosity, kindness, leniency, compassion, justice and equity. Moderation also means treating people kindly, recognising the rights of others, whether or not they are of the same religion, race, sect or ancestry (Hanapi, 2014), and having fine a high standard of behaviour which is reflected in the most appropriate words and acts. Being moderate should not be limited to attitudes when amongst Muslims or to those with whom there is philosophical, cultural and intellectual agreement. Rather, it should be the basis of a Muslim's dealings with all

people, as by treating them kindly we are following *Allah* the Exalted's commandment to do good, as it is stated in *the Qur'an*;

{O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for God, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear God; indeed, God is Acquainted with what you do.} (5: 8)

Thus, morality and virtue are the main results of moderation in dialogical thinking, as explained by Moosa (2005), in connection with al-Ghazali's thought and the concept of '*dihliz*', as well as by MacIntyre (2009). Mubarak (2012) cites al-Ghazali's emphasis on the morality principle in his book of *Minhaj al-'abidin (The way of worshippers)*, where morality is stated as the right path to be closer to God (*Allah*). Mubarak (2012) provides an in-depth analysis of the morality of Al-Ghazali; al-Ghazali emphasises that all human beings need to acquire the potential virtues that can be transformed into good behaviour. Al-Ghazali describes the best way to achieve this, which is for people to learn how to diagnose the behaviours and distinguish between the virtues and the vices, as well as practising the good behaviours so that they become habits (Mubarak, 2012).

At the same time, MacIntyre (2009, p. 56) makes a similar suggestion, based on the writings of Aristotle and citing Maimon:

To acquire moral virtue is, as Aristotle says, to have become habituated. "Know that these moral virtues and vices are acquired and firmly established in the soul by frequently repeating the actions pertaining to a particular moral habit over a long period of time and becoming habituated to them. If those actions are good, we shall acquire the virtue; if they are bad, we shall acquire the vice" (Maimon 1975, 68).

Therefore, based on the above discussions, it can be recognised that moderation is a core concept of Islam. Moderation, virtue, morality and behaviour are an integrated and comprehensive approach to reform the individual and to solve all the Muslim community's

demands and problems, which, in turn, influence dialogical activities both directly and indirectly. All this suggests that there is an important place for the practice of Islam “in a balanced and comprehensive manner in all aspects of life and society by focusing on improving the quality of human life (Hanapi, 2014, p. 55).

The education system can be regarded as an appropriate field for educating the population in how to achieve balance in their life, and how to engage in the operation of dialogue and dialogical activities, bearing in mind their culture and tradition. Balance is a concept that seeks to develop people’s consciousness, not individually but by interaction with others within the society; as Bakhtin (1984) claims, exchanging different perspectives, dialogue and interaction between people, can lead to the development of consciousness, whether individually or collectively, something that monologue cannot do. Although Bakhtin concentrated on the concept of dialogue, his thinking focused upon human interaction and was not primarily concerned with a specific tradition within which the dialogical activity takes place.

For change to come about in any society, understanding the tradition within which such dialogical practice takes place is essential. MacIntyre (1981; 1988) focused on the concept of tradition and its arguments reflect ways in which a society accepts or rejects different and new concepts based on the fundamental principles that have been agreed upon. MacIntyre argued that this in the context of western culture and Scottish universities, and the roles of the educated public towards understanding themselves and their community. Thus, the context he provided in which to discuss the importance of addressing tradition is very particular, and different from other communities in general, and, specifically, different from the Islamic community.

In Muslim society, as we have seen, the discursive tradition depends on the *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah (Hadiths)* (Asad, 1986). These sources, which are composed of a creed, morals, virtues, and values, are considered as a coherent frame for the religion of Islam. According to that, the discursive tradition could be changed from the past to the present time. This change might create a space for a debate between conservative voices who

claim to adhere to the founding texts of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, and other voices who want to deal with these texts free from any restrictions. On the other hand, differences in time and place require changes in the discursive tradition and releasing the traditions from restrictions that are judged to be unnecessary. This could, of course, cause conflict and dissension, which may then require the presence of religious dialogue between members of the Muslim community to reduce the resulting gap.

Al-Ghazali is a good example of a scholar who adheres well to the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* and at the same time participated in a great debate with Ibn Rushd and others. Moosa (2005) explains al-Ghazali's thought and how al-Ghazali engaged in a process of posing questions and seeking answers, a process which ultimately led to his openness to other thinkers and to holders of different views. As explained above, the concept of '*dihlīz*' captures and distils a key facet in al-Ghazali's thinking (Moosa, 2009). The concept of *dihlīz* shows that there are many doors surrounding an empty space, composed of the main door of the house which links the outside and inside. So, while al-Ghazali followed and was restricted by the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, he was also open to other thinkers who surrounded him at that time.

These restrictions are, firstly, respect for the constants of religion and creed, especially with regard to God (*Allah*), the body of God (*Allah*), and His attributes, as well as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the revelation that descended upon him. The other restriction to take into account is maintaining moderation and ethics, which help individuals to act justly, and honestly, guiding them to the right behaviours in a balanced way.

The more important question here is about the possibility of converting this conceptual theoretical framework into real educational practices in religious education in the university in Saudi Arabia. Currently, the problem is that university curriculums are based on one textbook for each course and do not involve dialogue; this is particularly true of religious education. A re-think within Saudi university education may be required that involves inserting some dialogical activities which, whilst taking into account Islamic

tradition, Saudi culture and Islamic fundamentals and constants, are at the same time open to other cultures.

3.7 Conclusion

It was desirable to engage with a variety of theorists in relation to dialogue since each emphasizes different elements or dimensions whilst also having points of connection and commonality. So, for example, there are continuities between Buber's understanding of the '*I and It*' relationship and Bakhtin's understanding of monologue in so far as in relational terms there is no possibility of reciprocity or mutual exchange within this type of communication. However, such a connection does not exhaust either theory since, for example, Bakhtin's theory of monologue also has a discursive dimension in regard to an inherent restriction on the number and range of texts, whereas Buber tends to focus instead, upon the relational dynamic. Furthermore, extending the range of theorists to include Freire contextualises dialogue in relation to education specifically, and as we have seen, MacIntyre enables a focus upon the distinctive refraction that tradition brings in its focus upon development of a particular narrative through time, in response to new challenges and situations. The translation of such discourse in relation to Islamic traditions in particular, is effected through Assad's work that emphasises continuities and development through time; past, present, and future. Finally Al-Ghazali is an exemplar of dialogical practice within the Islamic tradition whose work testifies to the possibility of combining a tradition centred approach with more open dialogical practice. In his case, such an openness to difference was combined with both a respect for the Qu'ran and Sunna, other Islamic foundational texts, and deeply rooted in the practice of his tradition.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the case study methodology of this study is explored in detail with reference to the data collection, analytical procedures and findings, which are presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. This chapter explains how the methodology was selected as the most suitable for addressing the chosen research objectives and questions.

From the previous chapters, we can agree that dialogue is one kind of interaction between people who may differ in religion, ideology, culture and/or language. By its means the people in one society or different societies can exchange knowledge and experiences in order to gain a deeper integration, one which is constructed on the principles of free thinking and peace. However, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia differences of knowledge and experience are less common, because Saudi Arabia is a 'mono-cultural society' in which the majority of the population follows one religion, uses one language, and has one government.

Understanding the culture of dialogue in such a community and in one of its universities may require a specific methodology that affords a description of the character of its culture of dialogue. Hence, a qualitative case study methodology was thought appropriate to understand what the culture of dialogue means to this society and this university. It was hoped that this methodology, by directly engaging with Saudi people, would help to attain the study's objectives and answer its questions in the context of Islamic and governmental regulations in the university and elsewhere.

Therefore, this project began by investigating and reporting on the implementation of dialogue and its culture in the educational context of the use of a particular university textbook on religious education. Many relevant aspects were addressed, such as the concept of dialogue, the traditions of Saudi society, the community's values and its

virtues, as well as the university textbooks used for religious education, and the university environment. The main point was to find how dialogue could be developed through activities taking place in the context of Saudi culture, its higher education policy, the university educational activities and regulations, and the relations between the academic teachers and students.

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and methods used. Brewer (2000) explains the difference between methodology and method, stating that methodology is “the broad theoretical and philosophical framework into which the rules and procedures fit” (Brewer, 2000, p. 3), whereas methods follow “merely technical rules, which lay down the procedures for how reliable and objective knowledge can be obtained.” (Brewer, 2000; p. 2). Below, I first describe the theoretical framework and approach of this research and then, having outlined this methodology, I then describe the methods used in this investigation.

4.2 Aims

In teaching classes in Islamic Education and supervising the students who specialise in this area in their teacher-training course in the Faculty of Education at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, I have noted some disturbing evidence. For one thing, the outline of the syllabus for each module of the course is always based on a single reference book, to which all the teachers and students are expected to adhere. Moreover, only a few teachers are skilled in the teaching methods which promote dialogue or give the students a chance to discuss their queries. These points were supported by the results of studies showing that Religious Education teachers rarely allow learners enough opportunities to speak or discuss in the classroom (Al Malki, 2004). Another study shows that there is increasingly less room in the content of high school textbooks in *Hadith* and Islamic culture for developing the cognitive aspect of a creative renewal of tradition or the ability to engage in dialogue and offer constructive criticism (Al Dousary, 2004). In published research, a study of Saudi

culture finds only a weak to semi-strong capacity to use dialogue as a means of communication between people (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2005). This research suggests that many people need more training and education before they can engage in dialogue.

Popular and official claims have been made that the culture of dialogue is being spread, but when I tried to discover university religious textbooks that supported these claims I could find none. The present study may, therefore, be the first to check such claims and could serve as a starting point to address these issues. It seeks to suggest the kinds of activity that could form part of a religious education course, particularly 'Islamic Culture', that would meet society's religious, intellectual and security needs, as well as the expectations of the state and the perceived needs of society.

In this project, the principal aim is to empirically investigate current understandings of dialogue within a Saudi university context and, in the light of this, to determine ways forward that might further promote the practice of dialogue. From this aim, there are three specific objectives, namely, to determine:

- 1- which theories of dialogue can inform a rethinking of religious education in the Saudi University context
- 2- the current situation with regard the practice of dialogue within Saudi University context
- 3- the practices that can best promote capacities for dialogue within Saudi University spaces

In order to achieve these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1- How do university teachers and students in a Saudi University understand and practice dialogue at the present time?

2- Having experienced a range of dialogue activities, how do the same University teachers and students evaluate these?

3- How might dialogue be further promoted in the Saudi University context within religious education?

To conclude, dialogue can be regarded as a cultural and social practice that seeks to promote understanding between different kinds of viewpoints, either between people within a single tradition (here, the Saudi tradition), or that between people within that tradition and those external to this. In the present study, understanding is sought through case study research into people's understandings and practices, to determine their background familiarity with dialogue. Government officials, academic teachers and students were the intended participants in this study.

4.3 Epistemological Approach

The epistemological approach to methodology in this research is called "constructivism". It is a philosophical theory about the nature of knowledge and is considered an epistemological stance (Anderson et al., 2000). This philosophy focuses on people's interactions with one another and their experiences and works to understand the relationships involved in furthering human development from a sociocultural or socio-historical perspective and other situated cognitive perspectives (Brown et al., 1989; Newman et al., 1989; Rogoff, 1990; Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Constructivism seems to me an appropriate methodological approach to my project. The reason for this is that this research has to explain the multiple constructions of knowledge (Robson, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 2000) and the meaning of a culture of dialogue in the Saudi community, and specifically in the Saudi university and its textbooks. While this study focuses on the way that beliefs, values, practices and context can influence the religious dimension, these things can also influence the

historical and sociocultural dimensions of the construction of knowledge (Schwandt, 2000).

4.4 The Case Study

The project applies a qualitative and instrumental case study methodology. Despite the criticism of qualitative approaches as, perhaps, over-subjective (Bryman, 2008), lacking in reliability and validity (Silverman, 2006) and time-consuming (Berg, 2007), qualitative research serves several purposes in the present project; for example, it allows testing, theory generation, the creation of key concepts, description and reporting (Cohen et al, 2011).

Since this study investigates the case of the culture of dialogue in a specific community, a specific Saudi university, and a particular course, an instrumental type of case study is used. According to Stake (1994), Bryman (2008), and Simons (2009), case study research is concentrated on a particular, singular and unique case; a single community, school, organisation or person. One of the features of case study research is that it reports its relationship with “the real-life, complex dynamic and unfolding interaction of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 289). The aim of a case study is to understand social phenomena by studying events as they occur, in order to see what things look like from the different perspectives of those in authority and other “powerless and voiceless participants and the interaction between them” (Feagin et al., 1991).

A case study strategy that can be used in educational research was constructed by Bassegy (1999). He suggests that a case study is “a prime strategy for developing educational theory which illuminates educational policy and enhances educational practice” (Bassegy 1999, p. 3). He identifies three types of educational case study: theory-seeking and theory-testing, story-telling and picture-drawing, and evaluative. The present research project, according to Bassegy’s definition, is a “theory-testing” case study, among the “... particular studies of general issues – aiming to lead to fuzzy

propositions (more tentative) or fuzzy generalisations (less tentative) and conveying these, their context and the evidence leading them, to interested audiences” (Bassey 1999, p. 58).

In the scheme of possible case study strategies, my project focuses on a single and particular case. It concentrates on one organization; on one educational module, Islamic Culture; and evaluates the module’s achievement in one area, that of dialogue. This concept is treated as a framework for human interactions in the dynamic of everyday life, in which different phenomena may appear as a result of these interactions. A case study can discern in some depth the diversity of the participants’ perspectives, and hence of their reasoning.

Bassey’s design (1999) concentrates comprehensively on the three types of case study, which are: theory-seeking and theory-testing case study; story-telling case study; and evaluative case study, and theory-seeking and theory-testing could be an appropriate type of this study. However, the second part of my study is empirical, in which the research also looks, at educational practices in the classrooms where this educational project was undertaken. Therefore, this study does not seek *just* to test a theory, but *also* to collect and understand the practical perceptions of the case held by the participants, at the same time evaluating different practical ideas.

Hence Stake’s three-part identification of case studies (Stake, 1994) may be more relevant to the present project than Bassey’s (1999). His three types are: intrinsic case studies, to understand a particular case in question; instrumental case studies, for gaining a deeper vision of a theory or an issue after examining a single case; and collective case studies, for gaining a full conceptualisation from several studies illustrating a single case. These may help create new ideas for developing the university textbook. In addition, we may be able to understand different theories in the area from reviewing studies of dialogue and of curriculum design to show how to translate theory into practical ways of describing the relations between students and teachers, or among other groups of people as they engage in dialogue.

Case studies are not immune from criticism, but they have certain strengths. It is accepted that their results cannot be generalised to a population, and they may be

affected by the researcher's bias, they can be time consuming and it is difficult to use them in summarising and developing propositions. However, their strengths are that they can provide detailed information, new suggestions for research, and new in-depth perspectives from which high-quality suggestions can be drawn (Flyvbjerg, 2006; McLeod, 2008).

To reduce possible anxiety in using a case study model, Flyvbjerg (2006) reports one of its benefits in research as being the acknowledgement "that human behaviour cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule-governed acts found at the lowest levels of the learning process and in much theory" (p. 223). Bassey (1999) also writes that case studies can produce fuzzy generalizations, which consist of "qualified generalization, carrying the idea of possibility but no certainty" (Bryman, 2008, p. 46). Moreover, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that generalisations can be derived even when only a single case underlies them.

This debate about the shortcomings of the case study may persist when we are thinking about research validity. Flick (2006) suggests that in qualitative research the validity of the outcomes is directly linked to the design of the research. Here, the case study is a comprehensive strategy and method which covers the research design and data collection; it can include two or more methods, approaches to data analysis and ways of connecting the items of information that come from different methods of data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2008; Yin, 2003).

The topic of dialogue, as a cultural focus, and higher education as a location for studying it, can be treated as aspects of a realistic or naturalistic field. In this study, an essential point is to investigate people's behaviours in the wider Saudi community as well as those of teachers and students in the university regarding the practice of dialogue. For this reason, an instrumental case study may be the best approach to take, not only to explore the behaviours and the culture of dialogue as practiced by Saudi people, but also to study the meanings and understandings informing these practices. Moreover, conducting a case study of religious education in a Saudi university could help to understand the social phenomena of interactions by dialogue between teachers and students in the university. The methods of the present qualitative instrumental case

study are triangular. The study uses semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field notes from observations of university classes, which are intended to clarify the practices surrounding dialogue, the meanings informing these behaviours, and the social phenomena of the activities of dialogue between teachers and students.

4.5 Data collection methods

For a qualitative case study, Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that the minimum essential methods for data collection include semi-structured interviews (individual and group), observation, and documentary research. In this study, the methods of collecting data were:

- a) individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Saudi Government officials, to understand the situation of dialogue in the culture of Saudi Arabia; and
- b) semi-structured interviews by telephone with male and female teachers and students who teach and attend the ‘Islamic Culture’ module in the university where the case study is based.

The semi-structured interviews with government officials sought to understand the situation, social culture and public understanding of the culture of dialogue and to interpret different practices and the meaning of these behaviours.

The semi-structured interviews with academic teachers and students aimed to understand the culture of dialogue in the university environment, and in its classrooms in particular. In this method, questions were asked to find out how far dialogue was applied in classrooms and in the educational content of Islamic Studies; and to identify recommendations for adjustments to the university textbook that would familiarize students with the best conditions for dialogue and equip them to engage in it. Using semi-structured questions made the interviews and discussions more flexible for the

interviewees and enabled the interviewer to react to new and unexpected responses from the participants.

In addition, the classrooms of the 'Islamic Culture' course were observed. I engaged with teachers and students in the lessons by asking questions and introducing relevant points for discussion. In addition, a number of documents touching upon the issue of dialogue in Saudi Arabia were analysed. The documents were collected from a variety of sources at the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue in Saudi Arabia; journal articles, dialogue workshop papers, dialogue conference papers, dialogue magazines, and public opinion polls.

This research took place in one of the Saudi universities, where a case study could be conducted. Among the religious education courses, "Islamic Culture" (SLM101, SLM201, SLM301 and SLM401) comprised the sample that was chosen for inclusion in this study.

4.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are sources of data in this study. Interview data can effectively add to the suggestions for improving the curriculum and educational policy (Cohen et al., 2011). One of the advantages of interviews that Cohen et al. (2011) identify is that the data extracted from them is often more descriptive and specific. They reveal much about personal opinions, attitudes and emotions and thus indirectly tell us about the speaker's reality, which means that they are appropriate for my research; in fact, both respondents' practice and views offered key data that informed the analysis and conclusions reached (Cohen et al., 2011). Interviews can also disclose individual perspectives, tell realistic stories and illustrate subjective facts (Cohen et al., 2011).

A problem relating to interviews, however, is that of invalidity arising from bias (Cohen et al., 2011). Gillham (2000) showed that there is a possibility of discrepancies

between respondents' practices and their expressed views, beliefs and knowledge, especially in the case of teachers who say what they believe and know, but may contradict it by their practice in classrooms (Fang, 1996). To point up any such discrepancies, I compared the teachers' answers with the students' answers. I also compared all the respondents' answers to the activities that I had seen them practise in class, the interactions between the two groups, and their actual participation in dialogue.

For the semi-structured interview, some of the topics and open-ended questions have been prepared, but these were not always asked in the same sequence and the wording sometimes differed according to circumstance, as described by Kajornboon (2016, p. 5):

The researcher has a list of key themes, issues and questions to be covered. In this type of interview the order of the questions can be changed depending on the direction of the interview. An interview guide is also used, but additional questions can be asked.

Because I chose an instrumental case study, the research sample was non-random; I specifically selected male and female respondents who were associated with the writing of and/or teaching from the textbooks for the 'Islamic Culture' course, as well as the students who were enrolled. Moreover, some Saudi governmental officials gave interviews, among them some academic teachers in Saudi universities, one of whom was a University Principal, and three members of the Saudi government, the Saudi Ministers' Council or the Shura Council. I knew that these individuals were all very interested in dialogue, because they had written books on dialogue in society or had taken part in dialogue activities at the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue. Some had also contributed to the trustees' council or the administration of the Centre.

In line with some of the recommendations of authors who have written on research methods, I thought that 16 interviewees would make up a representative sample and therefore asked four governmental officials (OG), three male academic teachers (TM), three female academic teachers (TF), three male students (SM) and three female students (SF) to participate. It was difficult to arrange face-to-face interviews with all the respondents because all of them were in Saudi Arabia and there was little time to make appointments with most of them. In addition, religious and cultural factors prevented me, as a male, from interviewing females face-to-face. Therefore, telephone interviews were chosen, except for the interview with the OGs, as this approach saved time and increased the likelihood of the respondents' participation at a time which would suit them.

Any interview with a governmental official, however, had to be face-to-face, because of the high respect owed to those in a high position. It was not easy to meet them, but I made arrangements far enough in advance to respect their status and their busy schedules, and offered to meet them wherever they chose, in the office or at home. Before starting each interview, I made sure that every participant was content for the interview to be recorded and had read and signed a consent sheet.

When the interviews were finished, I transcribed the recordings and analysed them using coding to categorise and label the responses. This entailed giving "a name or label ... to a piece of text that contains an idea or a piece of information" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 559). Gibbs (2007) points out that written material is relatively easy to code and categorise. In this study all the transcribed interviews were coded and analysed. A final report was linked to the notes on my observations, together with the documentary research, and finally integrated with the theoretical framework of the study.

4.5.2 Observation

In an instrumental case study, applying observational methods is useful in a variety of ways. It gives researchers different ways of checking the verbal and non-verbal expression of the participants' feelings, the interactions exchanged, who engages and who does not; thus discovering how communication travels between the participants (Schmuck, 1997). Among the advantages of using observation, according to de Munck and Sobo (1998, p. 43), is that it provides access to the “backstage culture”. Robben and Sluka (2007) explain that, in observation, researchers are asked to immerse themselves in the target environment by themselves entering the places being researched, so as to construct in-depth notes of practices, interactions and phenomena that can be subsequently analysed. From such sources, a more plausible, and situated account can emerge. In this connection, deWalt and deWalt (2002, p. 92) maintain that:

the goal for the design of research using participant observation as a method is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study that is as objective and accurate as possible, given the limitations of the method.

This could yield access to richly detailed evidence which supports the exploration and interpretation of the “behaviours, intentions, situations and events” (de Munck and Sobo, 1998, p. 43); such an approach provides, in other words, many opportunities to observe and participate in everyday situations.

My main purpose was to see and understand what activities were taking place in the university classrooms where ‘Islamic Culture’ was being taught; I wanted to see whether the academic teachers and students in class did what they claimed to do in their interviews (Robson, 2002). Marshall and Rossman (2006) and Robson (2002) explain that observation supports researchers in examining the participants' views expressed in the interviews and the situations recorded in the interviews, in order to

discover if there is any inaccuracy in the respondents' views. I also wanted to take comprehensive notes on the interactions between the teachers and students on a specific theme in the course textbooks and therefore I observed teachers and students in their teaching/learning environment.

De Walt and de Walt (2002) add a further interesting advantage of this particular research methodology in this regard. They believe that using observations together with interviews and document analysis increases the validity of a study and can help to generate or test objectives and hypotheses, or to produce a theory.

Nevertheless, researchers may face some challenges when they use observation. It is challenging to be there as part of the field and write about the events that are experienced (Pole and Morrison, 2003). There is also the possibility of the field influencing the researcher who is involved in observation in ways which they remain unaware; hence, s/he needs to concentrate on the role, write reflexive notes and stay long enough in the classroom to observe the teachers' and students' interactions thoroughly, while getting the students used to the presence of a stranger in their midst (Robson, 2002).

In observation, the greatest obstacle that faced me was gaining access to women's classrooms, given the cultural and religious prohibition of visits to a female university campus by a male. Therefore, I sought the help of a female assistant researcher, whom I chose very carefully. The main criteria were expert research skills and a Ph.D. qualification. Fortunately, I found the person I was looking for. Before starting the observations, I explained everything to her in detail; how to proceed in the observations, how confidential the collected material must be and what ethical issues surrounded it.

In line with all the above conditions, observations were carried out in eight seminars of the 'Islamic Culture' courses: four in men's classrooms and four in women's. The seminars were observed during the summer, because they are two hours long, twice as

long as in the other terms. Thus the total time spent by the observers in the classrooms was 16 hours (8 hours in the classrooms of each gender). This gave ample time to collect the required notes.

In this regard, despite the very limited time, we tried not to write up our observations in the classroom but rather do our best to invest all our time there in noticing what was taking place, and, as far as possible, remaining inconspicuous so as to encourage the students to act normally as well. As soon as each seminar finished, I started to write up all my notes and observations; and once the women's seminars ended, the assistant researcher telephoned me to give her notes and to give me an opportunity to ask her for further details. At the end of the class, if necessary, some students were asked about their actions or opinions. All these comments were used in interpreting the interviews and describing the present situation with regard to dialogue in class.

4.5.3 Documentation

Many written documents relating to this study were collected and analysed. They included a range of public documents relating to the system of Saudi Arabian government, such as the laws and regulations of the country, “the Basic Law of Government” and “the Shura Council and its Rules and Regulations”: counterparts of the parliamentary system elsewhere in the world. All those documents are available for public access through the website of the Shura Council. The documents included also, the official policy of the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, such as the Centre Handbook, the public website, and some internal publications for the National Dialogue Conferences. It was expected that analysing such documents would clarify the traditions of the Saudi community and help to discover the importance of dialogue in the Saudi traditions of the monarchy, the state and the Islamic community.

Moreover, the official document describing the Saudi Arabian education policy had to be considered. This text contains the aims and objectives in the different stages of education, such as early learning, primary schools, intermediate schools, high schools

and higher education. The importance of this policy lies in its being appointed and adopted by the King of this country. As such, this document is considered the roadmap for all workers in the educational field, including researchers, and is an official reference for all curriculum designers and writers of educational textbooks. Because the present study seeks to improve the culture of dialogue in university classrooms via religious education, this policy was considered to be one of its primary documents, as it would show whether the operation of religious education at the university takes account of the policy for higher education as a whole.

Although the Saudi Government had previously published the main targets for higher education, when I inquired about the internal regulations for the university under scrutiny, I was surprised to find that none of these had actually been written down as a formal text. This point led me to ask the teachers and students what they knew about the regulations of the university as these were implemented and generally known in their daily work. The only relevant document was the outline of the ‘Islamic Culture’ course, which I also analysed, together with its series of textbooks. The outlines and textbooks were designed and written by the university teachers, who sometimes taught the courses. The purpose of analysing those documents was to discover whether their content was linked to the Saudi government’s project of spreading the culture of dialogue, and had contributed to improving the students' abilities to practice dialogue in class.

4.6 Researcher Positionality

It can be said that in qualitative research, the researcher plays a central role in the research process, in particularly in case study research (Bassegy, 1999). In this research approach, the researcher is the primary collector and analyser of the data. As such, it is imperative for researchers to consider their own position through the different stages that together constitute the research process. In this regard, there has been, and continues to be, an extensive debate among qualitative researchers about the

advantages and disadvantages of researchers who study the communities that they belong to.

Merton (1972) identified two opposing researcher perspectives: the outsider perspective is the researcher who is not from the society she/he studies and vice versa. An alternative way of characterising the outsider/insider dichotomy is through the anthropological notions of emic and etic perspectives, which Naaeke et al. (2010) define as follows: "Emic perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is a member of the community being studied. Etic perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is an outsider to the community being studied." (p. 152)

The main difference between the outsider (etic) and insider (emic) researcher is that the outsider researcher is able to study the case with some objectivity in analysing and describing what they have seen and observed (Kerstetter, 2012). On the other hand, insider researchers have experienced the culture at first hand and can, for example, themselves feel the reality of the suffering in a situation, which outsiders cannot immediately access. As such, "insider researchers are uniquely positioned to understand the experiences of groups of which they are members" (Kerstetter, 2012; p. 100).

In addition, qualitative researchers argue that since obtaining rich and deep data is one of the most important advantages of qualitative research (Berg, 2007), insider researchers have greater potential to engage participants and responders in the research and finding out about their experiences in more detail (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Outsider researchers may face difficulties obtaining the same data from the research participants (Chawla-Duggan, 2007; Gasman and Payton-Stewart 2006). At the same time, insider researchers are advised to take into account a number of issues that could affect their research. They need to try and separate their personal experiences from the research participants' views (Kanuha, 2000), be especially concerned with the confidentiality of their respondents, and to reflexively consider the issues of any potential bias in their research, for example (Serrant-Green, 2002).

Avoiding researcher bias is usually perceived as being the biggest challenge in qualitative research (Merriam, 1988). On the other hand, Peshkin (1988) argues that, “one’s subjectivities could be seen as virtuous, for bias is the basis from which researchers make a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities, and joined to the data they have collected” (p. 18). Altheide and Johnson (1994) emphasise that the qualitative researcher needs to state their biases as clearly as possible, as this can assist the reader in distinguishing between the conclusions of data and how these have been redacted through the researcher’s experience.

For this study, in the interests of investigating the culture of dialogue in the Saudi tradition through religious education within Saudi universities, the following discussion outlines my personal experiences relevant to this study, what I have done, and what needs to be taken into account regarding my positionality in this research. Before undertaking this research, I spent more than two years teaching in a primary school and more than 5 years teaching university students who will become teachers in the future. I also have a Bachelor’s degree in Islamic studies and a Master’s degree in religious education. These experiences have given me insight into classroom dynamics, particularly with regard to the relationship between teachers and students in religious education. My ‘insider’ knowledge is also what guided me in selecting the courses that have become the focus of the case study in this research and helped in enabling access to, and selection of, appropriate research participants.

Since completing my Masters in Saudi Arabia, and before starting my Ph.D., I attended an M.Res programme at the University of Stirling which includes intensive courses in how to undertake qualitative research. I think both the M.A. and the M.Res enhanced my awareness of qualitative research discourses and gave me the opportunity to conduct small-scale research through which I have been able to develop further my research skills. Moreover, because I won a scholarship to do the M.Res and a Ph.D. in the UK, I have spent the last 9 years in Scotland with my family. Living away of my community and immersing myself in a different culture that emphasises the

importance of discussion and dialogue in learning (not only through my university studies but also witnessing as a parent their role in primary school and high school), has helped me to gain a different perspective when looking at the situation in Saudi universities. In this sense, while I am an ‘insider researcher’ as a part of the Saudi community, I have also, to an extent, become an ‘outsider researcher’, as a student who resides in the UK, and whose ways of thinking and attending have been informed by these experiences.

As well as the influence of my professional and educational experience, the process I have been engaged in through undertaking a Ph.D. project has also contributed to increasing my ability to stand back from an insider’s first hand positionality. Firstly, regular meetings and discussions of the findings with my first and second supervisors have helped me to see the situation from both outside and inside perspectives. In response to questions from my supervisors, I have, for example, had to describe practices and assumptions that I had previously assumed were self-evident, but which, it became clear, were culturally contingent. Also, I had many informal social discussions with Saudi friends who lived around me during my study and they helped me in thinking about this research’s themes and findings. However, the most helpful sources, I think, have been the theoretical framework and the many previous studies I have used within my Ph.D. project from non-Saudi sources. This ambiguity of cultural location means that the findings have been interpreted *both* on non-Saudi, ‘outsider’ sources but *also* through my views and analysis as an insider.

Finally, methodologically, the sources of data collected are wide ranging. In terms of the interview participants, males and females from a wide range of ages and experience were interviewed, including academic teachers and students, as well as experts and government officials. The data collection methods used were diverse as well, ranging from interviews to empirical classroom observations and document analysis. These have all, in their different ways, contributed to broadening my vision as both insider researcher and outsider researcher in dealing with a study that fuses culture and education in such an explicit way.

4.7 Transcription and Translation

As the study was based in an Arabic-speaking country and all its participants were Arab, transcription and translation became an issue. The translation of the data themselves from Arabic into English could be influenced by my input. The problem, then, was that the interviews were spoken and the analysed documents were written in Arabic and they all had to be translated into written English. To avoid the problem of non-equivalence, the findings were written in Arabic and carefully translated into English to ensure conceptual equivalence.

This technique of translation even took into account where to place commas and colons in the meaning structure of the interviews (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). To preserve the structure, the process of translation was word-for-word and simple standard Arabic was used as the platform for translation, to avoid any colloquial style in the participants' speech which might impede or limit understanding of the interviews. Furthermore, due to the elliptic nature of spoken language, extra words in brackets () were added to ensure that the meaning was clear (Catford, 1965).

The translator in the process of translation needs to be sure that the translation does not unduly affect the construction of meaning and interpretation of the original texts (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). To this end, when I had analysed the data and written findings in Arabic, I translated them into English myself. I then critically revised all the translated texts. Next, they were checked by an expert translator who was proficient in both Arabic and English. Finally, both texts were sent to an Assistant Professor specialising in English Language and translation in a Saudi university. This procedure, involving multiple points of cross-checking, engendered greater confidence that an English target text had been correctly translated from the Arabic original.

4.8 Ethical Issues

The most important requirement for any researcher is to balance his/her demands as a collector of data with the restrictions safeguarding the rights, safety and dignity of the participants. He/She must take account of research ethics and practice accordingly. Research ethics, at first glance, might seem to restrict the enquiries of researchers but, in fact, can help them by reducing the possibility of any interactional problems with the participants, whether in respect to access, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, feedback, free interaction with the researcher and any other effect in the investigated procedures (Porter and Lacey, 2005; and Cohen et al., 2011). Research ethics can also promote greater reflexivity, as issues that might otherwise pass by unnoticed have to be surfaced and justified.

The present study seeks to assist in the development of the university curriculum so that it extends students' capacity to engage in dialogue in the Saudi culture through religious education. This development is urgently needed because, as explained earlier, university religious education in Saudi Arabia centres at present around a core series of textbooks and success on the course depends on upon accurate memorisation rather than other practices, such as a critical discussion of issues. On the basis of the data gathered for the present study, professional judgements were then made in order to address the research aims.

Before starting to gather data, I contacted the head of the department responsible for offering the 'Islamic Culture' course. I visited him to discuss some points to do with the fieldwork for my thesis and to get permission to contact the department's staff and students. We also discussed the documents that would be required for analysis and the best time to observe the classes. At that time, he promised to provide a list of names and mobile numbers of the academic staff and students, males and females, and to arrange my visits with them so as make arrangements as straightforward as possible.

No children or vulnerable adults were involved in this project. The participants, whether interviewed or observed, were informed about the aim of the study and were given assurances as regards confidentiality and non-traceability. There was no intention in any future research output of identifying the participants to the Saudi government or the public.

All the collected data were coded. Records of the data collected (including transcripts and audio recordings) were stored in a secure and safe place. The identities of the members of course groups, teachers, students and people who were interested in dialogue were not revealed.

I discussed all the issues related to the women's seminars with the research assistant and explained everything related to technical aspects and also ethical aspects of the project. The research assistant was then asked to sign an appropriate ethics consent form. The female respondents were also given information about the aim of the study and given equivalent assurances with regard to their anonymity, and that any information they gave would fall within the scope of an ethical code (BERA).

The information sheets about the research distributed to the participants mentioned that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time (BERA, 2004; Porter and Lacey, 2005). I gave each participant a consent form to sign and asked for consent orally at the start of each interview throughout the research. If a participant withdrew, s/he was informed that his or her data would be destroyed. The information sheets included details of the Head of the (then) School of Education, to whom they might refer if they had any concerns about the research process. All the participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and that the personal information about the participants would never become public but would be stored safely in a secure location.

The participants were also assured that their data would remain anonymous and their names coded to hide their identities. I also undertook, when I wrote up the study, to make every effort to describe the respondents in a general way, so that anyone reading the study would be unlikely to identify where the research took place and which persons might be involved in it. Even though this instrumental case study was conducted at a single university, its location would not be clear to subsequent readers of my thesis beyond its being one of 29 Saudi universities. The participants were informed that any data that might identify them would be deleted.

For the sake of confidentiality, in addition, all the data held on my computer are protected by a private password. The hard copy data, at the same time, are stored in a secure and locked place, in my office at home. At the end of the project, all data that relate to the participants will be destroyed.

Having summarised some of the key aspects regarding the methodology and methods that inform this study, the following chapter reports on the findings from conducting this research.

CHAPTER 5: THE CONCEPT OF DIALOGUE: RESPONDENTS' UNDERSTANDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present my analysis of the data. I identify the themes that have emerged from that analysis and then document, and critically discuss, what respondents said about the concept of dialogue. The chapter is divided into sub-themes. Firstly, I consider respondents' views about the culture of dialogue, including their understanding of the meaning of dialogue. At the same time, I attempt to discover through their views the reasons behind their understanding and why they understood dialogue in that way. This chapter also looks at respondents' understanding of dialogue within the Islamic community, how this is associated with concepts of moderation, virtue, difference and respect of others and the opinions of others, as well as discussing the limits of dialogue within Islam.

This analysis focuses on the responses to what dialogue might mean within a Saudi context through inquiring into students', as well as teachers', present views about plurality and difference. In the light of these findings, some of the implications of such dialogical approaches will then be considered. Throughout this analysis, I draw upon literature about the Islamic concept of dialogue discussed in earlier chapters, as well as the work of MacIntyre in relation to understanding traditions of inquiry.

Before presenting the outcomes of my analysis, there are several issues that deserve a mention. Firstly, I identified four distinct views about the meaning of dialogue. There was, for example, a shared assumption that people in Saudi Arabia have inaccurate perceptions of dialogue and, indeed, one of the striking outcomes from the interviews is that many respondents expressed real concerns about the capacity of the Saudi community at large to engage in open-ended dialogue. The first of these concerns is linked with social constraints and the acceptance of the idea of dialogue in principle; the second is, essentially, about sticking to opinions and the fearing of being under the

influence of others' ideology or influence of their self-convictions; the third is the low standard of individual knowledge, as well as fear and mistrust.

These concerns, whilst real and important to identify, need to be set against a number of factors that might be regarded as creating an ideal environment for dialogue, such as intellectual and ideological diversity which might promote it and guide the community towards overcoming these obstacles. Some respondents were nonetheless hopeful that open and respectful dialogue between people who hold different views is possible within the community traditions of Islam, the restrictions on dialogue, the virtue of moderation and ethics, and respect for others and their views. Figure 3 illustrates the themes and subthemes that will be discussed in this chapter.

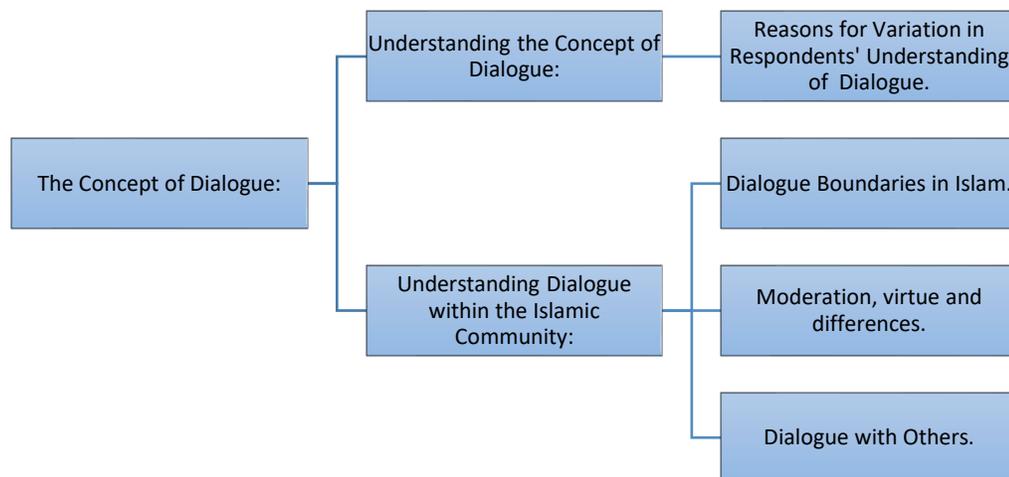


Figure 3: The Structure of Chapter 5.

5.2 Understanding the Concept of Dialogue

As will be seen below, respondents' understanding of the concept of 'dialogue' was really quite diverse, and can be divided into four main responses:

- some people thought that dialogue is primarily a way of reaching a right and correct opinion;
- some thought of dialogue as a method of persuasion, an argument or a kind of criticism;
- some described dialogue as a route to convergence and understanding between one person and another;
- finally, some defined it as an exchange of views between participants in the dialogue.

Generally speaking it could be said that it is possible to discern both similarities and outright contradictions between what has been produced by Buber (1947 and 1970) and Bakhtin's (1984) characterisation of dialogue. According to the findings, it appears that respondents defined their understandings of dialogue in ways that were divergent, and these different understandings of dialogue could, in practice, result in considerable confusion - or even possible conflict- since there was little overlap between the four different clusters of understandings. Engaging in 'dialogue', in other words, meant different things to each of the four different categories of respondents.

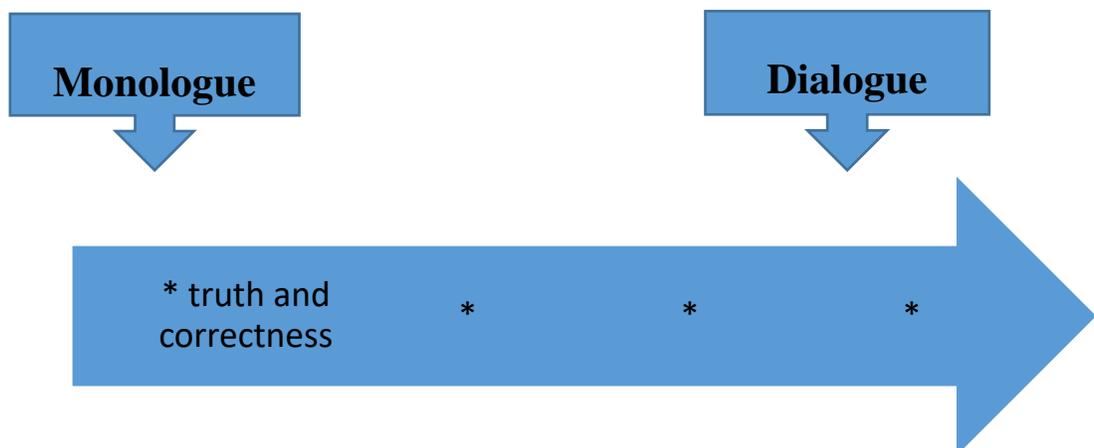


Figure 4: Respondents' Understanding of Dialogue (1st Group).

In the first group, where dialogue is understood as a practice that leads to correct opinion or decision, some respondents, such as government officials (OG2, OG4) and university teachers and students (TM2, SF3 and SM3) agreed that the purpose of dialogue is to reach a specific aim, such as the truth, or at least a view that everyone accepts (see figure 4). For example, OG1 stated:

“it is necessary as a result of dialogue and discussion to reach the correct opinion or the ideal opinion”

For this group, the purpose of dialogue is to reach the ‘correct opinion’, achieved through an exchange of views that converge into a final agreed position. Within these terms, if there is no agreement, the dialogue will be seen as ultimately unsuccessful.

Yet this focus on dialogue as a means of reaching an agreed consensus – characterised as correctness and the truth - begs the question: even if such a consensus is achieved, how can we know that this is, in fact, the truth? MacIntyre (1988) may offer a relevant response here. He argues that perceptions of truth will be significantly shaped by the tradition of inquiry within which they take place. However, MacIntyre also maintains that such traditions, and any truths associated with them, need to be subject to critical interrogation if they are to continue to be ‘in good working order’ (1988). It is possible that those who merely see dialogue as reaching the correct position may not be open to the sort of critical interrogation that MacIntyre thinks is necessary.

According to MacIntyre (1998), an openness in having a dialogue about social agreements is more likely to reduce the negative impact of conflict. So, although he stresses the significance of tradition, at the same time he claims that traditional practices are changeable in accordance with social variables. These variables require continuous social agreement or, as MacIntyre (1988) explained it, an “argument extended through time”. To avoid conflict, these changing traditional practices through the past, present and future entail a dialogue between those who want to conserve the traditions of the past, and those who want to change them, based on contemporary life and the requirements of the future. Thus, ‘truth and correctness’ could change on the

basis of changing the traditional practices that have been agreed in the past, after having an open and critical dialogue about the tradition in relation to current conditions.

Understanding dialogue as reaching the truth, where the sole purpose is assumed to be the establishment of 'the correct opinion', could encourage some to impose their beliefs on others. This finding might not accord with Buber's (1970) theory of dialogue. For Buber (1970), it is necessary for the dialogue to have a "relation is reciprocity" (p. 67). This means that the dialogue does not exist to force others to believe just in one correct idea, but it is to share the different ideas by reciprocating views. Moreover, this understanding of dialogue seems to be an '*I and It*' relationship (Buber, 1958), which does not allow a participant in the dialogue to respond to the other (Walters, 2003). In this case, the role of his/her is just limited to hearing other opinions who believe that he holds the correct opinion. Therefore, in the relationship of '*I and It*' (Buber, 1958), "I" here might deal with "It" as a subject and "It" could be used for "I" for his/her own aims (Shim, 2008). In this kind of relationship, the equality between the engaged parties in practising the dialogue may be damaged and, furthermore, conflicts and acts of violence could exist or estrangement between the community members.

On the other hand, within Bakhtin's (1984) terms, this would be a form of pseudo-dialogical practice that, instead of welcoming heterogeneity, is in fact more aligned with a monological tendency towards closure and the imposition of a single position. Because of that, Bakhtin (1984) emphasizes the difference between dialogue and monologue. Concentrating the conversation on persuading others and influencing them through limiting the truth to be unified appears to be monological in orientation rather than dialogical. In my view, Bakhtin (1984) was not wrong when he described individual isolation from other-consciousness as an image of extremism. Bakhtin here does not mean the extremism of practising violence, but is referring to a bounded way of thinking which precludes the acceptance of others' opinions or even listening to their views. In other words, this kind of extremism leads individuals to stick to their

opinions, holding firmly to their position, refusing to accept other opinions whilst, at the same time, demanding that others accept his/her views. Bakhtin (1984, pp. 292-293) stated:

With a monologic approach (in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change anything in the world of my consciousness.

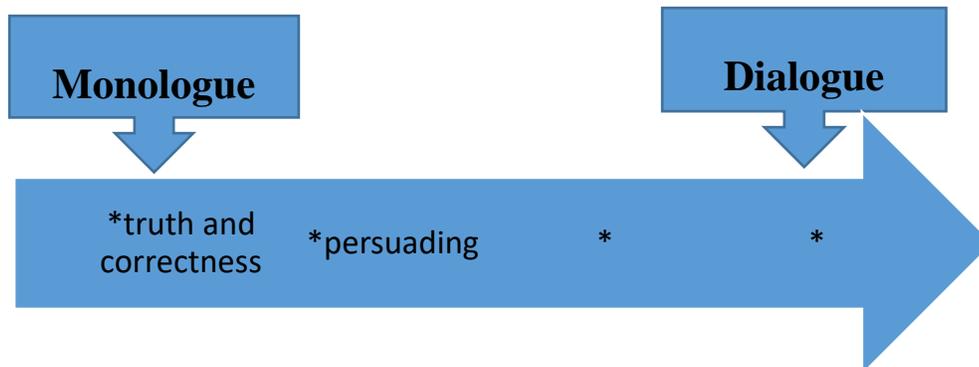


Figure 5: Respondents' Understanding of Dialogue (2nd Group).

The second group of respondents referred to the political connotations of dialogue, interpreting dialogue as largely concerned with the art of persuasion and referring to the ways in which evidence might be used so as to persuade someone else, or to criticise their opinion (see figure 5). At one extreme (TF2) stated:

“my opinion is completely right and other opinions are wrong”

From this perspective, effective ‘dialogue’ would appear to consist in the power to persuade another, through the kinds of tactics used so as to ‘win’ an argument and be seen to prevail. According to TF1, when a dialogue begins, all participants assume that the dialogue will be conducted like an argument or debate. In a similar vein, TF2 and

SF3 explained that argumentation often involves dispute and the imposition of one person's opinion on others, without giving them the chance to express their opinion or to oppose the opinion of others.

However, not all respondent within this category took such an absolutist position; OG4, for example, stated:

“originally, dialogue was based on persuasion and convincing and not only on persuasion. It is based on the view that we think our opinion is right, but it may be wrong.”

Instead of the assumed correctness of one's own standpoint here, for respondents such as OG4, there is potential for interruption and change, since a provisionality of truth claims appears to be acknowledged. From this point of view, OG4 tried to visualise each party as having the right to practise persuasion, and no one group has a monopoly on this right. In engaging in persuasion in dialogue, one inevitably opens up to the possibility of both criticism and the risk of refutation (TM3). It is, therefore, important to bear in mind that dialogue, on this reading, may lead to criticism not only of the views of others, but of one's own standpoint and assumptions too.

While persuasion is an expected way to be used in practising dialogue, the point at issue here is that the participant could use it not just in two-ways persuasions, but it may be used in order to put the others under pressure to accept the idea; this appears to be what was meant by TF1, TF2 and SF3. In this situation, the person who tries to persuade others could be not open to the other enough or to give them their right to practice the same. This can also be linked with Buber (1965 and 1970) and Bakhtin (1984). They stress the exchanging roles between the participants and the full integration between them in an open relationship and having open-ended dialogue. From my experience of living in Saudi society, it could be said that monological persuasion is routinely assumed as the default mode of interaction. Each participant attempts to keep himself/herself away from being under the control of others and their convictions and this tends towards relations that are fragmented and disconnected.

Engaging in persuasion and criticism can, however, also lead to conflict, unless all participants share a commitment to the values and practices that inform and sustain open-ended enquiry. If each party firmly maintains their standpoint and tries, at whatever cost, to convince and criticise the others, neither of them will be able to reach a midpoint or compromise, or what MacIntyre calls ‘moderation’ (2009).

For both groups of respondents, several contextual factors may have informed these positions. Firstly, the concept of dialogue in the Saudi community is strongly linked to inviting non-Muslims to Islam – or, as this is sometimes put - guiding ‘non-righteous’ Muslim back to the ‘right’ path. People who fall into this group engage in dialogue in the belief that there is a single truth, which is that everyone must follow Islam. From this perspective, Islam provides the great religious school and ideology they follow and its scholars provide the best religious views. Here, each person tries to convince the other to believe in the same truth, scholar, or religious standpoint. Thus, dialogue is conceived as an interaction in which one party is right whilst the other is wrong, and this exacerbates conflict between different points of view.

Such understandings of dialogue may also be strongly associated with the well-known inter-religious public debates conducted by a famous Muslim missionary Ahmed Hoosen Deedat (July 1918 - August 2005). Deedat held several debates with scientists and thinkers, including evangelical Christians, atheists, and non-Muslim religious people. In those debates, Deedat worked tirelessly to present a clear image of Islam and focused all his efforts on persuading others to his understanding of Islam. This involved elaborating arguments and presenting pieces of evidence that appeared to be both scientific and rationally defensible. Deedat’s influence on understandings of dialogue in Saudi society may well be that a ‘successful’ dialogue equates to influencing others through persuasion and ultimately ‘winning’ the debate.

A third influence upon such understandings of dialogue can be found in the field of education. The aim of discussions within Saudi classrooms is to evaluate the level of knowledge that has been gained by students through attending courses. So students

learn that they are required to give ‘correct’ answers, and this may get in the way of open-ended dialogue. From my observations in the university, teachers insisted that students refer to the course textbook to find the answers to their questions.

All these perceptions of dialogue are limited, as they tend towards a monological tendency, in Bakhtin’s (1984) terms; the meaning of ‘dialogue’ is far broader than a kind of persuasion or argument towards one truth, as we have seen in Chapter 3. It is necessary to include reciprocity by understanding each other and discovering a new idea whilst showing trust and respect for all participants (Buber, 1958 and Burbules, 1990).

What these findings suggest, therefore, is that a commitment to the concept of dialogue may result in competing understandings with regards to its practices, values and purpose. These understandings of dialogue do not involve the kinds of capacities, values and dispositions necessary for the practice of dialogue in Bakhtin’s (1984) sense, and therefore when ‘dialogue’ is promoted as a desirable aim for Saudi society, many will think that they support this, when in fact their orientation is quite different.

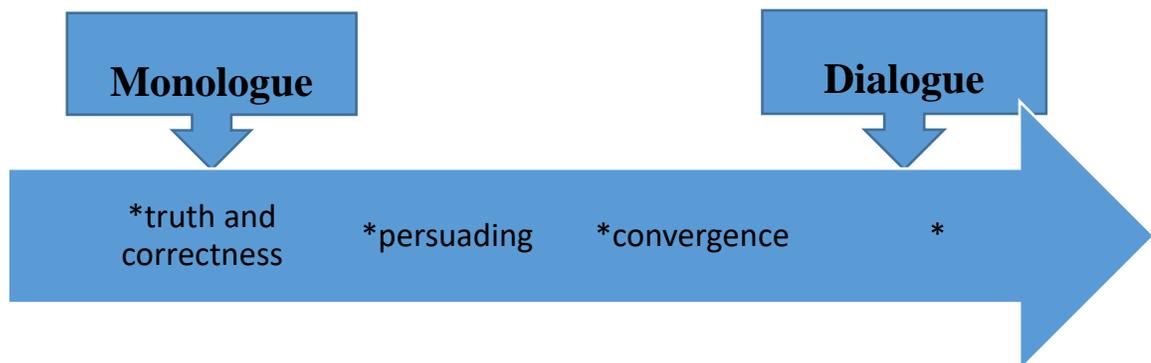


Figure 6: Respondents' Understanding of Dialogue (3rd Group).

Concerns about conflict and extremism prompted the third group to think of dialogue as a way to achieve convergence and rapprochement (see figure 6). OG2 thought that:

“dialogue is a means to bridge the gap between social dialogue spectra. That is why the dialogue table always collects antitheses from different social spectra so as to break the barriers and narrow the gaps between them.”

In this group, dialogue appears to mean that when anyone engages in talking to others, each person who is present can take part and has the right to introduce his or her point of view. At the same time, respondents in this category thought that it was desirable that participants took into account the value of different points of view, that all opinions can meet, and a way towards convergence might be found (TM1), or at least mutual understanding (OG4). A clear example of this type of response can be found in OG3, when he stated:

“compromise is an important requirement for understanding and rapprochement with others – that is why it is not necessary to reach agreement, but narrow the gaps, converging views to be extremely close”.

These findings support the idea of convergence and mutual understanding, as the desired outcomes of dialogue, requiring certain dialogical values and behaviours, namely, respect for other opinions and the willingness to listen without denying the right of others to agree or disagree. This is where traditions of inquiry can play a part in providing frames of reference that can reduce conflict and increase the possibility of dialogue. At first glance, this group's understanding of dialogue as convergence and rapprochement appears to overlap with the virtues of moderation and reaching the middle point between two things (MacIntyre, 2009; Hanapi, 2014). However, seeking convergence and mutual understanding in a dialogue might not encourage all participants to have full integration with others during the practice of dialogue so as to maintain the relationship on account of creating ideas and exchanging it, as emphasised by Buber (1970) and Bakhtinn (1984).

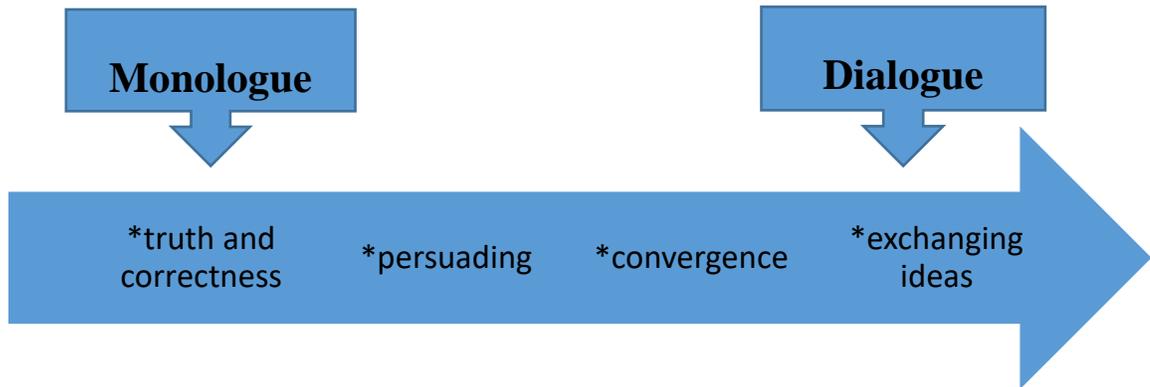


Figure 7: Respondents' Understanding of Dialogue (4th Group).

The fourth group thought that dialogue should be an activity whose purpose is to exchange views with a high level of mutual respect, without entering into any conflict or difference (see figure 7). An appropriate level of respect in dialogue for other opinions, whether these are regarded as acceptable or not, helps maintain peaceful and good relationships between interlocutors. For example, OG3 said:

“the dialogue is to give a full and complete opportunity to the speaker to express his/her opinion and "respecting other opinions" means that you have 100% of right to say what you want and to adhere to your opinion... and you have a right to accept or object to my opinion and I have the same right. This culture must be spread.”

In addition, TF1, TF2, TM1, SF1, SF2, SM1 and SM3 agreed with the view that the aim of dialogue is communication, understanding and the exchange of feelings, needs, opinions, ideas and ideologies. According to this interpretation, dialogue will be more positive, remain peaceful, and people's interactions will improve as a result.

This understanding of dialogue is strongly supported by Buber and Bakhtin. Buber (1970) emphasised the principle that “relation is reciprocity” (p. 67) in practising a dialogue in order to achieve a good relationship. Also, based on his description of the relational possibility between people in a dialogue, the fourth understanding of the concept of dialogue seems very close to the relationship of *'I and Thou'*, which includes an open dialogue. Hence, the relationship here between the participants is premised upon the human interaction, trust, virtue, respect and on giving others the right to respond, ask questions, criticise, and exchanging roles through practising dialogue.

For Bakhtin (1984), the fourth understanding of dialogue supports the aspects of Bakhtin's theory regarding a pluralism of voices and views, as well as the exchange of consciousness between dialogue participants. Bakhtin (1984, p. 81) argues that truth lies in multi-consciousness:

It should be pointed out that the single and unified consciousness is by no means an inevitable consequence of the concept of a unified truth.

That is why Bakhtin makes a clear distinction between dialogue and monologue. According to him, monologue depends on self-consciousness, whereas dialogue-based social interactions are interactions between minds to exchange consciousness among individuals. This will have a positive effect on both self-consciousness and other-consciousness.

The understandings of this group of respondents appear to be closer to the dialogical process as a natural activity (Bakhtin, 1984) and human relationships (Buber, 1970) of daily social interactions. These respondents conceive dialogue as a means of exchanging opinions, which also aligns with Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogue as an interaction between different minds so as to discover truth, through an exchange of consciousness among individuals (1984). In my view, it seems plausible that the perspectives of this fourth group of respondents have been shaped by their knowledge and experience obtained through having participated in activities at the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue. In addition, some had conducted research

with others or had been involved in writing about dialogue, while others attended a workshop or training event in dialogue. Such experiences appear to have had some impact upon how this group of respondents perceive dialogue.

In this study about one-third of the respondents understood dialogue in a truly open-ended way, believing that the aim of dialogue is to freely and respectfully exchange opinions and consciousness. However, the other two thirds of respondents understood the objective of dialogue to be reaching one opinion, one truth or a correct point of view. They saw this as requiring the persuasion of others, and criticism of others' views, in order to win the argument. This finding has important implications in terms of the Saudi government's plan to spread the culture of dialogue. In particular, this points to a need to effectively communicate and promote a clearer understanding of the meaning of dialogue, so as to focus on developing self-consciousness, a greater openness to other-consciousness, and an acceptance that different ideas can be exchanged without conflict.

Comparing those four understandings of the dialogue to Al-Ghazali's thought and his dialogical thinking, shows that there is an in-depth interpretation which connects to Al-Ghazali's concept of "*dihlīz*" within a dialogue. With going back to that concept, Moosa (2005) presents an architectural description of "*dihlīz*" as being the space between the door and the main house. At the same time, "*dihlīz*" is a space that connects a house with the outside. Therefore, no one can see what is inside from the outside (and vice versa), and it is a place where visitors are warmly welcomed. In other words, it can be said that "*dihlīz*" is the middle location between surrounded rooms. Moosa's (2005) interpretations of Al-Ghazali's "*dihlīz*" illustrates that Al-Ghazali, in his dialogue with others, remained open to them and could not be considered a monological thinker. He represented the human practice of dialogue as an ethical and moral virtue whilst still respecting and holding on to his commitment to religious constants and fundamentals (see figure 8)

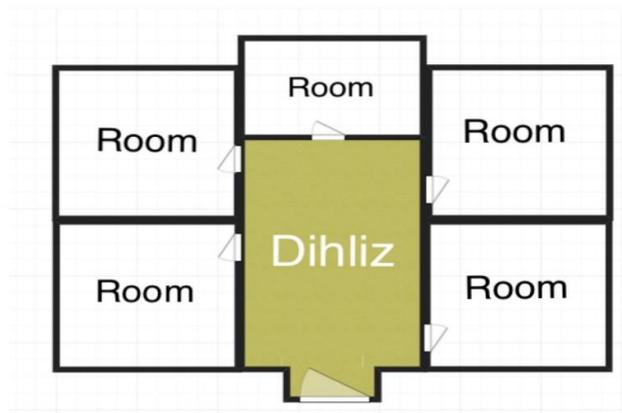


Figure 8: Showing the Location of “Dihliz”.

Therefore, it can be said that if we put the dialogical participant in the place of rooms (see figure 9), the fourth group will be closer to a more nuanced understanding of the concept of dialogue. This is because ‘*dihliz*’ is the area of warm welcoming for the participants' opinions, that lies in the middle between their point of views, opens to participants' ideas, and allows the participants to introduce their opinion whilst giving the others an equal right to give their opinions too. Also, this is a socially accepted area that allows participants to share their opinions and exchange their consciousness with the people outside of ‘*dihliz*’ (or their community) whilst adhering their privacy or traditions by remaining inside of ‘*dihliz*’ (or their community).

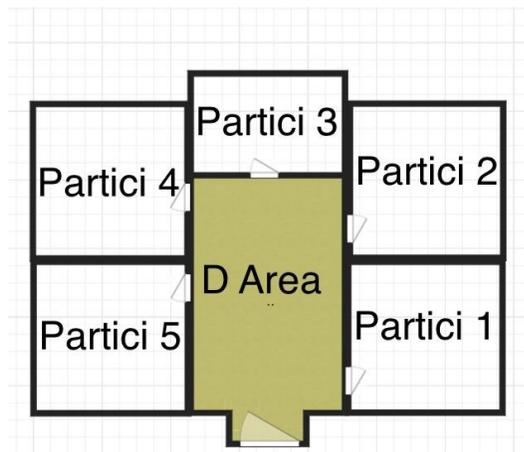


Figure 9: “Dihlīz” and Dialogue.

In summary, the understanding of dialogue as a force of persuasion, strength of argument and attainment of a single viewpoint, regarded as correct, needs to be re-reviewed and addressed. The aim of dialogue, within both the Islamic tradition and foundational religious texts of the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*, is the exchange of ideas to reach mutual understanding, and possible change. This, as we have seen in Chapter 3, is how dialogue is defined and understood within Islamic theory. To be more open to others it is necessary to be freed from a concept of dialogue that is motivated primarily by the wish to persuade and influence others. The central inquiry here is how the concepts of consciousness and tradition that have emerged in Western societies through the work of Buer (1970), Bakhtin (1984), MacIntyre (1988) Mossa (2005), can be reflected in Muslim society and Islamic thought. This is what will be explored in more detail in the following discussions.

5.3 Reasons for Variation in Respondents' Understanding of Dialogue

The existence of these varied understandings of the concept of dialogue invites further questions. Specifically, what might cause these different understandings of the concept of dialogue within each of the respondents' perspectives? In this regard, the respondents identified the following reasons:

- a lack of understanding as regards the concept of dialogue itself,
- intellectual differences,
- fear and mistrust, together with
- insufficient spaces for practising dialogue.

Firstly, whilst within the Islamic tradition there continues to be interest in the concept of dialogue, and, as we have seen, this has a strong presence in both the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, all the respondents were in agreement that people in Saudi Arabia have a weak understanding of dialogue. According to OG3, the concept of dialogue itself is still not clear to people and the actual culture of the people is still limited in this area. TF1, in her Master's dissertation, which was focussed on dialogue, found considerable limitations in the community when it came to recognising and understanding the concept of dialogue. Similarly, OG3 and TF1 thought that this deficit or weakness in understanding has an immediate negative impact on the process of dialogue itself, leading to a number of difficulties.

What is interesting here is that respondents reported that even some members of the Saudi community who might be expected to be more knowledgeable in Islamic studies and the concept of dialogue in Islam, objected to dialogue. One of the respondents (OG2) said:

“Some clerics and religious scholars objected to dialogue at the establishment of the dialogue centre due to their misunderstanding of the meaning of dialogue”

Secondly, there are prior attitudes between the different intellectual groups which could impact upon understandings of dialogue too. In this regard, one of the respondents (OG4) discussed the different groups (conservative, secular, liberal, enlightened, etc.) pointing out that they may refuse to engage in dialogue between one another. Moreover, OG2 spoke about other intellectual groups and social components

of society who suffer from non-consideration and rejection as well as suffering from a prevailing tendency to criticise or judge the views of others, or their ideas, without any investigation or study. All of these factors, in my view, have impacted on the understanding of the concept of dialogue and contribute to the intellectual challenge that Saudi society now faces.

According to some respondents (OG1 and OG3), each intellectual group sticks to their opinion and adheres to it, which undermines the value of dialogue or its possibility. This differs from Buber's (1970) and Bahktin's (1984) view of dialogue, which involves a principle of promoting relationships between people, the exchange of voices, opinions and ideas, reading other people's minds and the sharing of consciousness. The absence of these principles leads, I think, to the division of societies into rival groups and parties, and this can be among the greatest calamities that impact dialogical activities and the understanding of dialogue. This view, therefore, needs to be taken into account within MacIntyre's (1988) concept of "traditions". This suggestion firmly advocates that dialogical practices in Saudi society need to follow the Islamic dialogical thinker; Al-Ghazali, who was a good example of the dialogue with philosophers with the consideration of maintaining the Islamic traditions (Mossa, 2005). So, it becomes very important to steer the community towards the dialogue and away from conflict during this period of critical interrogation and to warn about the possibility of "tradition divides into two or more warring components", each one criticises the other, which could lead to miss "all coherence and fails to survive" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 12).

In this respect, OG4 was more optimistic, believing that differences in intellectual groups could promote a better understanding of the meaning of dialogue:

“one of the encouraging elements of understanding of the concept of dialogue is the intellectual and ideological diversity.”

OG4 also thought that the existence of intellectual and ideological diversities could actively encourage an exchange of views which might influence positively

understandings of dialogue. At the same time, he underlined the need for all involved to feel equal and on the same level as one another in order to be able to engage successfully in dialogue.

Thirdly, one of the reasons for different understandings of dialogue is a lack of confidence and the fear of accepting other opinions. On this point, some respondents explained many of the experiences associated with this, such as: hasty assumptions or mistrust, fear of changing one's mind, fear of being under the influence of others (TF3); making assertive judgments about ideas too hastily (TM2); adversarial encounters and anger (SF2); not accepting the opinions of others, the authority of parents and closed-mindedness and inflexibility (SM3). This fear leads to difficulties with listening to other voices and views in dialogical activities and accepting other opinions, compounding the tendency to remain in self-consciousness. This is very different from the Bakhtinian view (1984) of dialogue, as we have seen.

So far I have addressed conceptual and intellectual difficulties but there are also questions pertaining to knowledge: do Saudi people have enough relevant knowledge and information to understand the meaning of dialogue in order to engage in informed dialogue, and have they enough practice in open-ended dialogue? What opportunities do they have to practice dialogue in this sense?

On this point, TM2 stated that, if an individual's knowledge increases, he/she will have the ability to engage in a dialogue, because possessing and gaining knowledge allows individuals to exchange opinions by giving their opinions and discussing the opinions of others with a greater proficiency. Accordingly, participants will find themselves more open-minded and capable of speaking out. In this regard, OG2 thought that:

“reading has a principal role in developing one's capacity for expression and improving one's linguistic and mental capabilities, which leads to understanding and the exchange of views”

Several respondents appeared to agree with MacIntyre (1987) about the importance of reading and discussing texts deeply and broadly. They believed that a high level of knowledge and reading widely could help successful dialogue, through creating new ideas and having greater confidence in their presentation (SF2, SM3). MacIntyre suggests two conditions are necessary in order to take advantage of dialogue: reading texts analytically, and providing an appropriate environment and atmosphere for rational dialogue within the university, all of which serve to enrich the dialogical activities. In contrast, few ideas can be exchanged when there is a low level of knowledge, which could lead to silence (OG4), despising others' opinions, or making arbitrary decisions about them that has, as its consequence, a failure of dialogue (TF1). The lack of knowledge and practices could isolate each participant from dialogical activities and prevent them from discovering dialogue as a means of exchanging views and consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984) or transfer the relationship from the natural and human interaction as *'I and Thou'* into *'I and It'* relationships, as Buber (1958) identified.

To sum up, it seems that opportunities for dialogue face a number of challenges: lack of understanding of the concept of dialogue itself, intellectual differences, fear and mistrust, lack of sufficient knowledge and a lack of practical experience in dialogical activities. These findings also underline the crucial role of reading and understanding the traditions in promoting a culture of dialogue in the community, especially given that the very nature of some Saudi traditions may present some challenges to this project. Hence understanding the circumstances and traditions that make up the context of the Saudi community might help to create greater possibilities for dialogue.

5.4 Understanding Dialogue within the Islamic Community

In the Saudi community, the concept of dialogue needs to be framed in the light of its religious culture, especially when we recall that the entire indigenous Saudi population is Muslim and believes in Islam and its key texts, the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*. Through

the interview questions, this section seeks to build a clearer conception of the way in which Saudi people understand the concept of dialogue in the light of Islam. I begin this discussion with OG2's response to the question about dialogue in relation to Islam:

“Dialogue is an authentic concept in ‘Islamic culture’. The *Qur'an* illustrates the concept of dialogue. In the *Qur'an*, *Allah* Almighty has dialogues with the angels, Lucifer and all the Prophets”

OG4 emphasises how the *Qur'an* confirms the importance of dialogue and how dialogue is presented in the *Qur'an* not as exclusive to the Muslims, but as something that occurs between Muslims and the religions that existed before Islam. Dialogues in the *Qur'an* are between God (*Allah*) and all the prophets and Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, peace be upon them, are all mentioned in the *Qur'an*.

So dialogue has its place in the *Qur'an*, the first source of Islam. With regards to the second source, the *Sunnah*, TF1 pointed out that dialogue is mentioned in relation to a variety of relationships: parents and children, husbands and wives, the scholars and the learners, one woman and another, one man with another and between all community members.

The Holy *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* for a Muslim are not just sources of the faith, rules and *Shari'a* law, but also provide answers to questions pertaining to both this life and the hereafter. Both texts contain explanations for creation in the universe as well as the visible and invisible life. Thus, OG1 emphasised the importance of avoiding dialogue about the sacred tenets, which he believes is the most advantageous feature of the peaceful dialogue in Islam. These central tenets refer to avoiding debate concerning the body of God (*Allah*), His existence, the Prophecy and the Revelation. These are the invisible points, which human beings are unable to understand through their intellect, and avoiding dialogue on these areas avoids the possibility of sharp conflicts.

This seems to be consistent with other theories which point to the central importance of the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* amongst Muslims, as the primary sources of Islamic legislation and social life. In this regard, Lemcio and Williams (2015), speaking of al-Ghazali, focus on the *Qur'an* as the first source which must be referred to, as well as stressing the importance of the *Sunnah* as a revelation which explains the *Qur'an* or adds to the legislation. At the same time, although Islamic sources foster openness towards dialogue, these sources must be respected, and so dialogue must be within pre-defined parameters.

This framework needs to be borne in mind when conducting any study related to human beings, culture or society from an Islamic perspective. Here, as Asad (1986) argued, any socio-cultural study cannot be separated from Islam itself since Islam is present in every aspect of Muslim society. So, it is with the anthropological investigation of Islam required for this study, which concentrates on the culture of dialogue within the Saudi community. With this in mind, one can ask where religious dialogue lies in Muslim society. To answer this question, a profound understanding of Asad's (1986) understanding of discursive traditions is needed, starting by a reading of Islamic history.

The beginning of Islam was about 1400 years ago, in 609 CE, when the *Qur'an* was sent down to Muhammad (PBUH). During that period, the companions of Muhammad (PBUH) followed what was set down by the *Qur'an* and what was said by the prophet and they were responsible for memorizing and writing down the revelations as they have been passed down to the present time. The *Qur'an* was compiled by the companions of the prophet and was then transferred to us in an explicit manner. Therefore, no Muslim doubts the *Qur'an*. *Allah* the Almighty says:

{ Indeed, it is We who sent down the message [i.e., the *Qur'an*], and indeed, We will be its guardian. } (*The Qur'an*, 15:9)

In another verse of *the Qur'an*, *Allah* the Almighty says:

{And indeed, it is a mighty Book. Falsehood cannot approach it from before it or from behind it; [it is] a revelation from a [Lord who is] Wise and Praiseworthy.} (41: 40-41)

These two verses affirm the revelation of the *Qur'an* to Muhammad (PBUH).

The *Hadith* or *Sunnah*, on the other hand, is a transmitted record of the speech of the Prophet (PBUH) and his actions or habits. *Hadiths* are fully compatible with the revelation. *Allah* says in *the Qur'an* about the *Hadith* of the Prophet (PBUH):

{Your companion [i.e., Muhammad] has not strayed, nor has he erred. Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination. It is not but a revelation revealed. Taught to him by one intense in strength [i.e., Gabriel]} (53: 2-5)

The companions of the Prophet transferred the *Hadiths* verbally. That is why Sunni Muslims consider *Hadith* as a complement to the *Qur'an* in developing Islamic jurisprudence. This increases the sanctity of the *Hadith*.

These two sources are sacred for Muslims in general and for Sunnis in particular. Asad (1986), introducing Islam as a coherent set of beliefs, morals, values and habits that emerged from these two sources, stresses that:

If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* (p. 14).

Details about these two sources are of paramount importance in understanding what is meant by the “discursive tradition” (Asad, 1986), which, as Asad points out, focuses on the everyday practices of understanding the fundamental religious texts and not on the sacred texts themselves (*Qur'an* and *Hadith*). Therefore, he believes that the historical practices of some Islamic *Shari'a* concepts have been changeable through the past, and are so in the present and future, in accordance with the changeableness of life. So, when we say that Islam is both solid and dynamic, we mean that the texts

of *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* are solid, but, at the same time, Islam is dynamic and flexible in understanding the sacred texts through time. Thus, while McIntyre (1988) states that practical traditions in any society may need critical interrogation, Asad (1986) confirms that the discursive tradition in the Islamic community needs to be addressed too, through time, by religious dialogue. This means religious dialogue becomes a key factor in order to look at the present and future religious practices.

Therefore, the framework which I seek to build, aims to find a safe environment for successful dialogue in the Muslim community. I believe that this research may contribute to outlining a safe and clear environment for religious dialogue in the Islamic community through three main elements;

1- Dialogue boundaries in Islam, 2- moderation, virtue and differences, 3- dialogue with others.

Thus, one of the important questions I pursued in the interviews was whether or not dialogical practices within the Islamic tradition have any ideological and ethical restrictions. This question will be answered in the following points.

5.4.1 Dialogue Boundaries in Islam

Understanding the Islamic theory of dialogue requires understanding the limitations imposed upon dialogue by Islamic beliefs and in particular, the authority of the *Qur'an*. According to the respondents, the difference between dialogue in Islam and dialogue in other frameworks is that Muslims have sacred tenets of legitimacy. This assumption, in the respondents' perception, is not private to the Islamic community because some other communities also have sacred texts. These tenets do not forbid dialogue but they do promote a concept of freedom in accepting and rejecting opinions based on these tenets. As TM3 explains:

“if I engage in dialogue on Islamic sacred tenets that does not necessarily mean that I accept your view, and that does not oblige me to accept other opinions because my religion is a red line I cannot ignore it”

In brief, if an opinion is not in agreement with or is contrary to the *Qur’anic* verses or the statements of the *Sunnah*, this opinion will be rejected. OG4 referred to Imam Al-Shafi’i (one of the four most popular scholars in Islam), who said:

"if you find my opinion is contrary to a text from the *Qur’an* or the *Sunnah*, you must follow the holy text and my opinion must be rejected"

With respect to the holy texts, dialogue in Islam is ruled by the requirement to respect others’ ideologies and their intellectual directions. For example, Islam does not allow for any person to investigate the participants’ religions through dialogue, to judge their ideology, or to convert them from Islam or any other religion because of someone’s opinions or because of disagreement (OG4).

Moreover, Islam is not a sacerdotal religion. This means, Muslims have to respect scholars and religious men, but do not reach the stage of their holiness or sanctification by taking their opinions as the Islamic legislations from the sacred texts. In *the Qur’an*, God (*Allah*) wondered about and criticised this attitude, as He the Almighty says:

{They have taken their scholars and monks as lords besides God} (9:31)

In other words, there is no holiness or sanctification for anyone, even the scholars, in providing Islamic legislation and their role is just to give their opinion regarding the way to understand a religious text (OG2). Surprisingly, TM3 mentioned that some religious men have a lot of authority and that their students sanctify them. Consequently, everyone is asked to follow those opinions as though they are at the same level of the holiness as the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* (TM3).

Through those holinesses of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, it can be said that the present findings seem to be consistent with Asad (1986). Basically, the Islamic laws have been completely based on the holy texts of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, which are interpreted by religious scholars. Thus, the conclusions that are consequences of the religious scholars' understanding have no holiness as compared with the holiness of the sacred texts of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. In Islam, the holiness is for the holy texts alone, which it is unacceptable to subject to debate, whereas, the interpretations of the holy texts and its understanding by the religious scholars are debatable. Despite that, and according to daily observations, it is clear that there is significant reverence for the clerics' opinions, which could become undebatable, as with the holy texts. So, it is possible, therefore, that the great authority which has been invested in religious scholars and their opinions may hinder open-ended dialogical activities.

In this regard, all respondents agreed that the holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* are sacred sources, whereas the opinions of the Islamic scholars should not be regarded as sacrosanct. I believe holiness in Islam can be divided into three great aspects of the sacred:

- 1- the sacredness of religious texts, which means the sacred statements that have been written in the *Qur'an* and *Hadiths* or *Sunnah*.
- 2- the sanctity of the sources (*Allah* the Almighty and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)), which means glorifying the Divinity of *Allah* who sent down the *Qur'an* and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who is the source of the *Sunnah*.
- 3- the obligation to refer to the religious texts when evaluating opinions, in other words, opinions deduced by scholars need to be compared to the Holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* in order to judge their validity.

Through these three sanctities, we can determine what is acceptable and what is not in religious dialogue. The first and second propositions are beyond question, doubt or dialogue, as emphasised by Hathout (1995), MacIntyre (2009) and Lemcio and

Williams (2015), who refer to the holiness of the divinity, revelation and prophecy. These cannot be subjected to debate unless there is clear and direct evidence from the Qur'an or Sunnah, because such issues are considered beyond human understanding, as Lemcio and Williams (2015) highlight. Debating or discussing such matters may lead to conflict and sharp divisions among members of society (Zamzami, 2002; Avicenna, 2009). The story of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855) (Lemcio and Williams, 2015), reported above, provides a clear illustration of the consequences of discussing the divine entity. Therefore, Al-Ghazali was a thinker who had an open mind towards others and a broad interest in different issues, but at the same time he was respectful and adherent to the principal sources (Qur'an and Sunnah) through his dialogue with the philosophers (Mossa, 2005).

On the other hand, religious dialogue is based on the opinions of scholars and their understanding of the religious texts (as mentioned above), which Asad (1986) refers to as "discursive traditions". In engaging in this tradition, religious scholars have to be fully aware that their opinions are entirely judged based on what is stipulated in the holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. It is useful to repeat here, as mentioned above, the words of Imam Al-Shafi'i (cited by OG4):

“if you find my opinion is contrary to texts from the *Qur'an* or the *Sunnah*, you must follow the holy texts and my opinion must be rejected.”

The opinions of Muslim scholars deduced from their understanding of the holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* are negotiable. This is important to emphasize when talking about the role of debate and discussion in Saudi society.

These understandings and critical discussions about tradition and the discursive tradition may require a solid base in values and virtues, the foundation which not all religions and human races agree about. In Islamic society, virtue and morality are the primary aspects, because they are derived from the Holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* (Asad, 1986). Bakhtin (1984), too, refers to the importance of values and ethics in

distinguishing between monologue and *dialogue*. When having a dialogue about religion in Muslim society, moderation must come first.

5.4.2 Moderation, Virtue and Differences

There is an important ethical aspect to dialogue, since, when engaging in dialogue, participants need to take into account values and virtue. In the *Qur'an*, God (*Allah*) invites Muslims when engaging in any discussion even with non-Muslims to be "in a way that is best".

{And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best} (*The Qur'an* 29:46)

{Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best.} (*The Qur'an* 16:125)

The 'best' here has a broad meaning which encompasses ethics, manners, words, behaviour and anything that drives the practice of dialogue to be peaceful and successful. This should not be seen as a kind of restriction; it is not about banning ideas but about being able to think freely, to criticise other opinions and to discuss without fear of attack or abuse from the other party. At the same time, having to respect others without assaulting them about their religion, their beliefs or their ideas might also be seen as a kind of restriction.

Moderation in Islam represents a fixed asset and a strong principle, as stipulated in the holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. Respondents in this study emphasised this principle, presenting and reciting verses from the holy *Qur'an* to illustrate the significance of this principle. This is assured by Islam's invitation for all its followers to be obligated towards moderation and virtue everywhere and in everything, in particular when engaging in dialogue. In *the Qur'an*, *Allah* says:

{And thus We have made you a median community} (2:143)

Muslim individuals, therefore, are obliged to communicate with everyone in society, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. The Holy *Qur'an* explicitly encourages Muslims to be moderate and socialise with people of the book (Jews and Christians). So, we should have discussions together because Jews, Christian, and Muslims share a belief in *Allah* (Hathout, 1995; MacIntyre, 2009). Also, we all believe in the revelations which came down from Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (PBUT) (Kurucan and Erol, 2012). Hence, the holy *Qur'an* stipulates:

{Say, "O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you – that we will not worship except God and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of God."} (*The Qur'an* 3: 63)

Thus, there is a call to communicate with the other while emphasising the necessity of maintaining Islamic religious constants. The invitation is to reach a middle point between two opposites (MacIntyre, 2009; Hanapi, 2014). On this issue, OG2, OG4 and TM3 saw dialogue as contributing to spreading a culture of moderation and virtue, which will lead to the isolation of extremists.

In order to understand the location of the middle point between two things or more, it could be useful to call the concept of "*dihlīz*" of Al-Ghazali. When Mossa (2005) interpreted the concept of "*dihlīz*" in an architectural way, it can be seen that the "*dihlīz*" lies in the middle between others and is thus in principle open to all views surrounding the "*dihlīz*" (see figure 10). So, from this perspective, the dialogical thinking of Al-Ghazali also presumed such a point that allowed him to be open to others and to exchange ideas with them. Here, in other words, is a way of articulating a distinctive Islamic theory of dialogue, that offers both advice and understanding in regard to what is entailed if moderation is to be pursued.

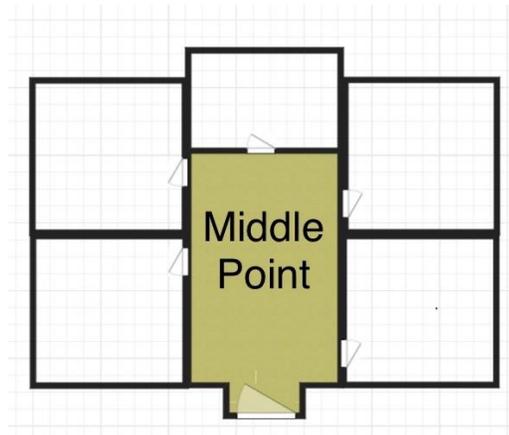


Figure 10: "Dihlīz" and Moderation.

There are numerous examples in Islam, in the *Qur'an*, the *Sunnah* and from Islamic scholars, showing the importance of moderation and virtue in dialogue. In Islam, moderation and virtue are necessary because as the *Qur'an* explains, there are many differences between people (TM1). One of the differences is among the teachings of the four most popular scholars and schools of religious thought, each one defending a set of distinct opinions (OG4). In this regard, OG4 discusses the veracity of the verses and scholars' statements about how to be moderate and virtuous in dialogue:

“Allah, Almighty, says: **{we or you are either upon guidance or in clear error}** which means that we need to accept and to understand each other, even if we are not following the same religion... Imam Al-Shafi'i (one of four of the most popular scholars in Islam) has two famous statements on the issue of dialogue. The first is: “my opinion is right with a possibility that it is wrong and other opinions are wrong with a possibility that they are right”. The second one is: “When I discuss some issues with other people, I wish I could be aware of their views and I wish that their views were right. Then I would follow them”. So, to both statements he wished to take a moderate stance and he looked for the right rather than imposing or sticking to his own opinion”

TM3 clarifies this in more detail:

“The differences in Islam are not in Islamic principles and tenets, but in *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *Shari’a* law, religious and controversial laws and issues. When examining these issues, there is no true or wrong conclusion to reach, but only preponderant opinions and less overwhelming opinion, because every verdict in *Fiqh* has a possibility of being right, depending on the holy text of the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*”

In other words, the difference between these scholars and their respective schools of Islam is not in terms of Islamic principles and tenets, but in terms of *Fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *Shari’a* law, religious and controversial laws and issues. When examining these matters, there is no correct or wrong conclusion, but only dominant and less dominant opinions, because every verdict in *Fiqh* has a possibility of being right, depending on the holy texts of the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*.

Therefore, the balance between self-consciousness and other-consciousness seems to be very important (Bakhtin, 1994). This balance lies in the middle point between two things or can be said to be between two consciousnesses. Consequently, when someone tries to exchange his or her self-consciousness with another-consciousness, he/she is not obliged to disown his or her consciousness and move into the other-consciousness, but, rather, needs to reach a middle point between the two opposites (MacIntyre, 2009; Hanapi, 2014).

When the self-consciousness of an individual interacts with another in dialogical activities, moderation seems to be one of the virtues which can contribute significantly to reducing the intensity or possibility of conflict. This is not an abandonment of fixed beliefs, but a form of free thinking that enhances dialogue and constructive criticism that may minimise the differences and enlarge horizons of thinking, which reflects positively on dialogical behaviour and its activities.

5.4.3 Dialogue with Others

In acknowledging the boundaries of dialogue as well as the importance of moderation and virtue and the differences within Islam, what are Muslims' attitudes towards others and other opinions in dialogue? What are they required to do about them?

The most commonly cited criteria when engaging in dialogue with others, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, is respect (TF1). But what is meant by 'respect'? OG2 offered the following definition:

“Respect is required from Muslims towards everyone in dialogue. Respecting everyone means not correcting their views but not automatically supporting their ideas either. Respect means giving others the right to say "No", to give them the right to contradict your opinion and to give theirs freely without fear”

TM2 identifies in more detail the roles that any Muslim needs to perform in his life. One of these roles is to call people to the right path and correct the performance of their religious practices. So, he then asks, how can a Muslim be one of the people who call others to the right path? The best way, he believes, is not by hitting people with a stick but through dialogue and discussion.

While recognising that there are still some conservative people who firmly cling to a fixed understanding of Islamic culture, TF2 believes an individual must be open-minded and involved with human beings. They must be willing to understand other opinions and ways of thinking. Moreover, one should not be angry or fanatical, but rather, present what one has to say and listen respectfully to others. TF2 suggests that the best way to correct the performance of religious practices is to be respectful towards them. Here respect is not primarily used as a tactic to win or persuade, though, since the *Qur'an* calls for all people to be respected.

Many respondents had concerns about the “other”. For some this manifested in anxiety about possible clashes or conflicts with the other when other opinions were rejected and anxiety about "giving others the right to say "No"". The more conservative

approach to the “other” was to argue that if the “other” was a non-Muslim or unrighteous Muslim, they would need to be invited to Islam or the right path of Islam by engaging them in dialogue.

It is important here to reiterate that an individual Muslim has a religious commitment to be open-minded and to interact with everyone, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. I think it needs here to be stressed again that the holy *Qur'an* explicitly invites people to moderation and socialising, not just with Muslims, but, also, with all people, including the people of the book (Jews and Christian). *Allah* the Almighty says:

{Say, “O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you – that we will not worship except God and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of God.} (*The Qur'an*, 3: 63)

This shows there are no real barriers that have been constructed for the individual Muslim by Islam to make overall contact with people around the world, while he/she maintains and believes in the Islamic constants and, at the same time, being respectful to others and their opinions. It, also, shows that the *Qur'an* guides its followers to the technique of finding a middle way between your opinion and others' opinions, which leads to moderation and prevents violence.

In summary, interaction with the “other” tends to be approached in two ways: 1) with non-Muslims to invite them to Islam. 2) with non-righteous Muslims to invite them to the right path of Islam. These two perspectives can be seen in a conference held by the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue in 2006, entitled "We and the Other: a national vision for dealing with global cultures" (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2012). It is clear that the focus has tended to be on the other who is religiously or culturally different, whereas the other may be a fellow Muslim who while following the same ideology, has different philosophical ideas or visions. Yet the Holy *Qur'an* stresses universal understanding and coexistence, not only with those

with different religious beliefs but also with other tribes who may share the same culture and traditions.

More specifically, the *Qur'an* encourages differences between tribes to be minimised, and calls for harmony between men and women who, in many other respects, may be different. In other words, the “other” does not have to be from another religion or culture. As mentioned by Altwajri (1999), dialogue is an opportunity to communicate generally with people who may be different collectively or individually - or both. *Allah* The Almighty says:

{O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is Knowing and Acquainted.} (*The Qur'an*, 49:13)

Again, the emphasis is on the value of moderation. Interacting with others should be based on respect, appreciation, trust and affection, as Buber confirmed (Burbules, 1990). In fact, interacting with others improves self-consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984). In Saudi Muslim society, the “other” is likely to share the same religion and cultural identity. Thus, the incentives and requirements of dialogue will be different to those in less homogeneous societies. In seeking to contribute to spreading the culture of dialogue within the Saudi community through higher education, this study has to take into account Saudi traditions.

5.5 Conclusion

I believe that in order to spread the culture of dialogue it is necessary to understand the Saudi people and the context in which they have developed a concept of dialogue. Investigating what meanings the concept of dialogue has is the first step. The next step is to discover the contextual factors that contribute to these understandings. Because the Saudi community is Muslim, the traditions of Islam and its boundaries regarding

dialogue have to be understood. In this respect, the research found that while there were differences in understanding the concept of dialogue, most respondents agreed that Islam encourages Muslims to have dialogue with others and, at the same time, invites them to be moderate and uphold good morals by dealing with others and their views respectfully.

CHAPTER 6: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY: POLICY, BARRIERS AND POSSIBILITIES WITHIN THE SAUDI TRADITIONS

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 focused on the respondents' understanding of dialogue within Islamic traditions. This chapter addresses the practise of dialogue in a particular tradition, that of the Saudi community. In outlining the position of dialogue within the Saudi community, this section comprises subthemes such as the Saudi Government and the concept of citizenship and the Surah Council (Parliament). Moreover, I discuss responses participants gave when asked how important dialogue is within Saudi society, whether there are any boundaries and limits to dialogue within Saudi Arabia, and, if so, what these consist in.

As explained in the introduction to this research, Saudi Arabia has an independent political system, with its own rules and monarchical legislation. In addition, Islam with its strong connection to this society, imposes its own considerations that have far-reaching cultural ramifications for the people. In other words, Saudi Arabia is a one religion, one language monarchy in which there are no political parties. These factors inevitably influence the understanding people have of the principles of dialogue and it is not surprising in this context that dialogue is subject to certain limitations and restrictions – and opportunities - that may be different from those of other societies.

The present chapter retains its focus on the culture of dialogue but moves on to discuss the responses given in interviews concerning understandings of dialogue, specifically within the context of Saudi Arabia. It therefore addresses the far-reaching implications of some of the concepts that have emerged thus far. Understanding dialogue in the Saudi context requires understanding the limitations which the Saudi tradition of Islamic law and the authority of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* bring to bear. The chapter

concludes by considering the extent to which Saudi traditions enable dialogues in practice that are in 'good working order' (MacIntyre, 1987). I argue that although the *Qur'an* encourages respect towards the different views of all peoples, whether Muslim or not, there are both obstacles and enablers to applying this respect towards all persons in practice.

While this chapter looks at how dialogue and its practices and motives can be understood within the religious traditions of Islam and within the social and cultural context of the wider society, it also looks at dialogue in the context of university education. One of the most important topics central to the analysis is Saudi Arabia's policy for higher education and the way in which university systems understand their desired goals compared to their actual performance in practice.

Therefore, this chapter presents findings from the case study of the educational environment with regard to dialogical practices at the university in general, such as investigating respondents' awareness of the higher education policy aims as well as the university's facilities and capacities in relation to these. After analysing Saudi Arabia's higher education policy, the interviews and also the observation notes, it can be said that there are a number of key findings pertaining to the promotion of a culture of dialogue. Firstly, respondents were not very aware of the aims of the higher education policy. When, as researcher and interviewer, I drew their attention to the policy, most of them agreed that the teaching and the educational content within the university concentrated on theoretical concepts rather than practical applications. Secondly, despite the university administration's focus on developing material aspects such as buildings, including classrooms and offices, respondents considered that these efforts were insufficient. Examples given in support of this view included the lack of sufficient classrooms and facilities, which led to consistent overcrowding. Moreover, the seats in the classroom are fixed to the floor, which precludes dialogical activities since it is not possible to re-arrange the seating so as to facilitate face-to-face dialogue between students. Figure 11 shows the themes and subthemes that are covered in this chapter.

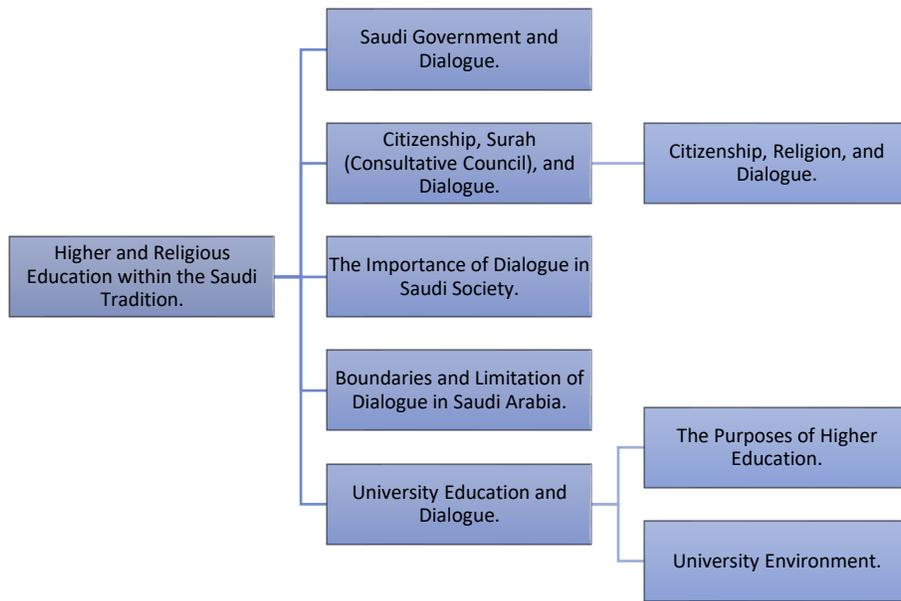


Figure 11: The Structure of Chapter 6.

6.2 Saudi Government and Dialogue

The previous chapter focused on the role of Islam and its influence on Saudi society. However, there are political and national traditions besides religion. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic monarchical state. Its sovereign, the King of Saudi Arabia, is its prime minister and the president of the Council of Ministers, Arabic is the official language and its constitution and regulations are based on the holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* (Majlis Ash-Shura, 1992).

These regulations are a part of the Saudi traditions that have been agreed through time by all religious, political, and social entities. Since the emergence of the first Saudi state in 1744 and the second Saudi state, and even the modern Saudi state today, the religious institution has been closely linked to the political institution (Wagemakers et al., 2012).

Saudi Arabia is also where the two holiest Muslim cities and Islamic sites are located, which encourages all the Saudi people to adhere to Islam and the Arabic language.

Politically, Saudi monarchs have committed to Islam in governance and constitution since the first Saudi state.

In the previous chapter I showed that the respondents agreed with the constants of their religion. There was similar agreement regarding the constants of the Saudi nation and its language and the belief that these must be respected and abided by, to maintain national security, stability and unity.

There is a tendency to believe that, in such a country, opportunities for dialogue are very limited and that monarchies are invariably rigid systems that do not allow for dialogue and the exchange of views, especially within the Saudi traditions that have been described above. But this is not quite true, as OG4 explains:

“Some people feel that the country is ruled by a royal system and that there is no chance for other viewpoints in the ruling system, but this is not true. The government follows the principle of dialogue and no one can overlook other people’s opinions and counsel.”

The question that arises is whether the governmental system in Saudi Arabia does leave room for dialogue through which people might exchange views. Chapter 5 demonstrated that Islam promotes dialogue through its practices and that as an Islamic state, dialogue is a cornerstone of the Saudi government’s work. The Shura Council (Parliament), for example, is a governmental institution where its members practise formal dialogue and all governmental and regulatory matters are discussed under the dome of the Shura Council. In this regard, both OG4 and OG3 pointed out that the Shura (Consultative Council) exists to provide official spaces for dialogue and that all governmental consultative boards provide consultations to those in charge of them. This includes different types of board, such as the consultative council, the body of expert counsellors and the municipal councils, and these councils, in turn, are based on dialogue.

However, OG3 distinguished between general dialogical activities and official dialogical activities, in that the objective of an official dialogue is to reach a required decision or agree to a specific opinion so as to pass it on to the government, whereas general dialogue involves a simple exchange of opinions without any commitment to reach a specific agreement.

This distinction gives support to the idea that the dialogue we are talking about is what is practised by everyone, and not the one which takes place in the Shura Council. In this Council, dialogue takes place in order to reach a specific decision or formulate a clear opinion on a particular issue. This kind of dialogue is therefore restricted to the selected elites who represent the community within the Shura Council. In contrast, the dialogue that is explored in this thesis is an interactive activity among human beings within society (Buber, 1970; Bakhtin, 1984; Kurucan & Erol, 2012), and does not require reaching a single opinion, but is about exchanging ideas and opinions to convert self-consciousness into interactive consciousness as described by Bakhtin (1984). Thus, participation in the Shura Council is not confined to those who are members of the Consultative Council or other consultative boards. A wider range of people in the community is eligible, including university professors, mosque imams, and judges. Everybody has the right to give advice and give his/her opinion (OG4).

In line with that vision, the Saudi state has adopted a dialogue project by establishing the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue. This centre offers a series of training sessions and publishes books and studies that investigate the topic of dialogue. It also holds conferences and forums on a range of intellectual, social or educational issues (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2012). Although the centre was founded in 2003, all the activities which it offers are not widely accessed and the need to spread the culture of dialogue remains high. Perhaps, this is evident through the responses of participants in this study. That is why, in my view, the idea of dialogue between citizens and an interest in developing the concepts, capacities and ethics of associated with the common good (MacIntyre, 1988) and active citizenship (Lister, 2003) need to be revived in the field of education.

6.3 Saudi Citizenship and Dialogue

Respondents emphasised the importance of national identity and citizenship in Saudi Arabia, concepts which take on specific meanings in a context in which religion is so central to all aspects of life. In this case, OG4 confirmed that in Saudi Arabia as an Islamic country, loyalty to country and religion are simultaneously conjoined. He, also, added, that whilst it is an Islamic state, it affords respect and appreciation for the minorities who live in the country and gives them rights according to their residency status. Here, I think the respondent means that the minorities are the groups which have been created from the differences of scholars and intellectual diversity within the Islamic society and Saudi society, such as; Sufis, Shafi'i, Hanafi and Malki, whereas the majority are Salafi and Hanbali.

As with any other concept, 'national identity' in the Saudi and Muslim community has to be understood in the framework of Islam. Religion and ideology have an impact on the lifestyles and daily applications of individuals in Saudi society, which could stimulate the Saudi people to understand their identity not just in the light of nationalism and the important of the national unity, but, also, in the light of the Islamic law and its guidance.

In this regard, respondents expressed the view that the existence of Islam in the country has many advantages and abandoning it might produce some struggles. They observed that most Muslims believe that Islam is a religion of unity, harmony, coexistence and modesty (OG1) and also that religion in Islamic societies is essential and plays a vital role in shaping identity and traditions, and has a strong social influence, particularly in Saudi Arabia (TF1).

In contrast, loss of religion and its values is seen as potentially damaging to the community and its unity. According to OG1, it can be argued that it is the lack of knowledge and understanding about the importance of Islam and the abandonment of religious sentiment that have led to the sedition, conflict and fragmentation that

characterises some societies. TF1 believes that abandoning religion incites people to go back to their tribal traditions and customs.

Other respondents elaborated on the importance of religion in Saudi Arabia and how this manifests in daily life. "People believe that the important thing is what the *Qur'an* tells us and what the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) said" (TF1). Saudi people tend to implement *Shari'a* and neither accept nor believe what scholars and intellectuals of the West, say, compared to what the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* provide (OG2). It can be said here that this strong relationship has existed since Islam was first established in the Arabian Peninsula and the founding of the Two Holy Mosques.

These views echo published texts which discuss the system of the Saudi government and "its constitution is Almighty God's (*Allah's*) Book, the Holy *Qur'an*, and the Sunna (the speech of the Prophet (PBUH))" (Majlis Ash-Shura, 1992). Furthermore, as the people in Saudi are Muslims, these two sources are sacred to them, as well as the broad group of beliefs, morals, values and customs that are derived from these sources (Asad, 1986). Nevertheless, those constants do not necessarily prevent Muslims from engaging in dialogue, as dialogue is simply about opening self-consciousness to other-consciousness (Bakhtin. 1984). Also, within the concept of an on-going discursive tradition as defined by MacIntyre (1987), dialogue does not mean abandoning personal values and opinions, to engage in conflicts or criticise Islamic constants; it is simply a critical interrogation to reach a new vision about the Islamic traditions within the Saudi community while adhering to the national identity and its basic components.

Notwithstanding the importance of religion in Saudi society, respondents identified six main challenges regarding the relationship between society and religion and unity. First, there is the problem of distinguishing the *Qur'an* from the *Sunnah*, with some people believing more in the *Qur'an* than in the *Sunnah* (SF1). Secondly, there is a lack of understanding regarding religious legislation and the importance of understanding the religion and religious texts correctly and thoroughly (TM1).

Thirdly, there is the perception that, although Islam is very informative and authoritative, its guidelines for everyday practices need to be updated in a way that is compatible with the current issues of modern life (TM1). Fourthly, modernity and modern life can be seen as the greatest challenges, because of the changes brought about in the community. These changes, however, must first be discussed, to allow views to be exchanged at all levels of society, in particular among the clergy (OG2).

One change that has had a significant impact and constitutes a major challenge for Saudi society, is technology. In this regard, TM1 stated that:

“Many people shifted to straying from the truth... due to their interaction with websites... many people converted to Shiism and atheism and forged a lie against *Allah*. Our youth is facing destabilisation in its principles, values and ideas.”

The fifth challenge pertains to intellectual life. According to OG2, some individuals and clergy strongly opposed the idea of reviewing and updating religious discourse. This could be because they worry that revising religious discourse may lead to a change in the Islamic constants (the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*) or to dialogue about its contents (OG2). In this regard, OG3 thought that the term “religious discourse” can be misunderstood:

“Sometimes, a person who advocates revising “religious discourse” does not know what “religious discourse” is... So, does “religious discourse” mean the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*? If so, this discourse is undisputable and cannot be changed... If “religious discourse” means the scholars’ understanding, it will be acceptable to review it and discuss it, because it is about expressing their own perspectives which have nothing to do with the original texts.”

This perspective contrasts with Asad’s view (1986) in that the "discursive tradition" of Islam needs to be altered according to the social and historical changes extended through time, which requires change to be addressed within religious dialogue. On the

other hand, it is consistent with Asad's view (1986) as regards the high respect with which the two sacred sources of the Islam are held. It is from a standpoint within the discursive tradition of Islam, that OG3 identifies the need for change, but this does not extend to the sacred texts themselves.

The final challenge is that of taking a critical line in relation to the beliefs of others, which can be both a highly sensitive, and highly charged issue, especially when this concerns issues of religious belief. According to some respondents, including TF3, TF2 and SM3, topics that are the focus of public debate are invariably religious, pertaining to different laws, beliefs or attitudes, due to differences between Sufism and Salafism, which can lead to either strong support or total rejection of another's views. This can lead to intolerance or extremism.

The challenges that respondents identified as facing Saudi society in relation to religion, show that further discussion and communication is needed. In their view, the aim of dialogue and why it is necessary, is to explain what is unknown, to clarify what is vague, to emphasise the tenets, or to translate the provisions of religion and legislation from theory into practice.

Despite the strong relationship between the Saudi people and Islam and their faith in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, there is a degree of confusion regarding different interpretations of the *Qur'an* that requires to be addressed as part of a wider debate. A key issue here is that some Saudi people make a distinction between the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*: the *Qur'an* is seen as the only source of legislation while the *Sunnah* is not recognised as a valid source of legislation. Others believe that both the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* are valid sources of authority and that both have the same level of holiness. So there are a number of intractable issues in play here that cannot be easily resolved, especially when for some, this includes tenets that are outside the boundaries of permissible dialogue (Chapter 5).

Respondents also had concerns about the issue of accusing and judging others. Anyone individually or as a group can criticise others because of a disagreement and as part of

this will pass judgment on others' beliefs, and this can sometimes lead to categorical judgements being made (e.g., as to whether or not they are “good believers or Muslims”), rather than focussing upon the particular issues in question. This represents a major challenge which can lead to fragmentation or sectarianism and therefore needs to be addressed as a topic in public dialogical activities and in the field of education in particular. Most importantly, it needs to be made clear that engaging in dialogue does not grant permission to assault others physically or verbally under any circumstance or pretext; dialogue can only take place on the presumption of respect for the other, even if another’s beliefs and attitudes differ.

Important though such issues are, one of the most pressing issues for the Saudi population at the present time concerns the understanding the purpose of Islamic law and the mechanisms for its application. In particular, in modern life and in an era of accelerated technology, religious legislation and religious discourse need to be revisited and subjected to widespread discussion. In this regard, a more informed understanding of the discursive traditions within Saudi society (Asad, 1986; MacIntyre, 1988) could contribute to promoting engagement in such important matters.

6.4 Boundaries and Limitation of Dialogue in Saudi Traditions

In the light of the discursive tradition of religious dialogue within Saudi society, a fresh set of questions arise:

- are there any specific boundaries and/or restrictions to dialogue in Islamic countries?
- when conducting dialogues in these communities in general, what is acceptable and unacceptable?
- does this vision hold for all of Saudi society?

- and thus, more specifically, what is acceptable and what is not when dialogue is conducted in the Saudi context?

I posed these questions to the respondents, who gave a variety of answers. Whilst a few respondents believed that it is possible to discuss any subject without limitations, most enumerated and categorised a number of restrictions.

First, since Saudi people are Muslims, they all respect certain religious rules and regulations, as has already been described. These rules and regulations can be divided into two aspects: the religious tenets and constants, and the non-constant religious aspects such as jurisprudential issues (*Fiqh* or *Shari'a*) and contemporary issues. For instance, in terms of constants, OG2, OG3, OG4, TM1 and TF3 listed God (*Allah*), the Holy *Qur'an*, the prophet Mohammed (PBUH), the Angels, the Holy Books, the Day of Judgment, Fate or Death, Paradise and Hell; no Muslim would disagree about these fundamentals and neither would they engage in any conversation about them. TM3 added to these, the five Islamic Pillars (The two Declarations of Faith, the five Prayers, Zakah (obligatory charity), Fasting and the Hajj), and a few other subjects about which there is a broad consensus or agreement amongst Muslim scholars.

Leaving aside the fundamental concepts in Islam mentioned above, several issues would be suitable topics for dialogue; of these, the area that has the most potential for opening opportunities for dialogue is jurisprudence (*Fiqh* or *Shari'a*) within Islam. Ijtihad is an Islamic legal term that refers to the independent reasoning deployed by Islamic scholars in finding solutions to modern religious questions (Esposito, 2014). At the present time Ijtihad mediates between the on-going discursive tradition and the rapid changes faced by communities, whether social, economic, or political. Those changes may require critical dialogues between religious scholars and the different community members so as to find an appropriate response.

So, what are the boundaries and limitations of dialogue with regards to politics and national identity? According to OG1:

“The government allows us to discuss without limitations. And there are some delicate issues that have already been discussed freely. However, as in any other country, there are some boundaries based on the conventions and customs of the country itself. This should be taken into consideration.”

While the space for dialogue on issues related to politics and national identity is unrestricted, Saudi people prefer through self-censorship to not engage in dialogue about the basic law of the Saudi government and about the rules for choosing the king, as TF2, a female respondent, explains:

"Some sensitive topics such as the rights of the ruler, obedience and disobedience leave room for debate. But, it is preferable not to open such dialogues with students."

Respondents divided into two groups regarding dialogue on religious issues. The majority believed that there can be no dialogue about religious constants while some believed that there is absolute freedom. MacIntyre (1988) appears to side with the latter. He emphasises that there should be no constraints when engaging in philosophical dialogue about the church pillars, but this kind of dialogue requires rationality and justice. In terms of dialogue about national constants in Saudi Arabia, such as the monarchy and the "Basic Law of Government", the respondents thought dialogue must not take place regarding such constants in order to preserve national unity.

Dialogue about religious constants can indeed lead to extremism and conflict, as in the example of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855) (Lemcio and Williams, 2015) in which dialogue about the constants and tenets in Islam, for example, about the *Qur'an*, led to severe conflict. Thus, opening up spaces for dialogue about these constants would need careful consideration in order to maintain social peace and to respect local custom and ideology.

6.5 Higher Education and Dialogue

One of this study's intentions (Chapter 1) is to draw the attention of the Saudi universities' administrations to the importance of dialogue as a fundamental skill and ability. It is therefore necessary to say something about the structure and policy making process of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia before exploring respondents' views in relation to this.

Higher education in Saudi Arabia is informed by a series of aims and purposes which are drawn up nationally in an integrated form, in an official list called the "Educational Policy for Saudi Arabia". Higher or university education is managed by the Saudi Ministry of Education; each university's administration contributes to this design and all universities collaborate to create a unified system in order to achieve its aims.

In the context of Scottish Universities, MacIntyre (1987) stressed that students need to be prepared to think about the public good while at the same time thinking about themselves. He also focused on individuals' ability to balance rational thinking and thinking about themselves with the common good:

to fit the young person for some particular role and occupation in the social system and to enable him or her to think for him or herself (1997, p. 17).

This means that if a student has a role in society and understands its needs, he/she will be able to think about him/herself within this broader context and the kinds of contribution that they might make towards the public good. This may require focusing on the development of students' abilities and offer them opportunities for practising the different capacities such as critical thinking and dialogue.

Consequently, students need enough space for practising dialogue within the educational environment based on exchanging roles between teacher and students and between students themselves (Freire, 1970). At the same time, rejection of the 'banking' concept of education (Freire, 1970: p. 58) and avoiding oppressive education which depends on lecturing and classic teaching methods (Freire, 1970) are

the most important ways to provide a good environment within the classrooms for having dialogue.

One line of inquiry in this research was respondents' views about and understanding of university education and its aims in their country and the practical aspects of everyday work in the universities according to the above policies and systems (see Chapter 2). Understanding the role of dialogue in this system is a focal point of the research.

6.5.1 The Purposes of Higher Education

Surprisingly, most respondents were unaware of the goals and purposes of education in general and higher education in particular. Even though we had previously touched upon educational policy within the interviews, I found myself obliged to lead the conversation towards Saudi Arabia's educational policy, since respondents appear to know very little about these goals and purposes. I therefore decided to distil some of the main points in the interview so as to elicit respondents' views, which I summarise in this section.

The majority of respondents identified an apparent gap in university education between theoretical education and practical application, notable not just when it comes to jobs and the labour market but also with reference to social life (OG2). According to TM3 and SM1, the university does not contribute to the formation of the kinds of social experiences and capacities that would enable students to engage in public life. TM1 offered a trenchant critique of the university in this regard, as failing to live up to such aims:

“higher education has not granted what we want, because when our students graduate, you do not find scientific or capacities qualifications among them, for dealing with life and people ... or at the level of ethical dealings with others.”

Respondents also noted that one side of this divide is privileged over the other: higher education in Saudi concentrates on students attaining scientific knowledge at the expense of capacities associated with more practical applications and outcomes. In this connection, SF1 explained the goal of current university education as being scientific materialism, which means, as interpreted by SF3, that graduates are encouraged to focus on attaining knowledge only. More specifically, TM3 explained that:

“Now our education is knowledge-based education and not practical education, which means that a student graduates with the basic or lowest level of knowledge in the field of precise specialisation and thus holds a certificate in it, but he/she does not have the capacities to employ this scientific knowledge.”

According to SM3, university textbooks, courses and curricula were not achieving effectively any of the stated goals of higher education, or preparing students for the labour market and public life. This view motivated me to ask how it is that, while not being equipped with the relevant practical teaching, many graduates do, nevertheless, manage to become skilled staff and/or active citizens. TM3 and SF1’s answers were that those who have developed their abilities and qualified have done so by their own efforts rather than as a result of attending university.

According to TM3, despite some efforts being made at universities in designing certain courses which could contribute to developing students’ abilities, those courses still concentrate on giving theoretical knowledge to the students rather than training them to in how to practise that knowledge. He said:

“Modules for training communication capacities, thinking capacities and computer skills were designed ... and yet there is no trace of these materials in the abilities of the students in their daily life... just as there are no communication capacities, as I think, or thinking capacities, and we see no output from these materials ... no impact of any kind on students.”

In contrast to earlier findings, however, higher education policy in Saudi Arabia has emphasised, in different ways, that the role of the university courses should be to improve students' abilities, whether this be life skills, social skills or career skills (Ministry of Education, 1995). It is also possible to identify a further policy agenda in higher education: educating students to be good people and active citizens (Saleh, 1986; Ministry of Education, 1995; Al-Essa, 2009; Bawazeer, 2010). Therefore, drawing the attention of both university academic staff and students to the purposes of higher education as outlined in its policy could be the first step towards raising awareness of the importance of practising in order to improve these wider capabilities of students. Clearly, promoting these broader capacities is not unconnected with that of promoting the culture and practices associated with dialogue.

Respondents expressed concern about the significant gap between theoretical education and practical application in universities and the focus on transferring and imparting knowledge through memorization rather increasing opportunities for practical education to improve students' abilities. A number of factors contribute to this. Firstly, each university course depends on just one reference. Secondly, the most common assessment method in Saudi Arabia is still the exam. This is not a defect in itself but does tend to make students marks-oriented. According to respondents, a wider range of assessment methods which assess abilities, is necessary, and not just knowledge. These methods should therefore be developed so as to shift the focus among teachers and students to the improvement of different capacities.

MacIntyre's vision (1987) for debate and dialogue in Scottish higher education posits that university students should have the capacity for rational dialogue and debate regarding the public good. In *The Idea of an Educated Public*, MacIntyre (1987) highlighted the importance of the universities' role in supporting dialogue and discussion by providing and developing a university environment. This might include, for example, opportunities to focus upon practices rather than just gaining knowledge, and providing different sources in the course, that might provoke discussion and

debate. This clearly has ramifications for the kinds of teaching and assessment methods deployed.

In his lecture entitled "The Idea of an Educated Public", MacIntyre (1987) stressed that the university is the most appropriate institution in which to deal with intellectual and philosophical issues. He argued for the importance of creating an "educated public", which MacAllister (2015) sums up as follows: the university is the most appropriate place to educate people, and it teaches a large number of people who will be teachers, employees and engineers (in Saudi Muslim society there are mosque leaders (*Imams*) who give a speech every Friday and the clerics who call others to Islam or to its virtues) who will transfer what they have learnt to others. The other point is that university education educates the public through creating spaces for peoples' interactions within the University by encouraging rational dialogue based on logical thought which respects the local tradition and that adheres to acknowledged virtues and ethics in order to come to a shared understanding. This practice is sometimes referred to as *phronesis* (Flyvbjerg, 2001), or practical wisdom, and concerns how people translate rationale dialogue into practice within their own particular circumstances. This dialogue within universities will also be about special and common issues and the common good, and this is the third point.

Failure to consider practice dimensions means that Saudi universities are not adequately preparing their students to become an educated public since currently students are not given opportunities to develop capacities beyond those necessary to pass examinations. This would imply that becoming an educated public involves both knowledge and skill in implementation. These viewpoints prompted many further questions, including:

- To what extent did the university environment, and its systems contribute to this result?
- Do faculty members and students also play a part in this?

- Does the problem lie in the design of courses, of curricula or in the way university teachers are prepared?
- Or, does the problem also derive from the service or logistic facilities?

Possible responses to these questions are presented in the following section while the remaining research questions are addressed in subsequent sections.

6.5.2 The University Environment

Given the ambitious efforts to improve the culture of dialogue among students within the university as part of a more comprehensive policy initiative in Saudi Arabia, the university environment and its facilities would appear to have an important position within the overall educational operation to achieve these ambitions. Respondents identified a number of challenges within the university environment. The first was administrative, played out in terms of difficulties in balancing between the development of material aspects such as buildings and offices on the one hand, and the development of the quality of educational practices within the classroom on the other.

One of the interviewees (OG3), a very senior and experienced member of staff, whilst praising the university administration for their efforts to improve construction, at the same time criticised them for neglecting the realities of the educational process, which is the core of a university's work, in his view. Other respondents also had somewhat negative opinions towards the university administration in terms of their neglect of the educational process. So, while they acknowledged the administration's focus on developing buildings and services, they believed this impacted indirectly on the relative lack of attention given to academic aspects such as the development of curricula and courses.

More generally, the implication was that while great efforts were being made to improve the university environment, these efforts were not translating into the real

work of the university as an educational institution. For example, one of the big challenges is the number of students in one class, which can be as high as 100. This restricts the kinds of pedagogies that teachers can draw upon in performing their teaching role. It has a particular impact on the possibility of finding ways to open up the space for dialogue (TF3). Moreover, regarding the classroom facilities for teaching, more than one respondent stated that the facilities were inadequate, not least, the availability of teaching aids in some classrooms. TM2 added that the unavailability of rooms and inadequate facilities was a major factor in the delay in being able to meet the demand for more courses, more teaching hours or new material.

These findings indicate that overcrowded classrooms due to a shortage of classrooms and limited time influence the extent to which teachers are able to use other, more interactive teaching methods, to supplement traditional teaching methods such as lectures. When these findings are compared to OG3's comments about the administration prioritising the improvement of buildings, we can see a mismatch in priorities. Efforts have thus far clearly not been effective in tackling some of these key challenges as regards the diversification of educational practices.

In addition, more attention needs to be directed at the design of classrooms. For example, the research assistant and I observed that seats are fixed to the floor, and all face the same direction, as if students were members of a cinema or theatre audience (see figure 12). The seating and distribution of students are not flexible enough, making small group seating or any other arrangement impossible.

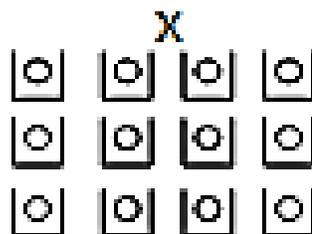


Figure 12: The Current Layout of the Classrooms at the University.

This prompted SM1 to comment that the teaching process needs classrooms that are designed for more flexible use, allowing students to form conversational groups and so on. I believe this is a useful suggestion and that such arrangements would have a positive effect on the level of collaboration and dialogue in the university classroom, especially a u-shaped arrangement (see figure 13).

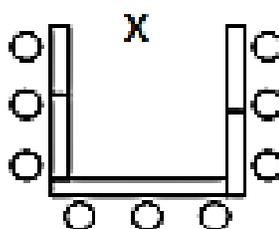


Figure 13: An Example of the Suggested Design of the Classrooms at the University.

Another challenge for academic teachers within the classroom is verbal communication between teachers and students and between the students. In this regard, teachers complained about the lack of voice system facilities within the classrooms. For example, TM3 complained that:

“Some classrooms did not have microphones or, if they do, the microphones are hand-held, limiting the teacher’s movements in the lecture... I tried to use a very helpful solution when I had a conversation with girls; I used a wireless microphone which I had bought by myself.”

Problems of amplification and the lack of specific devices were apparent to my assistant researcher and I. We noted that students in the first three rows responded more to questions and were constantly interacting with the teacher. Lack of amplification can explain the lack of interaction or discussion we observed with students in the back rows. This problem reduces the possibility of having good

communication within the classrooms and impacts negatively on student engagement. Students lose concentration and then tend to be busy with something else, such as their mobiles, which then distracts them from the teaching.

From my observation, specific technical facilities and educational aids for teaching were inadequate. The assistant researcher and I noticed that the classrooms had only primitive educational aids and technology, and even when available, these were not always fit for purpose. So, the question is: how can academic teachers work well in classrooms that are not prepared well for teaching? The question is all the more acute given the claim that decision makers in the universities prioritise the development of buildings and classrooms, and use of technology.

In order to promote dialogue, an environment has to be created which enables the meaningful and free exchange of ideas, for which the material environment of the classrooms has to be attended to. Previous findings from the classroom's observations demonstrate that overcrowded classrooms, a fixed structure and seats in the classrooms, and the lack of classroom facilities are detrimental to learning. Although these results of this study differ from MacIntyre, 1987 and Jackson, 2011, they are consistent with those of Alamri (2012) who found that the environment of the Saudi university needs to be developed to allow more freedom. While researchers have tended to concentrate on a context of interactive discussion, the appropriate material classroom environment is also a necessary element for this.

Flexible and well-equipped classrooms may assist the teachers to be more active and may encourage students to be more engaged. It is interesting to note that by comparing this with Moosa's (2005) interpretations of Al-Ghazali's "*dihlīz*" in architectural terms (see point 5.2) he has represented al-Ghazali's thought through this concept.

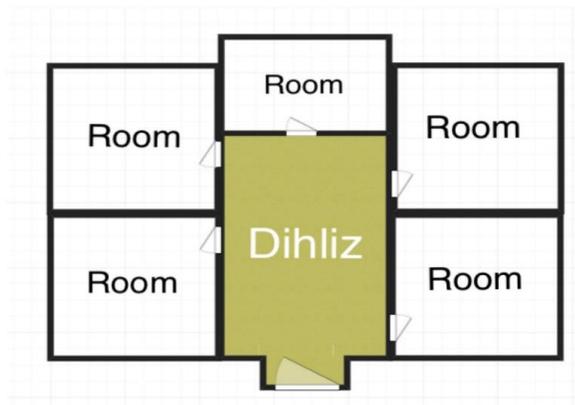
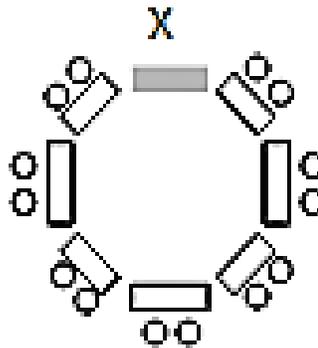


Figure 14: Showing the Location of “Dihlīz”.

This means that Al-Ghazali favoured a middle location between different opinions (see figure 13). This conceptualisation may help in creating religious dialogue within university classrooms through the design of the classrooms. In this, the academic teachers have to be in the middle area (*dihlīz*) as SM1 suggested. This could help them to engage in more flexible and face to face interactions, which eases communication and enables the exchange of ideas with students. Thus, improving the physical environment of the university could be crucial in promoting dialogue within the classroom (see figure 14).



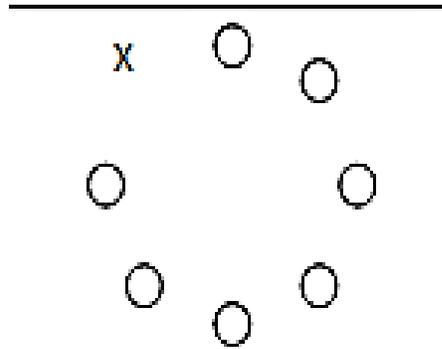


Figure 15: More Suggested Designs for the Classrooms at the University.

As with the concept of "*dihlīz*", MacIntyre (2009) emphasised the value of moderation (the middle point between two things), which allows self-consciousness to interact with other-consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984). This means that a middle area (*dihlīz* or Moderation) can evidence there is the possibility of exchanging ideas and harmonising opinions in a moderate and respectful manner. This theoretical interpretation opens the possibility to improve both the physical environment and current practices. These insights are also highly relevant to the practice of religious education; means to encourage dialogical practice in religious education, is especially important, given that in Saudi Arabia religious education courses are compulsory at all educational levels.

6.6 The Importance of Dialogue in Religious Education at the University

People's lives in Saudi Arabia revolve around Islam; this is central to their faith, laws, attitudes, conversations, ways of thinking and even their political governance system. Hence, crucial questions in this regard are:

- why do Saudi students at the university need to increase opportunities for practising dialogue?

- what are the motivations behind that, especially in religious education, given that Saudis share one religion, one language and one government, without political parties?

In the material that follows, respondents' varied responses to these questions are classified on the basis of different impulses and reasons. These reasons represent common issues affecting the whole Saudi community, as well as the University community, that stands in the way of promoting the culture of dialogue.

6.6.1 Dialogue as a cultural phenomenon

A number of respondents, including TF1, TF2, TM2 and TM3 believe that a central obstacle to dialogue is the current lack of a dialogue culture in Saudi society; this would suggest that the meaning, culture and methods of dialogue need to be more broadly disseminated. Moreover, a number of respondents thought that some people are brought up to consider dialogue a mere waste of time. This would suggest that if the educational aim concerning dialogue is to be realised among the Saudi people, further efforts in promoting a culture of dialogue will be necessary so as to improve both people's understanding of - and practice in - dialogue.

However, according to some respondents such as OG2 and TF1, the need for dialogue arises in reaction to certain kinds of general objection to it in Saudi society, raised by both lay people and intellectuals. Others, such as OG1 and OG3, think that this need stems from behaviours recognised in certain people, such as anger, extremism, lack of respect for others' opinions, bigotry and weakness of expression. Hence, one of the university's roles in educating students is to meet the community's needs for skilled graduates who understand dialogue, and its advantages, in a much broader sense.

6.6.2 Dialogue for improving practices

According to a number of respondents, the lack of a dialogue culture may be due to lack of proper application, indicating the need to improve the capacities and

behaviours conducive to participating in dialogue. Most respondents stated that while people believe in the value of dialogue theoretically, they face formidable difficulties in practice (OG2, OG4, SM3, SF2 and SM2). OG3, for example, said:

“I expect that people welcome dialogue and prefer to spread it... But when the dialogue is practised, you will find that actual participants have less understanding of how to apply the dialogue and its principles, sharing opportunities of talking, or respecting the opinions of others”

TM3, in contrast, saw the problem as being not just about abilities:

“... in my experience, people need enough spaces for practising dialogue and confidence to express their opinions without any probability of harassment they may face when entering a dialogue.”

However, according to the majority of respondents (OG3, OG4, TF2, TF3, TM1, TM2, SF3, SM1, SM3), the main reasons leading to the failure of dialogue is a lack of, or limited understanding about, what it means to engage in dialogue and what it means to apply dialogue as a process; such capacities along with certain ethical dispositions (Chapter 3) are essential to having a good discussion. They proposed that in a culture of dialogue, endurance and patience are essential qualities for all participants and, at the same time, they identified the refusal to listen, violence, anger, screaming and the imposition of opinion, as obstacles to dialogue. Such attitudes and perceptions, could impact on peaceful dialogue, and points to the importance of educating and training students in the practice of dialogue, and creating appropriate spaces for its practice within the university, as MacIntyre (1987) advocated.

6.6.3 Dialogue for enhancing the national responsibility and unity

One motivation for pursuing dialogue in Saudi society is national unity and the need to foster individual responsibility toward the nation. For OG2 and OG3, one of the most important objectives of dialogue in the Kingdom is to strengthen national

cohesion. They also thought dialogue would have a positive impact on developing the spirit of citizenship and the formation of identity in the Saudi people. For OG1, another objective of dialogue is to strengthen people's sense of belonging to the country (OG1), as, according to this respondent, there is a significant gap in this regard at present.

Dialogue within university education can therefore increase the consciousness of the people regarding citizenship (Lister, 2003) and the common good (MacIntyre, 1987) whilst enabling them, through dialogue, to better understand themselves individually (MacIntyre, 1988) and the needs of the community in terms of coherence and unity.

6.6.4 Dialogue for the diversity of the tribes and tackling racism

Some respondents expressed the view that dialogue should be promoted in Saudi society so as to challenge some of the more negative customs of tribalism and to stand up to racism. While tribal diversity is one of the principle components of Saudi society, it was also characterised by some respondents as a problem that Saudi society faces; some thought that dialogue could play an integral role in addressing some of these issues (e.g., OG1).

TM1 thought that some people adhere to racist and tribal standards; for example, they perceive that when you, as a husband and father, allow your son or your wife to talk with you, it can be detrimental to your prestige. They might even, in some cases, look down on those who are not Saudi, let alone enter into a dialogue with them. For this reason, TM1 went on to argue, more research is needed to teach people how to deal with other residents, especially those who come from other countries and represent different cultures (OG1).

Whilst there is no doubt that the Saudi community rejects racism and certain tribal customs, they are also very proud of the culture of their tribes. Balance is thus required here between three elements: upholding the tribal traditions while maintaining loyalty to the country and upholding the religion of Islam. Achieving this balance cannot be

left to chance and the university environment is the place where students can be made aware of its importance. Dialogue is also required in order to find a middle point between affiliation to the tribe, national requirements and religious commitment, while also combatting racism and xenophobia more generally.

6.6.5 Dialogue for respecting others and their opinions

As the respondents have argued, one of the motives for promoting a culture of dialogue through the University is undoubtedly to cultivate respect for other people and their opinions. Some of the respondents emphasised that accepting other people's opinions as valid opinions is one of the most important ideas to impart. In fact, this view is held not only by the respondents but was expressed by the late King Abdullah. As OG1 explains:

“When the late King Abdullah established the King Abdul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue, he said, ‘I am surprised that some of our scholars cling to their points of view and totally reject the opinions of others. They consider their opinions as sacrosanct; this made me think that we must remove this hypersensitivity and insistence, especially, when dealing with opinions.’”

In addition, according to OG1, in some sessions conducted at the centre for national dialogue, some citizens, scholars, intellectuals, journalists and others apparently behaved unreasonably by seeking to impose their opinions on others (OG1).

In this respect, it is supposed that one of the key objectives to be pursued through dialogical activities is to develop the ability to deal with people who hold different opinions or come from a different culture. Here it is assumed that dialogue within the classroom is a crucial activity, if the principle of respect for others and their opinions is to be realised more widely.

6.6.6 Dialogue for promoting and protecting diversity and pluralism

Another motive for pursuing dialogue in Saudi Arabia is to encourage diversity and pluralism within the community. In particular, questions that were posed here include:

- how can a society like Saudi Arabia understand diversity and plurality?
- what images of diversity and pluralism already exist in Saudi society?
- is there any diversity within Saudi society?

According to OG2, the Saudi social fabric may seem from the outside to be uniform but, in fact, there is considerable diversity. This respondent went on to talk about several social and cultural differences, exemplifying the pluralism and diversity together with the intellectual variations that exist in the Saudi community, such as groups that belong to different intellectual schools. He went on to explain that there are three distinct intellectual trends, namely conservatives, extremists and so-called liberals. Moreover, there is also doctrinal diversity, between the Sunni, who form the vast majority, and the Shia, who, although a minority, are still a part of the social fabric (OG2).

Pluralism also exists in jurisprudence, with the four most popular schools and doctrines differing greatly in their approach to *Shari'a* law (OG4). Pluralism also lies in the diversity of tribes mentioned above, so the problem is not the lack of pluralism but the ability of Saudi people to deal appropriately with the notion of pluralism that is perceived negatively as antagonistic and oppositional (TM1).

This finding suggests that it would be better to focus on this variety and plurality, which are considered to enrich any dialogue. Furthermore, it would be better, too, to emphasise that a plurality of differences and varied points of view can bring prosperity and do not necessarily lead to conflict. Pluralism and variation can enrich the dialogue that can be opened up for university students through different activities. Reading broadly can likewise bring out differences in students' visions and opinions

(MacIntyre, 1987), which will be reflected in classroom activities involving an open exchange of different views.

6.6.7 Dialogue for reducing intellectual conflicts

Some respondents suggested that one of the motivations for developing dialogue is to put an end to the conflicts between various trends in Saudi society. In the Saudi community, a number of groups are at odds with one another intellectually and reducing these conflicts between them is one of the aims of fostering a dialogic culture in Saudi Arabia (OG2).

OG2 and OG3 saw these conflicts as arising from prejudice and stereotyping of others, leading to intellectual isolation rather than social cohesion (OG2 and SM2), or this was seen to cause passive divisions and classifications within the society, such as secularism, the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism, Wahhabism, Sufism and so on (OG2). Moreover, according to OG2, people may even accuse a Muslim of not being a Muslim or of not following the correct Islamic approach by judging them and describing them as a hypocrite or disobedient, which may then lead to conflict and violence (TF2). On the other hand, TM3 raised the problem of applying intellectual conviction in dialogue. He argued that the biggest problem is people's assumption that what they believe is indisputable.

The requirement of Saudi society in this regard, is to learn how to deal with others and with different viewpoints in a debate. Dialogue is premised upon an understanding that diversity is innate and has to be addressed positively. The stance of "you either agree with my opinion, or you are against my opinion" can be addressed in dialogue. Some respondent considered that the practice of dialogue by students from different intellectual groups, may assist in affirming and accepting diversity and contribute towards eliminating the intellectual challenge of accepting others and their opinions (OG3 and OG4).

6.6.8 Dialogue for strengthening the family and the social fabric:

A number of respondents argued that it is necessary to cultivate dialogue in the social environment in general and in the family, in particular. TF2 described the dialogue between members of a family in the past as almost non-existent, especially in families and in schools, which means that some kinds of repression may have been exercised between parents and children or between teachers and students.

TF1 added that the main source of family problems in Saudi society is the lack of dialogue within the family, whether between couples or between parents and children. SF2 and SM2 said that parental authority or even that of older brothers in a family could be an obstacle to the success of family dialogue.

A significant finding which emerged in this regard is the extent to which power and fear (as represented by the parents) have an adverse impact on the dialogue process. This may explain why the creation of safe spaces for dialogue in Saudi society is necessary, without using the authority of traditions, teachers, or parents, as these could represent a significant obstacle to freedom of opinion and a plurality of perspectives in the activities of dialogue.

6.6.9 Modern technology, devices and programs

Modern technology, with its various programs, in particular in the field of social media and networks, was considered by the respondents to be one of the key modern features that encourage dialogue. TM3 thought that modern technologies train people to engage in dialogue and encourage them to express their opinions freely. OG1 agreed that social networks (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) have promoted the spirit of dialogue, helped to spread a culture of dialogue and have contributed to the discussion of many issues that would not, hitherto, have been voiced.

On the other hand, TM3 saw these technological dialogues as often overly heated and as increasing the possibility of conflict and disagreements (OG3). In the same vein,

OG2 rejected the role of electronic communication in fostering dialogue, emphasising the importance of direct communication, regular meetings and face-to-face dialogue.

Social media appear to open the door for dialogue, the exchange of views, discussion, and creating a space for freedom of expression. However, it can also be abused by making it easier to send inappropriate messages or abusive personal comments. This suggests the need to look at the behavioural, cultural and societal frameworks that increase the relationship between interlocutors in Saudi society, either face-to-face or via social media.

All those motivations for dialogue can be summed up in five points, which are;

- reaching the truth by participating in a balanced and equal dialogue between the parties,
- taking into account the values, morals and ethics,
- contributing to reduce the conflicts that may result from the internal dialogue and critical interrogation about the local tradition,
- moving to the future by having a critical dialogue about the past and present tradition, and finally,
- achieving the social integration and the realisation of the principle that dialogue is a natural and human interaction.

It seems that all of those elements are supported by Buber (1970), Bakhtin (1984), Asad (1986), and MacIntyre (1988).

An excellent example in the Islamic community of these elements is Al-Ghazali, as Mossa (2005) identified. Al-Ghazali had an openness to the other with taking into his account the right of the other to respond, ask questions and criticism, and this was what happened between him and the philosophers. Also, his approach was characterised by commitment to a set of ethics and values that assisted him to accept others' opinions

with respect and appreciation for those views. This kind of dialogue was not an obstacle for Al-Ghazali in retaining his traditional adherence to the Holy Quran, its concepts, its doctrinal and religious foundations. As a result of having such dialogue with the philosophers, the Islamic, Arabic and global libraries have become very rich with scientific and philosophical wealth.

Overall, the findings from the present study may explain why the Saudi government supports the project of a dialogue within the community (King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, 2012) and why this study is important. These findings also support the earlier studies about misconceptions or foggy understandings of the concept of dialogue, in some cases (see above, Chapter 5). This is one of the challenges Saudi people face, since, as we have seen, some people might think that dialogue is about reaching the right opinion or the truth, or is the power of influence and persuasion, which differs from Bakhtin's (1984) view of dialogue.

In the light of the above, it would seem that respondents tend to see self-consciousness and a monologic approach as characterising the general behaviour of a large section of the Saudi community. As cited and discussed previously, this approach was described by Bakhtin (1994) as the inverse of dialogical encounter:

“With a monologic approach (in its extreme pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change anything in the world of my consciousness” (p. 292-293).

This confirms the need for a culture of dialogue to be developed within the Saudi community. Moreover, it highlights the importance of understanding Bakhtin's view (1984) of dialogue. In his opinion, dialogue is the interaction between the self-consciousness and other-consciousness and this interaction leads to positive attitudes and keeps extremism at bay.

Perhaps the most striking finding was the disconnect between the lack of acceptance of diversity and other's opinions which has been reported and the overt encouragement within the Islamic tradition to engage in dialogue and accept others in all their diversity. This what Asad (1986) believed, and he also confirmed that this diversity requires the practice of dialogue so as to free ourselves from more limited standpoints. In this regard, the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue (2012) seeks to develop a more balanced discourse, one that accepts pluralism and diversity and simultaneously maintains the social fabric.

At the same time, the traditions of the Saudi society should be taken into account (MacIntyre, 1988). For example, respecting religion and the culture of tribes are considered the main characteristics of the Saudi traditions and in this regard, MacIntyre (1988) points out that changing agreed traditions in a society is difficult and may lead to a conflict, but having a critical interrogation about the practices of these traditions is nevertheless required. This means that, if the society is to become renewable, interactive and dynamic, there will be a need for extensive interactions with others, even though this is both difficult and complex in practice. Otherwise, a tradition will remain limited in its scope: single-minded and with single-consciousness. A lack of understanding of dialogue as consisting in the pluralism of voices might lead to this being monological, in which the truth is limited to one truth (Bakhtin,1984). In the Saudi context, this then can lead to arrogance in making judgments about others, their religion, thoughts and Islamic faith, or to judging a Muslim a non-Muslim, leading to forms of intellectual extremism. This can not only affect the whole country but also may be reflected at a global level at one end and the very local level, such as within individual families, at the other.

In terms of creating an environment more conducive to dialogue within the Saudi tradition, most respondents appear to hold the view that understanding the concept of dialogue would decrease the possibility of conflict and improve practices. In addition, it could reduce the gap between different opinions that may affect individual relationships. Another way of reducing negative attitudes is by disseminating the

virtue of moderation through practising dialogue. Moderation would assist everyone to become aware that he/she can remain in his/her self-consciousness as well as being open and listening to others towards reaching a point of consensus (MacIntyre, 2009; Hanapi, 2014).

6.7 Conclusion:

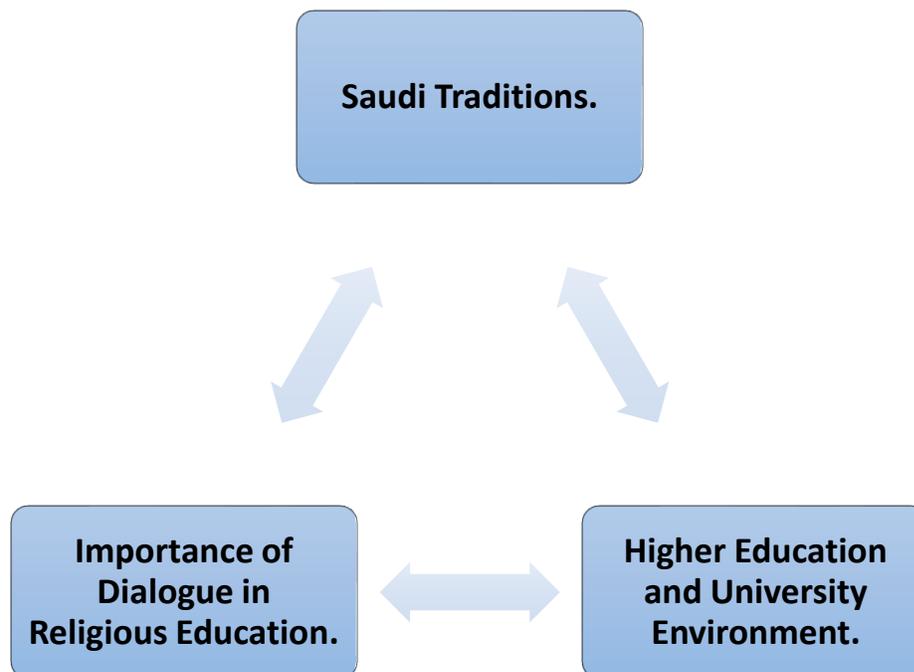


Figure 16: The three Relations: traditions, university, and students' needs.

In summary, it would appear that if a culture of dialogue is to be spread, this has to take place within the context of the discursive traditions that continue to inform Saudi society (see figure 16). The findings show that besides respecting and adhering to Islam and its constants, maintaining national unity and the political system are the primary pillars of Saudi tradition. In this regard, there are restrictions on dialogue within Saudi society that have been noted by respondents. Thus, debating Islamic constants or political issues is not acceptable to Saudi people, for example. The Saudi

Government, on the other hand, provides a number of spaces for dialogue, whether formally in the Shura Council, or informally by establishing the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue.

In addition to that, the Saudi Government looks forward to the contributions of education in human development for its Saudi citizens. To achieve that target, it has drawn up an educational policy for the different educational stages, including higher education and the university, which is the focus of this study. Although this policy is available for everyone to read, I found a lack of awareness of this and hence limited implementation of its goals and purposes. Respondents also reported that abilities in relation to dialogue, are undeveloped in the population in general. This means that some of the goals of higher education, as set out in the higher education policy, have yet to be achieved. Evidence of this failure can be seen in the lack of specialised knowledge and job skills among university graduates.

This opens up a new set of questions about university management and its role in the enhancement of the university as a workplace and the need to apply systems and procedures that reflect high-quality learning and teaching. The respondents concluded that university administrators are less concerned with promoting policy imperatives – such as the promotion of dialogical practice – than with issues such as the material and formal aspects of universities. Evidence of this can be seen in a lack of lecture hours, large groups in each class (up to 100 students), lack of classrooms, sub-standard equipment (microphones and other technological devices) and the rigid design of classrooms and seats, that severely restrict the kinds of pedagogy that can be enacted.

These findings would suggest that the attention and efforts of the university should be directed at two important aspects: higher education policy and the requirements of the community. Dialogue is important in this regard, as we have seen. It improves students' capacities, prepares them for daily life and employment, and, according to the respondents interviewed here, is a major requirement in the Saudi community. From responses of participants, it would seem that religious education at university can fulfil

its responsibility of educating students about themselves and their community issues, through dialogue.

Saudi society faces multiple challenges and there is a pressing need for collective and interactive efforts to focus on overcoming these challenges. Dialogue is significant because it has the power to develop self and collective consciousness. Education, in this regard, has a crucial role in preparing individuals to engage in dialogical activities in the light of Saudi religious and social traditions.

Therefore, practising rational dialogue at universities will help students to acquire independence of thought, which will then enable them to reflect on their broader social role (MacIntyre, 1987). MacIntyre also argues that students who have benefited from the practice of rational dialogue will be more capable of communicating to the public. That is why he (1987) emphasized that the university environment must have space for diversity. He outlines the role of teachers as being primarily to motivate students to read books, promoting diversity and respecting pluralism.

Through these Islamic and Saudi traditions, the university environment and the reasons for needing dialogue in religious education, religious education in the university provides the opportunity for rational and philosophical dialogue and consequently, needs to be reconstructed on the basis of moderation, pluralism and respect for others and their opinions. So, in order to accomplish the research objectives, we can now ask: how might religious education contribute to promoting dialogue culture in Saudi Arabia? This question is addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7: THE PRACTICE OF DIALOGUE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction

Having investigated how the concept of dialogue is understood within Islamic society and identifying Saudi traditions, this section closely examines the features of religious education. It draws on a case study of the courses that comprise the ‘Islamic Culture’ module, focusing on the significance attached to courses of ‘Islamic Culture’ within the overall programme, analysed through its outlines, textbooks, and its assessment (see figure 17).

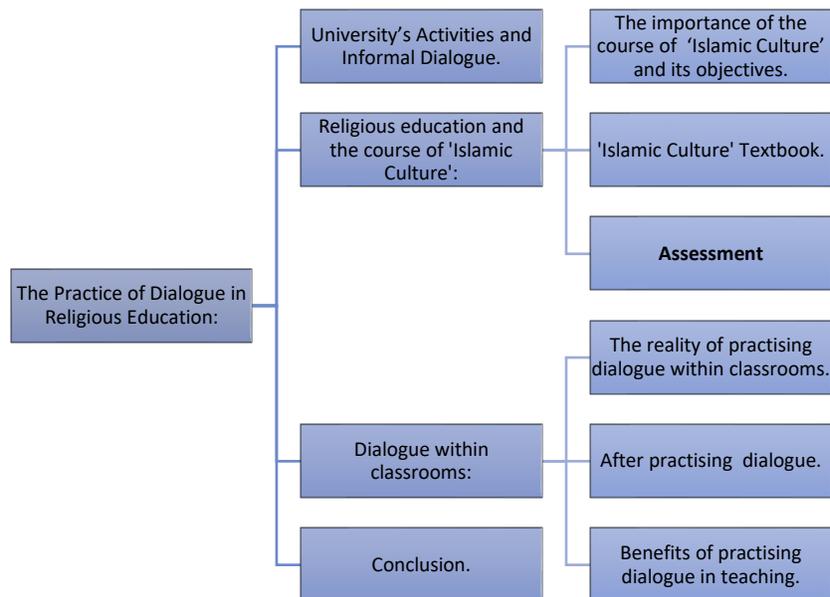


Figure 17: The Structure of Chapter 7.

One of the most significant findings in terms of the objectives of this research, is the importance attached to religious education in general and the course on ‘Islamic

Culture' in particular, as an integral aspect of Saudi identity and culture. According to the respondents, this kind of education – along with dialogical activities – is a crucial area because it promotes the concepts of moderation and tolerance. However, an unexpected finding was that teachers represent an obstacle to the promotion of dialogical activities in religious education. This is because alignment with orthodox views and rejection of views that are perceived to challenge these, orientates their practice towards the use of traditional teaching methods such as monological presentation, rather than dialogical activity.

Linked to this was another significant finding: the textbooks that accompany 'Islamic Culture' courses are designed to transfer specific knowledge to the students for the purpose of memorisation rather than debate. The findings show that as a result, even when the themes introduced in the textbook are in principle debatable, these tend to be presented in ways that do not afford students opportunities for dialogue. The presentation of these themes was also found to be unconnected to issues of daily life, in a manner that did not provide students with any guidance as to how they might translate these ideas or engage in debate about them. Moreover, the analysis of the courses that together comprise 'Islamic Culture' found that these are based upon a single text and that the assessment of these courses is mostly based on examinations. This further reduces the possibility of dialogue becoming an integral practice within such courses.

The second section describes responses from and attitudes of students towards dialogical practice, having experienced such activities within the religious education classroom. This is followed by a discussion linking the practice of dialogue with the attainment of desirable graduate attributes. For a number of students, their initial encounter with dialogue was marked by shyness, hesitation and fear that - in some cases - impacted upon their capacity to think in practice. That said, many students did respond very positively to the opportunities afforded through dialogue. For these students, dialogue was regarded as an appropriate educational practice for religious education in the university.

7.2 University's Activities and Informal Dialogue:

Academic education does not depend solely on traditional education. In fact, the university's activities are considered to be a way to improve students' capacities and experiences in general and to promote the culture of dialogue amongst students, in particular. In this regard, I have tried to explore such university activities and their availability at the university.

In terms of the educational role of dialogue, a number of respondents stated that such activities within the university are important and contribute to spreading a culture of dialogue too, whether in social, cultural or religious activities. For instance, SM2, praised the activities in general, saying:

“The university activities help the student to develop his capacity to interact effectively in class since he gets previous exposure to dialogues and debates.”

SF1 and SF2 believed these activities to be beneficial and expressed regret that such activities were either not conducted effectively or were entirely absent. On the other hand, one of the students (SM2) considered himself to be too busy with their studies and felt they did not have time to engage in such activities, whilst recognising their importance in the university.

According to SM3, the activities many students find most exciting are sports activities (SM3). Although it might seem there is little scope for dialogue within the sports activities themselves, dialogue could be practised in preparing for these. Another respondent (OG2) stated that in one Saudi university, there was a reading club. The students who managed the club tended to select a book for reading, and then invite the book's author and hold discussion sessions to enable the participants to give their comments and opinions.

The university also hosted a number of clubs that provided cultural, religious and medical programmes. These clubs are appropriate venues for dialogue yet there appeared from the interviews to be great reluctance to engage in such activities. This

may be due to a lack of innovation, creativity or quality of these activities or a failure of marketing. Moreover, the findings indicate that while sports activities at the university, especially football, are appealing to students, students will often try to find an excuse for not becoming involved in any university activity and the most popular excuse in this, is 'too busy studying', as mentioned above. Yet some of the respondents showed self-desire as regards engaging in the dialogical activities as they thought that was enjoyable.

The latter finding appear consistent with those of Almagamsi (2007), who suggested that when teachers and students come together and participate in activities such as seminars, the possibilities for dialogue increase. He added that informal seminars in mosques, literary clubs, and private weekly literary councils also have a potential for fostering useful dialogue.

Developing and offering activities in the university context is central to improving students' abilities. Even with large number of students, these activities can be provided in different ways. For example, each department and each faculty can devise and offer its own activities separately instead of having activities at the level of the whole university. In this case, the university's administration can encourage all departments and faculties to develop dialogical activities such as seminars or scientific discussions, as well as supervising these activities and even designing different competitions between them so as to raise the level of excitement and interest.

7.3 Religious education and the 'Islamic Culture' course

When focusing on the importance of educational dialogue within university classrooms, it needs to be remembered that religious education has a significant place in the educational system in general in Saudi Arabia. This perhaps explains why we look to religious education to spread the culture of dialogue among students at the university.

In addition, religious issues have a critical priority in dialogue among students in the university, especially, given the intellectual and religious diversity within the Saudi community. This emphasis on the religion of Islam for the Saudi people means it also has a major role in the educational and university environment. This has already been alluded to within previous themes, but here the focus on religion will be more in depth and will draw on the analysis of documents related to the ‘Islamic Culture’ course, its syllabi, course outline, and textbooks, as a case study for this research.

7.3.1 The importance of the course of ‘Islamic Culture’ and its purposes

In order to achieve the aims of education in this country, religious disciplines and courses are designed and given a place in higher education programs. Some of these courses, such as ‘Islamic Culture’, are compulsory for all university students. Currently, according to TM1, there are four compulsory courses of ‘Islamic Culture’. All students, male or female, at all universities begin these courses in their first year and continue until they have completed the four courses. Every student has to pass examinations in ‘Islamic Culture’ in order to graduate (TM1).

Examining the purposes of religious education in the national education policy suggests that the courses of religious education are at its core. However, the policy itself implies that the purpose of teaching religious education which is of most interest to Saudis may be merely the transmission of items of knowledge. In religious education in Saudi, this means religious knowledge and knowledge of the religious traditions which have focused primarily on faith in God (Allah), the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and other items of religious knowledge that are associated with worship and Shari’a law. This, to my mind, has greatly hindered the class activities and educational practices that can be followed in classrooms.

At this point in the research I asked one of the teachers of ‘Islamic Culture’ about their perception of the purposes of religious education: what were its aims? and what were

teachers required to achieve through religious education? Their answers were inaccurate and unclear. I was several times referred to the course outlines where the aims of the courses of 'Islamic Culture' are set out (these are discussed in the following section). When I asked whether they managed to achieve these aims, I met the same response: hesitation and equivocal answers. If we compare this with their understanding of the aims and purposes of higher education (see 6.5.1), we conclude that the university teachers of religious education lack awareness and understanding of the nature and purposes of religious education in higher education.

Regarding the teachers' role in the situation of teaching courses of 'Islamic Culture', it may be said that the most important point is to teach the book identified as the course textbook and explain it to the students. This recalls the metaphor of Ferire (1970) that the traditional teaching method transfers knowledge as a process of 'banking'; teachers introduce the information and the students' task is to receive it. This concept encouraged a number of the respondents (OG1, TM1, TF3, for instance) to confirm that the current curriculum of religious education in the university is interested only in transmitting knowledge, which is then unloaded in the exams, without any practices that might impact on the students' behavior or develop their abilities, self-evaluation and awareness.

Throughout the interviews and observations, it appears that completing the whole identified syllabus by teaching the outlines of the whole course of the 'Islamic culture' each year is the most important duty of the teachers. So, it is common in the university for teachers to be committed to following the textbook which has been determined for the course and there is no flexibility for a university teacher to pursue any other method (TM1 and TF3). This is what emerged from notes taken by my research assistant and me about some teachers (male and female) as they did not approve us to participate in the session within their classrooms, but merely permitted observations. The reason for this, according to them, is that they prefer to concentrate on teaching and they did not wish to face any disruption this might cause or any delay in their attempt to cover all the textbook's themes before the semester ended.

As a result, although the importance of religious education at all levels in the educational system in Saudi Arabia is never doubted, some students feel dissatisfied in studying the course 'Islamic Culture'. It is shocking to hear such opinions in this country, and it gives rise to an important question; why are they dissatisfied? The answers to it are summarized by the participants (TM3, TF1 SM3) unanimously, who attributed the following reason for it:

“because of a few teachers who did not present the course properly, did not delve into the outlines' themes in enough depth, and did not encourage the students to involve themselves in the class in learning together.”

The monologue approach to teaching which is sometimes used by the teacher makes the student feel like a subject who has little, if nothing to do with the learning process. This teaching system is rejected by Buber (1958), Bakhtin (1984) and Freire (1970), who called for an improved relationship between teachers and students through dialogue which builds on the exchanging of knowledge and information between them and between the students themselves. While religious education is the core of the Saudi education policy, the question here is whether dialogue can be practiced in conveying religious education to Saudi university students.

Although the religious education in Saudi is based on transferring knowledge, voices have been raised strongly demanding a change in the teaching approach that would allow students to practice dialogue in the classrooms. In this regard, respondents were asked for their opinion of 'Islamic Culture' and to comment on the importance of practicing dialogue in its classes. All the respondents (TM2, SM2, SF1 for example) agreed that dialogue in religious education is the most attractive activity the subject offers. They confirmed that when dialogue is introduced into these classrooms, students want to prolong the discussion and continue the debate. They also confirmed that the topic that students generally want most to discuss is religion. The reason for this may be that Islam touches upon everything in their lives, as well as being an integral aspect of their identity and culture, as all the respondents agreed. This is why

OG1 and OG3 stressed the significance of religious education in general, including ‘Islamic Culture’, as being a crucial area that must be learnt and understood. It is for these reasons that I chose to investigate the potential of dialogue in the teaching of this subject.

Another finding was that respondents thought the study of ‘Islamic Culture’ is a good way to pay attention to identity and culture as Muslims in the Saudi society. TF1, for example, argued that these courses promote the values and Islamic principles among young Saudi Muslims, to help students become balanced and moderate and avoid extremism or psychological and religious unrest. OG2 agreed that studying ‘Islamic Culture’ through dialogue could contribute to improving distinctively Islamic virtues, and considered that:

“Dialogue is essential to clarify the concepts of moderation through religious curricula, especially in Saudi Arabia.”

The findings of this study corroborate the findings of much previous work in this field. Ibrahim (1994), Bawazeer (2010) and Doorn-Harder (2007) also highlight the value of linking classroom dialogue and discussion with religious education. They all found that this kind of dialogue can improve students' reflexivity, reduce conflict, promote virtues and morality, and contribute to spreading the concepts of tolerance and peace. In the context of Europe in 2009, when the project "Religion, Education, Dialogue, and Conflict (REDCo)" was begun, Weisse (2011) and Jackson (2011) speak of the importance of classroom dialogue in religious education. However, it should not be forgotten that the religious education in Saudi Arabia is a tradition -constituted approach with different educational purposes than those assumed in most European countries, as we have seen.

Mention of a tradition – constituted approach to religious education – also serves to distinguish between widely differing purposes in the generic category of ‘religious education’. In Europe, as (REDCO) shows, there has been a move away from traditional forms of religious education which assumed a specific religious

commitment. This is because society is increasingly pluralistic and schools and universities have become more pluralistic because their students come from different faiths and ideologies. In response, a new approach to religious education based on 'neutrality' has emerged, where the purpose is to educate young people about a wide range of beliefs without assuming their commitment to any. This change to a more secular form of religious education (premised upon the possibility of a 'neutral' methodology) therefore resulted in a change to the assumed purposes of religious education, away from socialisation, inducting young people into a specific religious tradition (Christianity) and instead focusing upon understanding and the acknowledgement of religious and cultural difference. In this new approach to religious education, dialogue is important because it focuses on different points of view, pathways to mutual understanding and the capacity both to justify a given point of view and be persuaded by reason.

Although still within the category of 'religious education', the new approach therefore contrasts with the purpose of traditional religious education, which, as we have previously discussed, is primarily concerned with socializing people into a specific tradition. The overall aim of religious education in Islamic society is to apply Shari'a and adhere to Islamic traditions. In so far as the main aim of a Muslim person is to achieve happiness in the current life and to be assured of salvation in the hereafter, the goal of education is to educate people about their tradition by teaching them the rules of their religion.

The traditional frame in Saudi Arabia is not limited to understanding the tenets of the religion, but focuses on how Muslims can balance between adhering to their religion and being effective in everyday life. Therefore, and more specifically thinking of the content of religious education, OG4 thought that 'Islamic Culture' must keep pace with the issues of the day, and address them from the perspective of Islam and its concepts, as well as linking them to Al-Shar'ia. He also thought that contemporary developments such as contemporary factions inside and outside the Islamic framework and the attitude of Islam to them could be addressed on this

course, providing a broad range of subjects that could provide areas for dialogue (TM2). These responses clearly suggest that some respondents believed revitalising the idea of classroom dialogue in religious education should be made a priority.

However, TM3 also expressed concern, saying that dialogue in religious education could be problematic, given the tendency to stick to certain views and to reject the opinions of others. This problem began in ancient times, as he pointed out:

“The Islamic nation went through a period of sticking to the scholars' (Ulam'a) opinions without any discussion. At the same time, the religious scholars preferred the kind of student who does not discuss anything... The traditional education which was offered by scholars in those days may be the reason for that.”

It is interesting here to recognize how little impact traditional teaching methods in religious education may have on improving students' ability to think and discuss. This is perhaps why some respondents thought the courses of ‘Islamic Culture’ were not important. The course was viewed as lacking in open dialogue and was closed to the play of different opinions. To change this view, considerable effort will be required from the teachers of ‘Islamic Culture’ to broaden the scope of the course so as to integrate dialogue into the classroom and address these issues.

7.3.2 The ‘Islamic Culture’ Textbook

Although respondents confirmed the importance of dialogue in teaching ‘Islamic Culture’ at the university, the objectives of the four courses are seen as being focused on gaining knowledge rather than providing opportunities for practice. This was apparent from the analysis of the four modules’ outlines. Objectives focused on aspects such as understanding, knowledge, definition, clarification, statement and awareness, to the neglect of objectives concerning the improvement of abilities such

as thinking, analysing, discussing, dialogue, discovery, evaluation or criticism were evident.

Similarly, an analysis of the four textbooks that accompany the 'Islamic culture' course found that they concentrate on giving students ample amounts of knowledge and information with very limited focus on improving the students' abilities of thinking and speaking in relation to this material. A content analysis of the four textbooks found that most of the religious concepts and themes were covered albeit in a didactic way that did not invite questioning or elaboration.

The first textbook ('Islamic Culture' 1/ ISLS 101) covers what might be considered to be the three most important aspects of religion: intellect and culture, aspects of faith and worship in Islam. The textbook addresses these themes in three chapters. The first chapter discusses the concept of Islamic Culture in an expanded, comprehensive way. It treats four points, namely: a) the definition of the concept of Islamic Culture; b) the sources of Islamic culture such as the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*; Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic history and the Arabic language; c) the importance of Islamic culture and the impact of belonging to Islam; Islamic civilization as the identity of the community, and its impact on the interaction in this civilization and society; and d) the relationship of Islamic culture to other cultures, and how it can interact with Western culture and other cultures.

Chapter two contains four units: a) the concept of faith and the pillars of faith; b) the characteristics of the faith of Islam, which are clarity and moderation; c) the importance of Islamic faith for individuals and society; and d) issues of doctrine on several points. The most notable of these points are the freedom of belief in Islam, the mockery of religion, extremism in religion, and Islamic faith between mind and narration. The third and final chapter in this textbook describes worship in Islam through several topics: the concept of worship in Islam; the motives of Islamic worship, the rules, terms, conditions and characteristics of worship, and the types of worship in Islam. The last unit refers to concepts and erroneous practices of worship.

In the second textbook ('Islamic Culture' 2/ ISLS 201), the themes addressed relate to religious fundamentalism and tenets. In this book, the focus is on the sources of Islamic legislation (the *Qur'an*, *Sunnah*, consensus, measurement, ijihad and fatwa), and these themes are divided into four chapters. The first chapter is about Islamic legislation (*Shari'a*) and the characteristics and purposes of Islamic law. The second chapter comprises four units which focus on the *Qur'an*, its definition, names, characteristics, the scientific miracles described in it, and finally, the duty of Muslims towards it. Chapter Three also contains four units and focuses on the *Sunnah*, its definition, integrity and mechanism of documenting the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH). In addition to that, this chapter presents the greatness of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his place in the hearts of Muslims and reviews the characteristics of the Prophet, peace be upon him, which are considered to be a good example for every Muslim to follow. This chapter also addresses the duty of Muslims towards the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). The fourth and last chapter covers the remaining sources of Islamic legislation, which are: 1) consensus, which means the agreement of Muslim scholars on a jurisprudential opinion since the death of the Prophet; 2) measurement, which means measuring contemporary and modern issues compared with the original, substantiated judgments derived from the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*; 3) and finally, Ijtihad and fatwa, which means exerting all efforts to extract a legitimate judgment through an understanding of the Holy *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.

The contents of those textbooks ('Islamic Culture' 1/ ISLS 101 and 'Islamic Culture' 2/ ISLS 201) concentrate on the traditional aspects of Islam. All themes that have been covered are about Islamic constants such as faith, the sources of Islamic law, and fundamental religious information. The knowledge they provide is both traditional and repetitive, which is why TM3, one of the team members involved in preparing the 'Islamic Culture' textbooks, described them thus:

“And I think that students in the primary, elementary and secondary schools had already studied those topics in religious courses in each year of public education. Then they come to the university to learn the same subjects again!”

Because of the limitations and restrictions on dialogue in the Muslim community and its religious education mentioned by respondents, points of fundamentalist dogma covered in these textbooks are not appropriate topics for dialogue. In terms of ‘Islamic Culture’ (1) and (2), SF1 thought that:

“Not all the themes in ‘Islamic Culture’ are possible topics for dialogue. There are areas such as those in the first and the second textbooks which are not appropriate for dialogue.”

This view mirrors previous thinkers who have explained the effect of dialogue and discussion on the fundamental issues and religious tenets of Islam such as the God (*Allah*), *Qur’an*, and revelation (MacIntyre, 2009; Hathout 1995; Lemcio and Williams, 2015). However, TM3 believed that dialogue for educational purposes is possible even with fundamental religious issues. Combining these two perspectives, it can be said that dialogue about fundamental Islamic issues or principles is not possible, but it can be done in facing some suspicions which have affected some Muslims about the truth of God (*Allah*), Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*.

The contents of the third and fourth textbooks (‘Islamic Culture’ 3/ ISLS 301 and ‘Islamic Culture’ 4/ ISLS 401), on the other hand, were significantly different. The third textbook (‘Islamic Culture’ 3/ ISLS 301) is the longest in terms of the number of pages and comprises three chapters. This book focuses on local social issues for Muslims such as the family and social system or the outside community with respect to contemporary global issues. Finally, the fourth textbook (‘Islamic Culture’ 4/ ISLS 401), concentrates on employment, occupations, and the ethics of work and workers in Islam.

The first chapter of the third textbook (‘Islamic Culture’ ISLS 301) focuses on the family system in Islam. The units cover the concept of marriage, its provisions and conditions in Islam, related matters concerning husbands and/or wives, differences in

marriage and the Islamic provisions for dealing with them, as well as modern issues in Saudi society such as women's employment and family life.

The second chapter deals with the social system in Islam, its characteristics and components, which contribute to the development of human societies. It also discusses Muslim community institutions such as mosques, endowments, schools, charitable organisations and volunteer work. The chapter then addresses a range of contemporary issues such as sexual deviation, smoking, drugs, alcohol, and other issues.

In the third and last chapter, the textbook investigates some of the global challenges that Muslim individuals should understand from a religious standpoint, so as to handle them without losing their religious and national identity. A number of global challenges are put forward in this chapter, including:

- a) Islam and the dialogue of civilisations.
- b) Islam and human rights.
- c) Globalisation.
- d) Virtue, sin and the importance of ethics.
- e) Islam's attitude to terrorism.

The fourth and final textbook of 'Islamic Culture' (ISLS 401) comprises three themes: the first is the concept of morality in Islam and human civilisation, and its link to the Islamic faith, worship and daily life. The second theme regards professional ethics and work, the role of work in the present era, its impact on the success of the work environment, and some local and international ethical conventions related to professional ethics and work. It also focuses here on Islam's interest in professional ethics and work, and some salient features of professional ethics in the Muslim community.

The third theme focuses on the basics of professional ethics. This theme is divided into two topics; firstly, the basic ethics which all workers need and secondly, specific ethics which each worker needs according to his/her field, for example, the ethics of teaching, ethics in the medical and health fields, ethics in the judiciary, trade and engineering etc.. Finally, the last theme deals with the culture of the worker and his/her skills such as leadership, motivational power and persuasiveness.

The result of analysing the content of these textbooks ('Islamic Culture' (3) and (4) show that they cover many contemporary issues. This encouraged TF2 and TM3 to argue that the social issues covered by these two levels could provide ample opportunities for dialogue and open the door to the exchange of opinions between teachers and students. However, when those textbooks were analysed (3 and 4) in more detail, it was found that while the chapter headings seemed to have potential for dialogue, the content neither promoted dialogue nor opened any questions that might provide a spring board for such dialogue.

The 'Islamic Culture' textbooks are indeed massive tomes containing far too much information; the focus is on knowledge and its educational acquisition with no specific examples from everyday practices, which leaves no room at all for students to discuss such practices. The textbook merely offers and analyses information, and provides a variety of opinions about each issue with no participation or input required from the student.

Yet it is agreed by educationalists that education is not simply about increasing students' knowledge but is also about preparing students for contemporary life by improving their abilities of thinking, analysing and speaking, especially when dialogue is promoted within education (Al-Saied, 1998; Abdul Hameed, 2000; Nicholas & Bertram, 2001; Rosenbaum, 2005; Weisse, 2011). In contrast to those studies, the textbooks of 'Islamic Culture' concentrate on providing knowledge, rather than improving students' capabilities. And yet, Saudi policy for Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 1995) emphasizes the need to encourage students to make links to their

society and to investigate how to relate students to their religion by thinking about how to deal with community issues in the light of religion.

One example where the link could be made but is not is in the second module ('Islamic Culture' 2/ ISLS 201), which contains information about the attributes of the Prophet (PBUH) and his morals but does not then highlight the relevance of these qualities and ethics in facing the challenges of moral and social breakdown in modern life. It does not consider how to apply these ethics in addressing current issues in dealing with Muslims or non-Muslims.

Thus, the themes covered by the textbooks accompanying the four 'Islamic Culture' courses fail to combine contemporary issues with local everyday life issues. Moreover, it seems that within these themes, issues are discussed from a single perspective, that of religion, instead of providing a variety of different perspectives. Of course, because of respect for religion, students do not feel free to discuss religious matters, so they are more likely to feel able to engage in dialogue regarding contemporary life issues pertaining to religion rather than talking about religion *per se*. Contrary to expectations regarding textbook design, the analysis found a difference between what is mentioned by Amankwa et al. (2011), Boyer (1996) and Ahmad and Alwan (2012) about how to design an educational textbook. They argued that textbooks need to contribute to drawing the attention of students to the current issues and connecting them to national, social and local issues. This suggests that the textbooks accompanying the 'Islamic Culture' courses should be reviewed in order to include issues from the daily life of the Islamic and Saudi community.

The analysis also shows that in terms of the style and approach to presenting information, while the contents of these textbooks introduce arguments for each controversial topic, they do not provide opportunities for students to think about them. In other words, the books contain axiomatic knowledge with no opportunity for students to review and think about the arguments with their teachers. This implies that opportunities for asking questions are probably limited or non-existent. This is in

contrast to Moosa's (2005) analysis of the approach of Al-Ghazali, who used non-traditional ways of thinking based on asking broad questions and seeking answers to those questions in order to come to new knowledge. Ahmad and Alwan (2012) argue that open-ended questions are a good way of stimulating students to think and to engage in dialogue. Hence, to improve the textbooks of 'Islamic Culture' each topic should motivate students to ask open-ended questions, thereby opening up space for dialogue.

The other issue is that each course of 'Islamic Culture' is accompanied by a single textbook, with no other recommended readings. This severely limits students' access to knowledge, which in turn hinders dialogue within the classrooms and may in turn thwart the appetite for knowledge. In this regard, it is important to recall one of the two conditions that MacIntyre (1987) stressed as being necessary for rational discussion, namely, that students need to be stimulated through engaging actively in reading different texts and analysing what they read. Ahmad and Alwan (2012) also underline the importance of guiding students to other books in order to provide an appropriate environment for rich dialogue within the classrooms.

I did not expect the 'Islamic Culture' courses to involve just one textbook, given that they are university courses and I wondered how this had come about. Some respondents thought that the reason for this was that tests are standardised and if sources and references vary, this will hinder the process of standardising the exams (TF3). The academic staff are not involved individually in preparing the exams and consequently may be restricted to following one source or reference for the course.

7.3.3 Assessment

'Islamic Culture' is assessed through regular exams which are held twice every semester, with a final exam (at the end of the semester) and through assignments, discussions and dialogues. However, there is no clear explanation how discussion and dialogues are assessed and marked and no clear description of the nature of the

activities and assignments either. I observed one of the teachers assigning 10 marks to his students for memorizing one of the chapters from the *Qur'an*. This may be spiritually beneficial and will improve their power of memorization but this does not contribute to developing students' capabilities. Also, the 10 marks are not enough to encourage students towards dialogue.

In terms of exams, respondents told me that there are three exams: two of them during the semester carry 25 marks each and the third carries 40 marks. All these exams are multiple choice and the questions are taken from a bank of questions. Students can get a maximum of 90 marks altogether. TF3 explained:

“Our questions are multiple-choice ones taken from the bank of questions which contains about 1000 questions, and they are all corrected electronically.”

Such procedures can further undermine the importance and therefore effectiveness of dialogue. Many students confirmed that getting good marks is what matters to them. Therefore, if more marks were assigned to dialogue and discussions, students would presumably be motivated to engage in these practices.

This exam system could be argued to kill teachers' creativity and undermine the development of students' capabilities for practising dialogue. Since one of higher education's objectives is to broaden the students' horizons, the process of evaluation should not be restricted to exams. If only 10 marks are awarded for discussions and classroom activities and the remaining 90 marks are for exams, students will understandably focus upon the latter. This does not lead to positive interaction in the classroom. The fact that exams consist of multiple choice and true/false questions explains why teachers and students are restricted to the single textbook. Introducing both closed and open questions and encouraging students to read beyond the course textbooks, to engage with other books and sources could provide them with

opportunities to engage in dialogue within the classroom, and then use these dialogic arguments in answering the exam questions.

7.4 Dialogue within classrooms

Having reviewed the application of the concept of dialogue within the tradition of Saudi society, its relationship with the political context of governance and the government system, as well as the context of higher education policy and university systems, this section investigates the practice of educational dialogue within the university's classrooms. In education, practices are often considered as the core of pedagogic concern. Therefore, this section of the research seeks to find out about the reality of dialogic practices within the classroom:

- how do academic teachers and students interact with one another within the classrooms?
- and what are the methods that have been applied to motivate students to engage in dialogue?

7.4.1 The reality of practising dialogue within classrooms

In order to achieve the goal of this study, which is to find ways to develop the religious education curricula in Saudi universities in ways that involve students in dialogical activities, it was important to examine existing practices of dialogue in university classrooms. Drawing on observations, this section therefore examines dialogic practices between teachers and students, together with their understanding of what 'dialogue' means in practice in the educational process, and some of the attitudes of teachers and students in the process of dialogue.

7.4.1.1 Students' shyness, hesitation and fear:

While most students were enthusiastic about dialogue, a number of factors emerged that inhibited them from practising dialogue within the classroom. Firstly, shyness (SF2) was found to be a problem, not only for female students but for male students too. When students were asked about that, the first reply was that they had not engaged in dialogue within the classroom before and therefore had no previous experience. OG4 agreed that shyness in engaging in dialogue might be simply due to lack of practice.

Many students were clearly very hesitant to become involved in dialogue, which was evident in repeated pauses when speaking, and talking in a very low voice, which sometimes made it difficult for others to hear. When I asked respondents about this, they said the reason behind this reluctance was the fear of being criticised, contradicted or not meeting the teacher's approval (OG1, OG4 and SM2).

Most students who participated in this study explained that on the whole, students prefer to remain silent in the classroom, because they fear eliciting a negative reaction from the teacher. For example, SM1 also related the students' silence to their shyness and fear of criticism from the teacher. He added that some teachers accept dialogue, whereas, other teachers are very assertive and this silences the students. Indeed, according to OG1, fear is the biggest problem for the process of dialogue, while OG3 expressed the view that the fear of engaging in dialogue and fear of teachers that still exists in Saudi universities should be overcome.

It can be said that there is a lack of confident interaction between academic teachers and students. Because of the traditional environment, teachers possibly are not pedagogically prepared to undertake discussions and nor are students. Both of them may have had inappropriate experiences involving dialogue, which made them feel embarrassed about being questioned or being asked for their opinion. This

psychological obstacle may be deeper if their dialogical capacities are weak or if they have not previously been involved in dialogical activities in their educational life.

7.4.1.2 Thinking capacities:

According to TF1, some students also found the thinking and comprehension capacities, which are necessary for dialogue and debate, very challenging. In this regard, TF2 explained that:

“Many notes had been shown that boys and girls have problems in thinking, understanding and analysing talk and questions... Students need time to think about open-ended questions.”

The assistant researcher observed a teacher posing an open question about the ethics of the profession (‘Islamic Culture’ 4). The question was about how ethics can affect production and professional work and whether this effect is positive or negative. Students took some time to understand the question, and then asked the teacher to rephrase the question. They then took more time to think about it. The teacher then simplified the question by converting it to a set of closed questions, after which students began to respond and interact. The same thing was observed in a session with male students. In this group, a teacher wondered aloud what would happen to the community and the profession if a worker does not have a commitment to professional ethics. Hearing the question, some students needed time to understand it. They then asked the teacher to repeat it, but even then, no-one responded.

A small number of students (male and female) had excellent experience in engaging in dialogue, however. One of the students was observed engaging in a discussion in which he was to some extent opposing and criticising another opinion, but doing so in a polite manner. He presented his ideas simply and clearly for all the students in the classroom. In a different class, a student gave an answer which contradicted that of his classmates. He persisted in expressing his opinion in a polite, quiet, balanced manner

without any sign of intolerance. The teacher gave him full freedom and asked him to trace the reasoning that had led him to this view. The student introduced his logical sequence clearly and easily and cited evidence from the *Sunnah*. This was a surprise for me, as I had not found models such as these before in the observations for this research or indeed at any point in my many years of university teaching.

In summary, opportunities for dialogue within the classroom were found to be limited and therefore students lacked the practice of engaging in dialogue; this lack of practice was then an obstacle to successful interaction. Therefore, it appears that the teachers need encouragement to implement practices that promote dialogue. The suggestion here is that teachers could be required to join in training courses in effective teaching methods that steer them away from traditional teaching methods, and involve instead dialogic activities within the classroom and engaging students in dialogical practices. As for students, perhaps they are willing to engage in dialogue, but simply need to build up their experience and therefore confidence, through engaging in different dialogic practices.

7.4.1.3 Teachers' adherence to one textbook

During the many lectures we attended, we observed few teachers applying a dialogic approach; most stuck with the traditional approach of giving lectures. In addition, most teachers relied on the textbook alone, and indeed, some teachers presented the lessons holding the textbook in their hands at all times. The students, meanwhile, did not show any interest in reading from the textbook. I noticed that some students did not bring their textbook with them and when I asked them about this, they answered:

“Why should I bring the textbook with me? The teacher always reads from the book and doesn't bring in additional information. So, bringing the book or not makes no difference in the classrooms.”

The supposed justification for doing that is that the traditional method of teaching involves the use of a single textbook. This may be a reason why teachers carry the textbook during the lessons. Sometimes, teachers simply read from a book or let one of their students read while they rested and all attendees were required to do was to listen, which is an ancient teaching method. TF1 was shocked when she witnessed a student in a lecture reading from the textbook in a low and bored voice while the other students were busy on their smartphones and the teacher sat on her chair. I too noticed that teachers often did not make any attempt to move about in the classroom or in front of their students. Instead, most of them sat at a desk or stood behind the desk when delivering a lecture.

Moreover, sometimes, if the students' answers did not seem to fit with the ideas presented in the textbook, the teacher may might shut down the discussion and monopolise the argument with ideas and comments from the textbook. In one classroom, a teacher asked the students to express their opinion about the professional qualities of a teacher as a part of 'Islamic Culture' (4). When the students started to express what they thought, the teacher stopped them, asking them to limit themselves to what had been presented in the textbook.

7.4.1.4 The efficiency of university educators

Although there are multiple methods of teaching, the most popular teaching method among the university teachers at the present time is presentation or oral speech. According to TM1 and TM2, oral speech is common, whereas very few applied dialogue. TM3 (the former head of an academic department) also noted the frequent use of presentation rather than dialogue:

“Dialogue is not common in classrooms. Few academic teachers open the space for dialogue... What seems to me is that dialogue is not common, but the presentation is.”

One of the most important points to emerge from observing lectures was that most teachers delivered their lectures from their chair and some of them seemed to be restricted by the knowledge presented in the textbook. We also noted that many students seemed to be busy with something else in the classroom rather than paying attention to the lecture.

We observed a wide variation in terms of abilities and effectiveness among the teachers. On the whole, it was noted that both male and female teachers who held qualifications in education (Diploma in Education after the bachelor's degree, or graduates of educational colleges such as Teacher Training Colleges) or those who had experience in public education for a number of years, were able to manage dialogue or employ less traditional teaching methods in their classrooms. For example, in one lecture (given by someone who had been a teacher in public education at secondary level, and has a Diploma in Education), the teacher divided the students into two groups and started to ask them questions, giving them the chance to debate freely and encouraging them to express their opinions.

It was shown that all the teachers on the 'Islamic Culture' course held a bachelor's degree or a master's degree, except one who was an assistant professor. University educators with an advanced degree in higher education (for example, Ph.D.) were also noticed to be more interested in dialogue than others. However, most lectures observed were wholly traditional, with some attempts to enrich them with discussion.

Those observations were closely aligned to the findings from the interviews, in which OG3 and TF1 underlined the need to select university teachers based on their abilities, qualifications and professional preparation for teaching. OG4 classified university educators into two groups: those who are very knowledgeable, but understand little about teaching methods and those who know a lot about teaching but have little knowledge. He argued that university educators needed both these types of knowledge.

It was clear from analysing the interviews and observations that university educators need professional development in teaching skills and teaching methods, as well as being highly qualified, with a Ph.D. being the minimum. They must be highly qualified because of the important roles and significant responsibilities that they have to do in preparing and the skilled workers and qualified employees in different fields and enabling them to graduate.

All the observations inside the classrooms raised a series of questions, which were then presented to the students attending:

- what is the benefit of a lecture which is based on lecturing and oral speech?
- why should students pay attention if the presentation is restricted to the information contained in the textbook?

The students were unanimous in stating that oral speech has no value and is boring if it relies entirely on the content of the textbook.

These results confirm the importance of encouraging teachers and students to work together in practising dialogue within the classrooms, which could contribute to solving some of the challenges and problems faced by teachers and students. So, what are the possibilities for applying dialogue within the university classroom and are teachers and students able to engage together actively and positively in this way?

7.4.2 After practising the methods of dialogue

To find out how dialogue might work in the classroom, some teaching methods such as group discussions applied during observations by the academic teachers within the classroom. Based on those dialogical practices, academic teachers and students who attended the discussions expressed the view that discussions and dialogues, in general, were useful for students and that conversation, and collaborative and participatory sessions through the discussion groups motivated students to present their thoughts.

The use of such methods is likely to reduce boredom and increase knowledge and ideas.

According to TM1, dividing students into many groups could encourage students to engage effectively in debating and discussing with each other, which could be very interesting and enjoyable. One of the students spoke about her first experience of engaging in the process of dialogue in a classroom:

“In one lecture, a teacher gave us the chance to speak on a topic of the textbook. And because of the number of students, the teacher divided students into groups, and each group had only to talk about a specific aspect of the topic. Actually, we engaged enjoyably together and presented our ideas. Afterwards, the teacher spoke, added and commented. The dialogue was very, very beautiful.” (SF3)

Although SF2 also thought dialogue between students inside classrooms can often contain beautiful and valuable ideas, there are also factors that can undermine the success of the method. Some students interact less or are unwilling to engage in dialogue and this can impact the other members of the group. To address this, she suggested limiting the group to two or three participants, if possible, as this forces members to interact. Also, from my observations, dialogue mostly occurred between the teacher and individual students, not among the students themselves so, in this regard, SF2’s suggestion might help to stimulate dialogue between the students as well.

Our observations affirmed SF2’s comment. Students in larger groups (5 or 6) tended not to interact so much with each other, whereas in smaller groups (2 or 3), a kind of dialogue can take place. Keeping the groups small might also help address the problems of those students referred to earlier who do not want to take part in dialogue because of fear or shyness, making it easier for them to engage together. However, as has been discussed earlier, the two major obstacles to integration of dialogue within

lectures remain the high numbers of students in one classroom, the fixed seating arrangements, and lack of time.

7.4.3 Benefits of practising dialogue in teaching

After having experienced dialogic activities, all the respondents agreed that the educational process in the university needs to be built on dialogue. OG3 emphasised, however, that in order to spread a dialogue culture, the curricula, the criteria and standards of teaching quality, the performance of academic staff, as well as the classroom environment all required reviewing and improving.

Dialogue within the classrooms in the university should not be seen as mere entertainment, but, as TF1 stated, as contributing to developing and improving students' capabilities and thinking. Another significant benefit, according to TF2, is that, through dialogue, teachers can identify students' problems and whether they hold what might be regarded as inaccurate thoughts or not, in order to engage with them in trying to address and correct them. Thus, through dialogue, students can be encouraged to improve their ways of thinking and their behaviours (TM1), and increase their consciousness by reflecting on their convictions and thoughts (SM2). In TF3's view, dialogue also promotes students' understanding and helps teachers to correct misunderstandings.

SM2 also saw dialogue as an opportunity for teachers and students to exchange experiences, while TM2 thought that this kind of dialogue produces a rounded person who likes to learn more, who benefits from others' experiences, accepts the opinions of others, and is open to difference. In her experience, TF2 noted that the transmission of experiences between students through dialogue along with questioning inside the classroom stimulates students, making them more receptive to knowledge, to listening to the opinions of others and more likely to ask for more references or books related to the discussed topic. However, respondents also emphasized that, in their view,

dialogical activity needs to be managed and controlled within the classroom, based on the Islamic and Saudi tradition (TM3, SF1, and SM2).

7.5 Conclusion:

In summary, the empirical observations that were analysed as part of this research suggest that there are at present a number of challenges that beset interactions between academic teachers and students, and these will need to be addressed before systematic discussion within the classroom becomes a reality. A significant finding was that students faced a number of difficulties when asked to engage with others through dialogue, namely, shyness, hesitation and fear; lack of thinking capacities; the practice of teachers sticking to the one textbook, and the efficiency of the university educators. Referring back to MacIntyre (1987) and his views on how to stimulate rational dialogue through teaching at the Scottish universities in the Enlightenment era, this study's findings are somewhat different from what he envisages.

Moreover, the findings differ in some respects from Buber (1947), Bakhtin (by Wegerif, 2010) and Freire (1970) who stressed the importance of dialogue in the educational field and identified its advantages. Buber rejected a classic education which depends on teaching knowledge as 'absolute' and which gives the students an opportunity to gain an 'objective knowledge' (Avnon, 1998:43, p. 98). At the same time, Freire (1970) focused on the affordances of dialogue by exchanging roles between teachers and students to avoid any oppressive teaching method, which, in turn may cause shyness, hesitation and fear between students within the classrooms. Thus, the promotion of dialogue within classrooms could assist in facing those challenges. Also, dialogue, in Buber's (1947) terms, could contribute to moving from a monological style of teaching to one characterized by more open-ended dialogue, which moves from an '*I and It*' relationship to an '*I and Thou*' relationship between teachers and students, in the move from traditional teaching to more modern teaching methods.

Buber (Murphy, 1988) emphasised the importance of educating students in a similar way to MacIntyre (1987) who concentrated on the importance of dialogic practices in the universities and their role in educating a public. MacIntyre (1987) believes that if the university gives an appropriate space for practising rational dialogue, the result will be that a graduate will be able "to think for him or herself" independently. He argues that Scottish universities before the enlightenment era contributed to improving graduates' thinking abilities and the positive effect of this on their jobs and communities, especially those who went on to be teachers, was in transferring what they had learnt at university to the public sphere.

MacIntyre (1987) discussed the importance of providing a good university environment for having a rational dialogue but latterly has expressed his belief that universities today are unable to provide such an environment (MacAllister, 2016). MacIntyre stressed the responsibility of the university in improving the environment within which students learn how to engage in dialogue and how to deal with others in the case of conflict or disagreement. In his view, university teachers need to be more open to dialogue and to play their role in encouraging students to engage in critical thinking. He also stressed the importance of supporting students to read critically and analytically from different religious and traditional texts as well.

MacIntyre is not the only one who has advocated the importance of improving the educational environment to promote rational dialogue. As pointed out earlier, Weisse (2011) identified the project "Religion, Education, Dialogue, and Conflict (REDCo)" in Europe in 2009 as embodying the value of peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity, exchange of different views, and professional competence as characteristics of an educational environment that encourages students to dialogue. Furthermore, Jackson (2011) emphasises that students want to learn in a classroom environment in which they feel safe to express and discuss their views. These ideals differ quite markedly from the empirical findings reported in this study. If such ideals are to be taken up within Saudi higher education, the university administration, teachers and all members of the university will need to radically overhaul existing practices, if the

policy imperative to create an environment to provide safe and peaceful spaces for dialogue is to be realised.

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Long et al. (2007) and Toyoda and Harrison (2002). Their results showed that using discussion groups with technology within the classroom contributes to encouraging and increasing student engagement in dialogue. While these teaching activities show that students are ready and willing to engage in dialogue, teachers need to be more active as well. Bawazeer (2010) agreed with MacIntyre (1987) on the importance of the teacher's role in stimulating students to become active participants in dialogue. Bawazeer's (2010) study also confirms the views of some of the respondents here, that teachers who have a Masters or Doctorate level qualifications were more able to fulfil their role of managing the classrooms when they applied dialogic activities.

Thus it clear to note that the essential elements in order to encourage students to engage in the practice of dialogue in education are to provide two things: improving the university environment and stimulating students to practice dialogue by teachers. According to Mossa (2005) and his architectural interpretation of the concept of '*dihlīz*' of Al-Ghazali, it is possible to say that if the teacher takes the location of '*dihlīz*', she/he would be, at least in principle, able to steer the dialogical activities and provide a good environment for interactions taking place within the classroom. In terms of creating a climate conducive to such exchange, the teacher needs to be warm in welcoming the students' ideas, assume a stance in-between competing positions, open to different points of view, including those from outside outside culture, and to be seen as fair in establishing appropriate rules for presenting ideas freely (see figure 18).

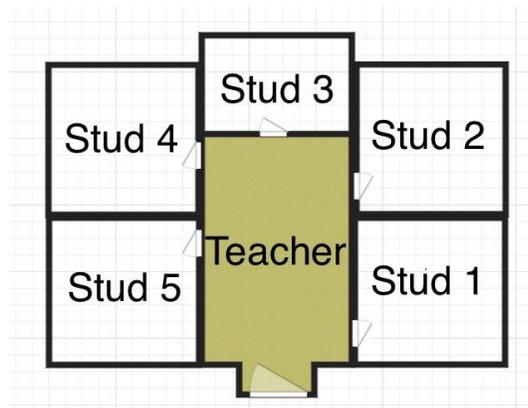


Figure 18: 'Dihlīz', Teachers and Students

If the aim is to spread a culture of dialogue among Saudi people, there are two basic requirements, as identified by MacIntyre (1987): students need to actively read a broad range of texts and this needs to be promoted by providing a variety of references for all courses of 'Islamic Culture'. Encouraging students to read different sources and present their opinions about what they have read based on the headings of each course is therefore desirable. Moreover, the style of assessment and course requirements need to be improved to grant students opportunities for expressing their views in a free and safe environment. Evaluation methods need to include open questions that stimulate students to extract what they believe and think, and can rationally defend, instead of relying solely on memorization for multiple-choice exams. The academic teachers therefore need to be more open, stimulating their students to engage in dialogue without fear of disagreement with the students or between the students themselves. Creating and providing this kind of environment would enable students in Saudi Universities opportunities to become qualified in a variety of capabilities and in the practice of dialogue in particular. Creating such environments could have a significant impact on achieving the policy aim of promoting a culture of dialogue more generally.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This study set out to obtain a deeper understanding of the culture of dialogue within the Saudi community and a Saudi University. It investigated several interrelated issues to facilitate not only a better understanding of the current perspectives on the culture of dialogue but also so as to identify a theoretical framing that might contribute to rethinking the role of dialogue within the Islamic and Saudi tradition in ways that are appropriate to that context.

The main aim of this study was to consider ways of promoting the dialogue within a Saudi University to improve the students' capacity through the religious education curriculum. Pursuing this main aim, the research set out to answer the following objectives:

- 1- to identify the theories of dialogue that can inform a rethinking of religious education in the Saudi University context
- 2- to investigate empirically the current situation with regard the practice of dialogue within the Saudi University context
- 3- to identify the practices that best promote dialogue within Saudi University spaces.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1- How do university teachers and students in a Saudi University understand and practise dialogue at the present time?
- 2- Having experienced a range of dialogue activities, how do the same University teachers and students evaluate these?

3- How might dialogue be further promoted in the Saudi University context within religious education?

The methodology of this study was designed to achieve the research objectives and to answer these questions. This study was an ethnographic instrumental case study of the culture of dialogue in Saudi Arabian Universities, especially in religious education. The three methods implemented for collecting data were: interviews, observations and document analysis.

In terms of interviews, 16 individuals from three distinct groups in the case study university were interviewed. The first group comprised 4 Saudi government officials, the second, 6 academic teachers (3 males and 3 females) and the third group consisted of 6 university students (3 females and 3 males).

In terms of observations, for cultural reasons, an assistant researcher carried out the observations in the female section, and I carried out the observations in the male section. Altogether 16 hours of observation were conducted (8 hours with the females and 8 hours with the males). All observations were of the selected course for this case study, which was 'Islamic Culture'.

A range of documents were analysed, namely: the dialogue policy of the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue; the Saudi Education and Higher Education Policy; the course outline for 'Islamic Culture', and finally, the textbook for the 'Islamic Culture' course. This approach was taken so that a comparison might be made between (i) what respondents said with (ii) practice observed within the classrooms and (iii) the official education policies in regard to the promotion of dialogue within Saudi higher education.

8.2 Summary of the Research and Main Findings

The study has sought to answer all the research questions and achieve the objectives of the study. This has focussed on the possibilities of practising dialogue within the

University's classrooms in religious education courses, based on the different theories of the dialogue and an understanding of the Saudi traditions. The study found a range of understandings of the concept of dialogue among Saudi officials, academics teachers, and students. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that respondents mobilized three distinct understandings of dialogue:

(i) conceived dialogue as primarily concerned with a correct standpoint towards which all must assent

(ii) regarded dialogue as consisting in attempts to rhetorically persuade others about what that individual believes to be the case, and thereby consists in ways of exerting pressure on, or influencing others

(iii) dialogue is concerned with understanding another's point of view in the hope of reaching mutual understanding, whilst accommodating difference.

Indeed, while it was emphasised that dialogue needs to be distinguished from monologism (and hence from '*I and It*' forms of relationship), most of the respondents did not make use of the variety of expressions associated with the concept of the dialogue, such as accepting other viewpoints and dealing with diversity, exchanging consciousness, and social interactions. Considered thus, dialogue is a highly complex practice that is multidimensional. Through engaging previous studies and respondents' views, this study found that a weak understanding of the notion of dialogue may correlate with aggressive attitudes, such as anger, conflict, and the closure of conversation.

The findings also show that some of the limitations in the understanding of the concept of dialogue were related to a stereotypical image which was formed in the minds of the Saudi community for two reasons. Firstly, the concept of dialogue is understood within the framework of Islamic belief, shaped by the notion that there is only one truth, and this was found to (unnecessarily) close down a range of issues that are, within the grammar of that tradition, open for discussion. Secondly, it was found that

the educational culture reinforces this perspective by emphasising the 'one correct answer' in its assessment of students.

Therefore, it is this understanding of dialogue that is in need of modification, bringing about a move towards dialogue as social interaction in which there is an exchange of knowledge and perspective. Individuals involved in dialogue need to know that the main purpose of dialogue is a human and equal reciprocation between 'I' and 'Thou' and a natural interaction between self-consciousness and multi-consciousness so as to reach the truth or to increase their consciousness. All those conceptions are crucial in supporting a project that promotes a culture of dialogue in Saudi Arabia, which will, it is hoped, contribute in creating a peaceful, optimistic, and positive atmosphere for dialogical activities.

Community traditions in this context are very influential as regards the understanding and practice of dialogue. Therefore, holding a dialogue about any traditional practices can fuel conflict between those who want to conserve the old ways and those who want to change these traditions in the light of new social and cultural challenges. In the Islamic context, traditions are inextricably linked to religion and understanding the discursive tradition in Islam (Assad, 1986) is necessary so as to ease conflict and to discover where dialogue can be located within Islamic traditions.

Islam contains faith, morals, customs, values and practices. One of the significant findings to emerge from this research is that dialogue in Islamic tradition is framed by three major elements which must be respected during any dialogical activities: moderation, virtue, and dialogue with others.

In terms of the boundaries of dialogic activities, respondents shared the view that the Exalted God (*Allah*), Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), revelation, the texts of *Qur'an*, and the texts of *Sunnah* are foundations sacred in Islam and are highly respected and, therefore, dialogue about those sacred aspects is unacceptable in the Islamic tradition. However, the findings also show that dialogue in the Islamic tradition is accepted

within legislation (*Fiqh*) and in relation to contemporary issues. All respondents were in strong agreement about this.

In addition, moderation, virtue and acceptance of differences are key pillars in a distinctively Islamic approach to dialogue, and this was illustrated through a consideration of the writings of al-Ghazali from within the Islamic discursive tradition. These virtues, as showed from the analysis of the interviews and documents, are also regarded as an integral component of dialogue in Saudi society, and are in full agreement with the tenets of Islam in this aspect, which seeks to promote it within the society by education or by the activities of the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue. On the other hand, through comparing the findings to theoretical understandings of dialogue, extremism was seen to be an outcome of monologue, the single thought, adhering to the opinion and the self-consciousness which prevents dialogue from achieving a middle point between two views. Respect for difference as a core value of dialogue is required in any interaction that aspires to be dialogic, and awareness of the importance of moderation and virtue is more likely to foster respect for differences within dialogue.

The third element is respecting others, which is clearly supported by dialogue in the Islamic tradition. While the Islamic tradition invites Muslims to deal with those from different cultures with respect, the findings from this research suggest that the concept of respect for others is not fully embedded within the community. Interestingly, findings show that Saudi people have a rather narrow understanding of the 'other', as non-Muslim. Moreover, such respect does not necessarily extend to the opinions of others. Therefore, when discussing the principle of respect for others, it needs to be made clear that this is a comprehensive term which includes Muslim or non-Muslim, Saudi or non-Saudi, male or female, from same tribe or other tribes, and from the same culture or different cultures - and extends to respecting others' opinions.

A fourth element to add to the Islamic principles already discussed that constitutes the dialogical frame, is the notion of national unity in the Saudi context, something that

was emphasised by all the participants interviewed for this study. They saw conflicts, disagreements, and violence as impacting negatively on that unity. Moreover, it emerged that respondents appeared not to be interested in political issues, had little to share about politics and avoided speaking about politics in general - since they thought that any conversation about politics would lead to conflict and disunity. Thus, one of the more significant findings of this study is the identification of this fourth element within the frame of dialogue in the Saudi community, which pertains to the maintenance of national unity alongside respect for the Saudi monarchical system.

Throughout the previous chapters, this study has sought to ascertain the importance of dialogue in religious education at the University. This point is critical because the Saudi community is highly homogenous and any diversity is not immediately apparent as all Saudis believe in one religion (Islam), speak one language (Arabic), and have a monarchical system with no political parties. So, at first sight, it is hard to identify any kind of diversity. However, it became clear that there are, notwithstanding these points of unity, considerable points of difference within the culture too.

In this connection, there are a number of social and intellectual challenges in the Saudi community that need to be addressed and the promotion of dialogue, as shown in the findings, is a central recommendation in achieving this. Based on this study, the following challenges were identified: discrimination between the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah*, understanding the texts of religion, applying religious teachings, contemporary changes, ambiguities associated with the concept of renewing religious discourse, judging others on their beliefs and categorising them based on their views.

As argued at the beginning of this thesis, education has a crucial role to play in promoting a culture of dialogue. Thus the design and provision of a comprehensive educational curriculum to promote dialogue is urgently needed, one that takes into account the religious and national frames of reference in the Saudi context and the challenges and requirements of the Saudi community. It is also necessary within educational contexts to avoid the 'banking model' in order that there might be an

exchange of roles between teachers and students within the classrooms where dialogue takes place. This can help provide some of the conditions necessary for having a 'good education', in Biesta's (2010) terms, which aims at socialisation, qualification and subjectification, rather than to focus just on transferring knowledge from teachers into students in the style of one-way communication.

The most appropriate educational environment in which to apply the Islamic theory of dialogue is that of the university. This study has highlighted the importance of dialogue in the educational system generally and in religious education in particular from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. This involves implementing an appropriate understanding of dialogue in religious education in Saudi universities. Any application would need to be supported by higher educational policy – and in this connection, this study found worryingly low levels of awareness of higher educational policy among both teachers and students. It is difficult to see how the purposes of any policy can be fulfilled if key players are unaware of it. Therefore, I argue that the Saudi University should play a greater role in enforcing higher education policy and have a clear vision of the policy formulation stage through to the implementation stage, in order to achieve the objectives of that policy.

Practically, with regards to research questions and objectives, this study used a number of methods to investigate empirically the dialogue practices within university classrooms, so as to report on these findings. The results of this part of the study found considerable variations in the extent to which teachers and students engaged in dialogue and dialogic practices within the classroom. While teachers and students seemed to be aware of the importance of dialogue - and appeared to share an understanding of its meaning too - practices in the classroom did not generally reflect this.

Moreover, students identified three main factors that discouraged them from engaging in dialogue: psychological factors such as fear and lack of confidence; lack of practical experience in engaging in dialogue within the classroom; and lack of knowledge.

When teachers seek to promote a culture of dialogue, these three factors should be taken into account. The core role of the teacher in this regard is promoting and motivating students to get involved in dialogue, creating opportunities for students to speak freely and providing a safe environment in which students can express their opinions. Moreover, teachers need to use teaching methods that will increase student motivation and create an atmosphere of active learning, self-learning, and knowledge exchange, instead of the traditional teaching methods focussed upon alignment with, and memorization of, a pre-established text, which was heavily criticised by all participants.

With regard to research question 2, it was found that involvement in dialogical activities between teacher and students within the classroom revealed both a readiness and capacity for dialogue. The activities undertaken consisted of discussion groups of 5, 4, 3, or 2 students. It was observed that students were more interactive in small groups than larger groups. In small groups, they felt more able and more motivated to participate and express their opinions but the results also showed that lack of knowledge was a real impediment to students engaging in dialogue. However, when the students were asked to use smartphones to search for information, the interaction became more intense and all the students became full participants in the dialogue.

A clear finding to emerge from this study is that the teachers and students responded very positively to these activities, reinforcing the importance of moving away from traditional teaching methods, to methods that stimulate and promote dialogue. However, at the same time, there are clear obstacles that need to be overcome, such as shyness or weak levels in thinking capacities. All the respondents stressed the importance of the teacher in managing the classroom to overcome these obstacles, in particular, thinking capacities. The teachers, as the findings suggest, have a significant responsibility for preparing questions which fit with the capabilities of the university students, avoiding the use of too complex questions, and using open questions in an appropriate and scaffolded way.

Thirdly, diversity and pluralism are intrinsic to the concept of dialogue, because there is no dialogue without diversity of ideas, opinions and knowledge. According to the findings of this study, the principle of diversity was not sufficiently present in several aspects of religious education at the university. The first of these aspects was the outline of the course. The results of this study show that there were shortcomings in the preparation and formulation of aims for the religious course: the objectives focused entirely on the students' cognitive development with no reference to any other capacities, such as thinking capacities, analytic capacities, and critical capacities. This confirmed that the students at the university had not been taught to transfer the theoretical aspects studied into practising what they have learnt, as is intended, based on Saudi Arabia's higher education policy, but were instead limited to the receiving of knowledge, which has been the traditional approach to education. Moreover, the assessment methods specified in the outline of the course are unclear. The most prominent method for assessment in religious education at the university is examinations, which only measures cognitive achievement. Both the aims and type of assessment show a lack of attention to the principles of diversity and pluralism on the part of the curriculum designers of religious education at the university. Direct intervention by the academic departments is needed to develop this aspect, and to try to design these courses in accordance with the policy of higher education drawn up in Saudi Arabia, which emphasises the development of capacities and student capabilities, training them for life and employment.

At the same time, the university textbook for religious education courses lacks any reference to diversity and pluralism. Although the wide reading of different sources is one of the most prominent features of university education, the religious education courses are still based on just one textbook, with no reference to other sources or references. The textbook used provides knowledge from only one perspective; it is devoid of alternative views and opinions on each of the topics, and the topics are clearly selected to provide information rather than promoting critical questioning and dialogue. Finally, the topics, which are either about the religious sacred things and

constants in Islam or Islamic issues, hold little interesting information for the students, as the respondents mentioned.

Another interesting finding in this regard is that several topics covered by the textbook potentially raise issues of pluralism and diversity, such as legislation and *Shari'a*, as well as a number of ethical and social issues. These topics could be presented in a way that connects with a broader range of issues which encourage interaction among students in the classroom. The reduction of references and sources of knowledge to a single textbook in religious education courses and the neglect of diversity and pluralism will not contribute to diversity and dialogue in the classroom. Hence, the use of the university textbook in religious education needs to be made more attractive by teachers through supplementing the textbook with some issues that are put forward for discussion and can be related to the topics specified in the syllabus. Students should also have a say in the selection of those issues, so that they are relevant to their requirements and needs. In addition, an up-to-date and appropriate reading list should be provided, with the requirement to read and discuss the publications being a part of the assessment.

Finally, this study had argued that in order to promote a culture of dialogue in universities, creating an appropriate environment is crucial. From the findings of this investigation, it would seem that the amount of attention directed at the development of university buildings impacted on the university administration's level of attention to the educational atmosphere. Yet at the same time, all the participants complained about the large number of students in one group and the limited number of available classrooms. Within the classroom itself, facilities were thought to be inadequate; the fixed seating was seen to be an obstacle as was the lack of educational aids. At the same time, the respondents reported that there was a shortage of teachers and poor teaching skills.

If the university administration is committed to working towards providing an appropriate learning environment, especially if it wants to keep pace with national

projects in general and to play an active role in supporting the dialogue project, the university administration should concentrate on the performance of its teachers by providing a training programme specific to academic teaching. The study shows that some teachers are enthusiastic about their subject but lack the skills to teach effectively. The university administration also needs to provide classrooms with the necessary facilities to avoid the problem of a vast number of students in one group, so that teachers can fulfil their role in an appropriate learning environment. In addition, both university management and academic departments need to recognise the importance of academic activities within the university towards the development of students' overall abilities and dialogical capacities. They have the responsibility to design seminars and group discussions on a variety of social and educational issues and to set up reading groups to improve the cognitive, intellectual and dialogical capabilities of the students.

8.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

8.3.1 Strengths

Very few studies on dialogue and its application in religious education have been carried out in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this research contributes to this growing body of work. The main strength of the current study is that it is the first local ethnographic study that has set out to create a theoretical and practical framework for dialogue within the tradition of Saudi Arabia. It is also unique in discussing dialogue in the context of religious education in a Saudi university. Moreover, it provides findings from a well-designed research study on how to apply dialogue within university classrooms, based on the views of academic staff and students, which can be used to inform present and future higher educational policy.

The study has also provided insights into how Saudi people understand the concept of dialogue and how they deal with dialogue socially and educationally, and has

identified factors that support and hinder dialogue within the community and classrooms, which all results in there being limited literature on applying dialogue in Saudi higher education and religious education. These findings can inform educational policy-makers, university textbook writers, and university curriculum designers in Saudi Arabia about current perceptions of teaching religious education in higher education, and have identified several factors that would promote dialogue within the classrooms. Moreover, the findings will support me when supervising future religious education teachers, trainees, and Master or Ph.D. researchers in religious education at the university where I work.

Furthermore, I am not aware of any other studies about designing a dialogue framework that have included government officials, due to the difficulties in contacting them or having the opportunity to meet them. So, pre-preparation and pre-contact activities began early so as to make the necessary arrangements to travel to Saudi's capital city to meet face-to-face and to make sure there was enough time for the interviews. In addition, as far as I am aware, few Saudi studies have addressed male and female dialogue-related issues in one study, because of the difficulties faced by any researcher in accessing both genders in the university. This study, by overcoming this obstacle, has filled a significant gap in the research in Saudi Arabia. In addition, including male and female teachers and students in the study has positively impacted the interpretation of the findings and assisted in gaining a better understanding of practising dialogue within the classrooms at the university, perceptions towards it, and future views of education. Finally, the fact that I as the researcher have experience in academic teaching (as a university teacher) is another strength of the study because I have a comprehensive and full awareness and understanding of the interactions between research participants and their environment, and was able to interpret them as an insider within the context of Saudi culture and the university environment.

8.3.2 Limitations

Due to the case study methodology, the study was limited to one university and one course of religious education. The study was also supported by a postgraduate female student who carried out the observations in the female classrooms and she had limited time compared to a full-time researcher. If there had been time and resources available to extend the study to other religious courses or other universities, it would have been possible to generate more in-depth data and widen the scope of the study's findings.

In addition, the study would have benefitted from including government officials' perceptions of dialogue within Saudi traditions, and compare their perceptions with those of teachers and students. Moreover, a comparison between those visions might have assisted in understanding in more depth, the culture of dialogue within the Saudi community and within education, which policy makers in King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue and Ministry of Education should consider when formulating policies, preparing training sessions, and designing educational curricula.

8.4 Recommendations for Further Research

In the light of the findings derived from this study and the conclusions emerging from them, the following recommendations for theory and practice of dialogue in religious education at the University are presented.

One of the recommendations of this study is that, while this study is an instrumental case study, in future research, the study could be carried out in other contexts through extended studies of larger samples, or in other kinds of courses (Arabic Language, history, etc.). It would be interesting to compare this study's findings to those studying other universities or courses. Many governmental institutions such as the King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue, the Ministry of Education and universities in Saudi Arabia could use this study's findings or apply the strategy of this study to a

range of educational fields to spread the culture of dialogue and to study the usefulness of the results of this study.

The King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue should work towards raising awareness of the concept of dialogue, concentrating on how to develop an understanding among Saudi people of dialogue as an exchange of consciousness towards peaceful social interaction. It would also be of great benefit if their training courses were redesigned based on this study's dialogue framework which takes into account both Islamic and Saudi traditions. This has helped clarify both the scope of dialogical activity and its limits within an Islamic discursive tradition, and this could be of considerable value in moving beyond some of the fears voiced by respondents concerning the appropriateness of dialogical exchange.

In spreading the culture of dialogue, the Saudi Ministry of Education should focus its efforts and resources on the universities. Primarily, the Ministry should focus on measuring the output of the university on the basis of the purposes of the higher education that have been outlined by the Saudi government for the higher education policy. In addition, in order to keep pace with the changing needs of the community and the Saudi nation with regard to dialogue, the Ministry could transfer this study's findings into its activities, such as curriculum development and design for all schools (primary, intermediate, the high school for males and females).

With regard to the university, a number of recommendations can be made based on this study's findings. Firstly, the university should raise awareness about higher educational policy in general among academic staff and students, who, in this study, showed very low levels of awareness. This could be achieved by different means: firstly, the university's administration should remind all academic departments and staff about the policy by distributing it and asking each member of staff to work towards fulfilling its aims, reporting any difficulties and suggesting how those difficulties might be addressed. Secondly, the university should use the web generally and social media in particular, to maintain and renew awareness among individuals in

the university. Thirdly, academic departments should ask university staff to redesign course outlines, connecting the courses' aims to the aims set out in the higher educational policy and how to achieve these aims through the course. Indeed, the university could appoint an institution or research centre to be responsible for dialogue and its implementation within courses, as well as designing and presenting workshops and training in dialogic teaching and learning.

This study has illustrated from different perspectives that all players in the university need training opportunities for dialogue. Academic teachers should have training in how to use teaching methods and how to manage a classroom in ways that motivate the students to engage in dialogue and increase effective interaction within the classrooms. Training should not merely focus on practising dialogue through education but should also focus on how to evaluate and improve the university curriculum to be adapted to the government's project of promoting a culture of dialogue. Training should also be given to students, that includes information about the concept of dialogue and its associated practices so that space can be opened up for the discussion of real issues that students face.

As the primary source for learning within the university's courses, the university textbook needs to be improved, by being designed for teaching and learning purposes. Authors and designers of this kind of textbook need to understand how to do that appropriately for students in the educational field. Issues, needs, and the writing style should raise students' attention and stimulate them to engage with others in exchanging knowledge and experiences. Moreover, students should be invited to participate in building a list of issues and needs related to the textbook's contents which they would wish to discuss within the classroom. There also needs to be in place mechanisms to ensure that the textbook is regularly reviewed and updated in line with new issues, theoretical developments, and emergent concerns.

8.5 Conclusion

The completion of this thesis marks the ending of a long journey. I have shown the importance of dialogue in education and the multiple points of view on its theory and practices. There is clearly a degree of uncertainty about the meaning of dialogue. To return to my metaphor, I have attempted to interpret and highlight the impediments and obstacles to dialogue in education and the wider community. In addition, I have made practical suggestions in terms of how the university's administration, teachers, students, and writer of the textbooks of the religious education can improve their own space for professional action and, through this, provide opportunities for practising dialogue. As I have argued throughout this thesis, dialogue in education is crucial in helping Saudi's young people to understand themselves, identify their own needs and help them to find and implement solutions through peaceful dialogue. This requires academic staff and the university as an institution to find appropriate methods, understand the current situation, be aware of the community's challenges, keep pace with government aspirations, and transfer all of this into practice by using their expertise to educate university students.

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